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## **Social media and information responsibility: Assessing student awareness of ethics, legalities, and privacy at Kuwait University**

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## Social media and information responsibility: Assessing student awareness of ethics, legalities, and privacy at Kuwait University

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### Abstract

**Objectives:** This study examines Kuwait University students' awareness of the ethics of social media, as well as issues related to privacy and legal matters. Social media interactions with people remain an intriguing area of research. Nonetheless, legal and ethical issues in higher education remain an exciting area of research. The study aimed to determine whether significant differences exist between information ethics, legal issues, and information privacy related to social media, as well as the following variables: age, gender, nationality, library instructional session, academic year, and level of IT literacy among students at Kuwait University. Furthermore, this study examined Kuwait University students' awareness of information ethics, legal issues, and information privacy. A correlation between information privacy, legal issues, and information ethics was also investigated. **Method:** The study used a cross-sectional design. An electronic questionnaire consisted of demographic questions and information on ethics, legal issues, and information privacy on social media scales. 1137 students at Kuwait University completed a questionnaire. **Results:** Participants in the study showed a high level of awareness and understanding regarding ethical implications of social media use. Significant differences were found between privacy of information and gender and library instruction sessions. There was also a

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significant difference between information ethics and legal issues and variables such as age, nationality, academic year, and IT literacy. The results showed that knowledge of legal issues was positively and significantly correlated with knowledge of information ethics and information privacy. **Conclusion:** The widespread deployment of online technology and social platforms has made consumer privacy more challenging. The use of social media has become a key part of young people's digital interactions. Consequently, a more comprehensive understanding of privacy is required.

**Keywords:** social media, ethics, information privacy, information awareness, information responsibility

## وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي والمسؤولية المعلوماتية: تقييم وعي الطلبة بالأخلاقيات والجوانب القانونية والخصوصية في جامعة الكويت

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### ملخص

**الأهداف:** تبحث هذه الدراسة في وعي طلبة جامعة الكويت بأخلاقيات التعامل مع وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي والأمور المتعلقة بالخصوصية والقضايا القانونية. لا تزال القضايا القانونية والأخلاقية في التعليم العالي مجالاً بحثياً مهماً. هدفت الدراسة إلى تحديد إذا ما كانت هناك أي فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين أخلاقيات المعلومات والقضايا القانونية وخصوصية المعلومات على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي والمتغيرات الآتية: العمر، والجنس، والجنسية، وجلسة التدريس بالمكتبة، والسنة الدراسية، ومستوى معرفة تكنولوجيا المعلومات بين طلاب جامعة الكويت، إضافة إلى ذلك، فحصت هذه الدراسة وعي طلاب جامعة الكويت بأخلاقيات المعلومات والقضايا القانونية وخصوصية المعلومات. وكذلك درست الارتباط بين خصوصية المعلومات والقضايا القانونية وأخلاقيات المعلومات. **المنهج:** استخدمت الدراسة تصميماً مقطعيّاً، وقد ضمت الاستبانة الإلكترونية أسئلة ديموغرافية ومقاييس أخلاقيات المعلومات والقضايا القانونية وخصوصية المعلومات في وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. أكملت الاستبانة 1137 طالباً وطالبة من جامعة الكويت. **النتائج:** أظهر المشاركون في الدراسة مستوى عالياً من الوعي والفهم فيما يتعلق بالآثار الأخلاقية لاستخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. وجدت فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين خصوصية المعلومات والجنس وجلسة التدريس بالمكتبة. وجدت أيضاً فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين أخلاقيات المعلومات والقضايا القانونية ومتغيرات؛ مثل العمر، والجنسية، والسنة الدراسية،

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ومستوى الإعلام بتكنولوجيا المعلومات. وأظهرت النتائج أن المعرفة بالقضايا القانونية ارتبطت ارتباطاً إيجابياً بمعرفة أخلاقيات المعلومات وخصوصية المعلومات. **الخاتمة:** أدى الانتشار الواسع للتكنولوجيا الإلكترونية ومنصات التواصل الاجتماعي إلى تفاقم مشكلة خصوصية المستهلك. وأصبح استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي جزءاً أساسياً من تفاعلات الشباب الرقمية؛ مما يزيد الحاجة إلى فهم أشمل للخصوصية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، الأخلاقيات، خصوصية المعلومات، الوعي المعلوماتي، المسؤولية المعلوماتية

## Introduction and Related Studies

The use of social media is regulated by legal and ethical issues, which many see as both critical and negative (Hudders et al., 2020; Lipschultz, 2020). In the education sector, using social media tools plays an essential role as a means of communication among school stakeholders, such as faculty members, staff members, and students, enabling cordial and lasting relationships (Sarwar et al., 2018). Education is a critical asset for combatting the increasing number of cybercrimes in which many youngsters across the U.S. engage. McCarthy (2021) observed that legal guidance for school stakeholders on cybercrimes and privacy rights needs to be discussed to facilitate a positive school environment.

When various social media platforms are used to complement physical learning, they have a positive influence on interactions among students and with teachers in school and improve knowledge-sharing behaviors, which impact students' engagement, leading them toward having good academic performance (Ansari & Khan, 2020). However, the unethical misuse of online media affects the privacy of information and citizens and may cause security breaches; therefore, creating awareness among users of the dangers of sharing sensitive information in these spaces and the importance of observing individual privacy on these platforms is crucial (Barrett-Maitland & Lynch, 2020).

Consumers should be educated on online social responsibility and privacy (Acquisti et al., 2020; Anic et al., 2019; Livingstone, 2018). Consumers are motivated by various psychological and economic factors to defend their private lives and privacy, whether through deliberate personal action or through the application of available regulations. Acquisti et al. (2020) noted that the market-driven

privacy management approach of consumer responsabilization did not work, and thus, a comprehensive policy intervention to protect personal privacy from interference within the best framework for their best advantage is needed. In the study, it was observed that the issues of e-learning and social media advertising in the educational sector required policies that address online privacy for both students and their schools. Anic et al. (2019) presented a model that dealt with online privacy concerns (OPC) related to individual factors and government regulation, investigating how consumers perceive the government's role regarding their privacy and their information in relation to their privacy. The study mentioned that consumers had more confidence in managing their personal information than in online regulation by the authorities, which they felt was unsafe and unsecure and this increased OPC. Livingstone (2018) noted trends in which the public are exploited through social media by gullible audiences, and regulators are reluctant to deal with these challenges.

Various studies in the Middle East region have concluded to agree that social media technologies and their use have shaped how students perceive privacy and ethical issues; empirical studies from Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates have pointed to the effect and influence of sociocultural norms on digital conduct (Ashour 2019; Saleh & Mohamed 2024). These studies, especially in Saudi and Qatari contexts, showed that privacy issues are related to cultural identity and religious values, where people continue to share information online; yet, at the same time, they express high concern for privacy. The regional diversity of participants, including citizens and expatriates, creates a complex situation in these countries when it comes to understanding digital literacy behaviors. Socio-cultural context remains a vital variable in understanding ethical digital literacy.

Arab culture embraces collectivism, depending on each other and in-groups as sources of togetherness, which has a high-power distance culture and is sensitive to social justice. The culture demands total privacy for personal data, and customers, especially students, prefer online services, whether in school or the e-commerce sector. Al-Omouh et al. (2022) showed the influence of togetherness and the strength of cultural beliefs and values on adopting e-commerce in the Arab world. The study significantly influenced the relationship between word-of-mouth (WOM) applications and e-commerce acceptance. Al-Amrani (2021) indicated that students working on virtual and online platforms were comfortable in the education process and perceived less social embarrassment when interacting with other students for whom English was their first language. Online learning reduced social barriers, and students felt that their privacy was protected and that they were safe from discrimination in situations with language barriers. Hussein (2020) investigated how a community in a collectivist culture, especially Egyptians, defined social isolation. The study noted that social isolation was part of cultural togetherness and a unique way in which the communities observed their networks of social relationships in discussing and maintaining moral and ethical issues within the groups. Milla and Dos-Santos (2019) conceptualized various media platforms in terms of their features and discussed the correlation between media platform selection and cultural values. The study noted that cultural beliefs and values significantly impacted social platform selection, and the authors observed ethical and moral issues.

Problematic social media use (PSMU) affects academic achievement. Homaid (2022) noted that PSMU caused technostress and exhaustion, which resulted in poor academic performance. Regarding the use of social media, the study noted that WhatsApp, Snapchat, Twit-

ter, and Instagram were undergraduates' most preferred networks, and Facebook and Skype were the least preferred. The study noted that students spend most of their time on social media interactions, and this means that educational stakeholders need to revisit collaborative interventions that involve creating students' awareness and knowledge to balance social media usage and academic performance. Alnjadat et al. (2019) noted that males were more addicted to online interactions than females, while females' academic performance was more influenced by the use of social media than males. In the study, it was concluded that school educators need to develop rules that guide the incorporation of social media into the educational sector and create awareness for students to focus on academic performance. Sarwar et al. (2018) noted that it is essential to incorporate social media sites with educational course materials and deploy them on new technologies, which should include ethical considerations and privacy of information. The study findings showed cyberbullying as a blocking factor in the connection between collaborative learning and learner performance.

Educational practitioners need to understand the influence of religious and cultural values and beliefs in ethics education. Balakrishnan et al. (2021) showed that existing cultural and religious values affected the ethical decision-making of future engineers. Burton et al. (2018) insisted that schools and departments dealing with computer sciences should develop curricula that include ethical issues that need to be part of the responsibilities of the technologists who are deeply involved in facilitating the social network. Califf and Goodwin (2005) highlighted the need to incorporate ethics courses into programming, especially the ethics of personal information privacy that students come across in their work. Security issues and related ethical and social issues were generally considered essential to a course on computer operating systems and artificial intelligence.

Megregian et al. (2020) observed professional and ethical dilemmas that included negotiating strained interprofessional relationships and promoting autonomy for women. The study recommended leadership that embraces moral values, such as ethical leadership. Banks et al. (2021) noted that businesses should operate on a broader base, promoting positive outcomes and focusing on both stakeholders and shareholders. The study noted that school leaders must practice ethical leadership to educate students on ethical issues when dealing with social media interactions. Grosz et al. (2019) noted that the compulsory computer courses “Privacy and Technology” and “Intelligent Systems: Design and Ethical Challenges” were broadly undertaken across faculties and that ethical material was incorporated into their educational material. Teshaboev and Karimov (2022) explored the relationship between ethical education and the efficiency of education. The study discussed the role of moral education in improving education's effectiveness, particularly the responsible ways in which social platforms are used in education. West and Buckby (2018) explored the incorporation of ethics education as part of the compulsory courses to become a professional accountant. The study noted that Australian and New Zealand accountant professional bodies incorporated the ethics education to be undertaken by all prospective professional accountants to inform them of the ethical and moral obligations expected of them when practicing and socializing.

The widespread utilization of online technology and social platforms has caused many challenges in ensuring consumer privacy. However, Bandara et al. (2020) found that no comprehensive laws protect consumers' privacy, which has caused much infringement of their privacy through cybercrimes. Barrett-Maitland and Lynch (2020) noted that the use of social media was accompanied by personal privacy and ethics, and the former had far-reaching security implications.

Users of mobile networks should pay attention to privacy settings in applications and the types of personal details they share, as this helps prevent privacy violations and unethical practices. Rahman et al. (2019) examined the privacy and security of providing minimal personal information to avoid loss of privacy when using social media. The study noted that various groups for information awareness were established, privacy violations became prominent, and privacy dilemmas increased. Taha & Dahabiyeh (2020) found in their study that college students were knowledgeable about information security, but their protection habits differed between smartphones and computers.

Young people have made social media part of their digital interactions, and they use it in the areas of education, entertainment, and communication. Uncontrolled usage of social media may lead to deterioration in mental health. Beyari (2023) indicated that social media had influenced the increase in mental health problems. Social media users, mainly Generation Z consumers, need to be careful when utilizing social media platforms since they are usually fragile, especially when interacting with negative conversations, which affect their mental health. There is a need to have policies and laws to deal with negative interactions and to protect consumers' privacy. Organizations are responsible for minimizing employee burnout, reducing counterproductive work behavior (CWB), and observing justice that promotes organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Cohen and Abdallah (2021) showed that CWB influenced levels of psychopathy, reduced emotional intelligence, and increased employees' burnout, which may be caused by the overuse of social media.

In contrast, OCB supports procedural justice, reduces employees' burnout, and improves emotional intelligence. Siffels (2020) investigated the beyond-privacy situations and the health of contact tracing victims during the pandemic. The app was assessed between privacy

and public health in terms of the privacy of patients' information. The study argued that some legal frameworks could assist in moving beyond the dilemma of privacy vs. public health by introducing conceptions of the common good to the public in arguing about contact-tracing apps. The legal framework should distinguish between times when there is a breach of privacy and those when a necessary demand surrounds the social media area.

Online users exploit social networking platforms to express their public concerns to various institutions and create awareness about social issues that affect them. Bhatt et al. (2022) observed that government agencies have recently employed data from social media to offer better services. The study noted that the need for processing public outcries on social media had become a crucial research area among academic researchers and practitioners, especially on the issues within communication and information technologies, such as privacy, where personal information is at risk of being misused. Privacy issues showed the importance of data protection laws and policies and warranted the importance of regulating online learning or remote work. De Wolf (2019) contextualized how young people manage their privacy on social media platforms. The study demonstrated that feelings of exposure without much control in a social network environment were positively related to interpersonal privacy control. The study noted that interpersonal privacy management does not seem as important to teens when coordinating boundaries with peers and interacting within their social media circles as when sharing sexual content and handling private information shared by parents and guardians. Lin and Wang (2020) noted that information technology research has shown that males and females differ in their utilization of information technology systems. In the study, it was found that women were sensitive to privacy risks, have wide social

networks, and were more committed to forming attitudes toward information sharing and communication than men.

The Internet of Things (IoT) is a unique innovation that connects several pieces of equipment over the internet and operates them remotely. Studies (Deep et al., 2020; Ogonji et al., 2020) explored IoT security and privacy issues. According to Ogonji et al. (2020), connected devices like IoT often obtain users' information and preserve it online. Maintaining the privacy of the collected data has been a great concern recently. As devices and other equipment become interconnected, security risks issues become increasingly critical and need urgent attention. The implementation of IoT and the interconnection of devices, although critical in the new ways of operating, threaten and could compromise the security and privacy of consumers, affecting their implementation. Degirmenci (2020) investigated several apps requesting permission and compared them with the impact on privacy and information privacy concerns. The study showed that prior privacy experience, computer anxiety, and perceived control significantly affected privacy concerns. Xu et al. (2019) noted that connecting more mobile devices to the network hastened the innovation of mobile IoT. Crowdsensing mode compromises privacy due to the sensitive information held. The need to encourage employees' participation in issues to deal with privacy preservation was impossible to address. The study proposed the use of an auction-based privacy-preserving incentive scheme (APIS) for sensing task allocation in the MIoT.

Kaplan (2019) reexamined the digital market debate over the "audience commodity" problem. The study noted that the media platform systems were market monopolies that organized a self-defeating arms race among their customers and enabled social networking sites (SNS) to extract large amounts of sensitive information, thus exploiting their customers. Sartawi (2021) indicated that the level of social

media disclosure of intellectual capital influenced the overall value of firms. The study recommended that Kuwaiti and Omani bourses develop formal guidelines for social media disclosure of intellectual capital to create harmony in disclosing information and enhance the firms' value by taking advantage of social media to attract more talented employees and maximize customers' and investors' benefits.

### **Research Questions**

Considering the literature review, the following are the research questions:

- 1 - To what extent are Kuwait University students aware of information ethics, legal issues, and information privacy on social media?
- 2 - Are there statistically significant differences based on sociodemographic factors such as age, gender, nationality, library instructional session, and IT literacy level in terms of the information ethics, legal issues, and information privacy of social media among Kuwait University students?
- 3 - Are there statistically significant correlations among the information ethics, legal issues, and information privacy on social media?
- 4 - Are information ethics and information privacy of social media associated with legal issues?

## **Methods**

### **Sample and Data Collection**

This study used a cross-sectional design. The study sample included currently enrolled Kuwait University students. The online questionnaires were distributed to the study participants through their Kuwait University Teams accounts. The online questionnaire included a consent form that clarified participation rights such as confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw from the

study at any time. The number of students at Kuwait University is 42,697. The minimum sample size from this population is 381 at a confidence level of 95%. The sample of this study consisted of 1,137 students. The sample was collected over a period of two months. Through the Teams program, students received a link to the online questionnaire. Students who accepted the invitation filled out the questionnaire and submit it.

The mean (SD) age of the participants was 24.69 (6.10) years. In this study, the majority of participants were females (81.4%), with a high proportion of Kuwaitis (91.1%). More than half of the participants were single (77.5%), and 27.9% of the sample was in their second academic year. Over half of the sample reported that their perceived levels of IT literacy were intermediate (63.9%), and smartphones were the most frequently used internet device among the participants (80.1%). More than half of the participants had not received an introductory program about using the library and dealing with information sources (62.8%). Females accounted for approximately 73% of the student body at Kuwait University, while male enrollment remains comparatively low across all academic disciplines. Additionally, Kuwaiti nationals make up the significant majority of students, while non-Kuwaiti individuals represent a small minority. Consequently, the sample used in this study accurately reflects the demographic composition of Kuwait University (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Sample Characteristics (N = 1137)*

| Variables | N   | %    |
|-----------|-----|------|
| Gender    |     |      |
| Female    | 926 | 81.4 |
| Male      | 201 | 17.7 |

**Cont. Table 1***Sample Characteristics (N = 1137)*

| <b>Variables</b>                                  | <i>N</i> | <b>%</b> |
|---|----------|----------|
| Nationality                                       |          |          |
| Kuwaiti   | 1036     | 91.1     |
| Others  | 94       | 8.3      |
| Academic Year                                     |          |          |
| First Year  | 234      | 20.6     |
| Second Year                                       | 317      | 27.9     |
| Third Year  | 241      | 21.2     |
| Fourth Year                                       | 213      | 18.7     |
| Fifth Year & above                                | 126      | 11.1     |
| Most Frequently Used Device                       |          |          |
| Desktop computer                                  | 50       | 4.4      |
| Tablet  | 80       | 7.0      |
| Laptop  | 91       | 8.0      |
| Smartphone  | 911      | 80.1     |
| Marital Status                                    |          |          |
| Single  | 216      | 19.0     |
| Married   | 881      | 77.5     |
| Divorced  | 34       | 3.0      |
| Participants' Perceived Levels IT Literacy Levels |          |          |
| Beginner  | 135      | 11.9     |
| Intermediate                                      | 726      | 63.9     |
| Advanced  | 271      | 23.8     |
| Library Instructional Session                     |          |          |
| Yes   | 419      | 36.9     |
| No  | 704      | 61.9     |

## Measures

Numerous demographic characteristics, including gender, age, academic year, marital status, nationality, and information literacy skills, were examined. The online questionnaire also included information ethics, legal issues, and information privacy on social media scales developed by Al-Aufi et al. (2017). In addition, an 8-item information ethics scale was used to assess ethical concerns related to the use of information on social media. To address legal concerns such as copyright, fair usage, laws, and cybercrimes when using information on social media, a legal issue scale (7 items) was used. Furthermore, information privacy on social media scale (9 items) was used to evaluate participants' awareness of privacy when using social media. The responses on the three scales ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Al-Aufi et al. (2017) developed the questionnaire in Arabic language and validated it through expert review at Sultan Qaboos University. In addition, the questionnaire was initially tested by conducting a pilot study among a small group of Kuwait University students. Within this sample, internal consistency Cronbach's alpha for the information ethics, legal issues, and privacy scales was 0.79, 0.89, and 0.71, respectively. These are all considered good alpha values. In general, it is valid and reliable.

## Ethical Statement

Kuwait University rules and regulations, as well as the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2000, guided the research procedures in terms of ethical standards. The study ensured that all participants provided informed consent. The confidentiality of participant data was always maintained, and any information collected was used only for the purposes described in the study. Furthermore, participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without incurring any consequences.

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## Results

Descriptive statistics such as the mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage were used to generate sample characteristics. The Shapiro–Wilk test demonstrated that the assumption of normality was valid for all groups,  $p > 0.05$ . Independent samples  $t$ -tests and one-way ANOVA were used to determine differences in group mean values. Additionally, correlation analyses were conducted to examine the bivariate associations between the dependent variables. Linear regression was used to determine the influence of information ethics and information privacy variables on legal issues. Statistically significant differences were identified by  $p$  values less than or equal to 0.05. Furthermore, the SPSS statistical package (Version 26; IBM Corp) was used to analyze the data.

Comparing variables with different numbers of items can be simplified by using per-item means. This method allows for a more accurate analysis due to the elimination of the influence of varying item counts. Furthermore, it simplifies the interpretation of results, enabling a better understanding of differences between variables. A per-item mean is calculated by dividing the sum of all item scores by the total number of items within a variable. To ensure unbiased comparisons between variables, this process adjusts the variable mean according to item counts.

The scales' means were as follows: information ethics = 33.2 (4.15 per-item mean), legal issues = 26.1 (3.72 per-item mean), and information privacy = 26.8 (2.97 per-item mean). The range of 1 to 5 has a midpoint of 3, where 1 indicates strongly disagree and 5 indicates strongly agree. The per-item means for the three scales ranged

between 2.97 and 4.15. The information ethics on social media scale had the highest per-item mean of 4.15, which indicates that the study participants displayed high levels of awareness and understanding of the ethical implications of using information on social media. Meanwhile, the information privacy on social media scale had the lowest per-item mean of 2.97, which indicates that participants showed inadequate knowledge regarding privacy concerns (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Coefficient  $\alpha$ , Mean Score, and Standard Deviation for Three Scales (N = 1137)*

| Scale (Number of Items)    | Mean Score | SD  | Per-Item Mean |
|----------------------------|------------|-----|---------------|
| Information ethics (8)     | 33.2       | 4.4 | 4.15          |
| Legal issues (7)           | 26.1       | 5.4 | 3.72          |
| Privacy of Information (9) | 26.8       | 5.7 | 2.97          |

A *t*-test was used to test the differences between genders in terms of the participants' knowledge of information ethics, legal issues, and information privacy when they were using social media. The results showed very strong evidence of statistically significant differences between the genders in privacy of information ( $t = 6.249, p = 0.000$ ), with a mean of 29.0 for male students and 26.2 for female students. However, the analysis indicated that the means of information ethics and legal issues did not differ significantly at  $p \leq 0.05$  (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Information Ethics, Legal Issues, and Privacy of Information in Social Media by Gender Using t-test*

|                        |           | Gender |        | Statistic                    |
|------------------------|-----------|--------|--------|------------------------------|
|                        |           | Male   | Female |                              |
| Information Ethics     | <i>M</i>  | 33.0   | 33.2   | $t(1093) = -.522; p = .602.$ |
|                        | <i>SD</i> | 4.36   | 4.44   |                              |
| Legal Issues           | <i>M</i>  | 25.7   | 26.2   | $t(1085) = -1.16; p = .243$  |
|                        | <i>SD</i> | 5.37   | 5.49   |                              |
| Privacy of Information | <i>M</i>  | 29.0   | 26.2   | $t(1077) = 6.249; p = .000$  |
|                        | <i>SD</i> | 5.55   | 5.69   |                              |

*p*: *p*-values (2-tailed); *M*: mean score; *SD*: standard deviation; *t*: *t*-test

A *t*-test was conducted to evaluate the difference between nationalities in the participants' knowledge of information ethics, legal issues, and information privacy when they were using social media. The results showed very strong evidence that there were statistically significant differences between nationalities in the participants' knowledge of information ethics ( $t = -3.11, p = 0.002$ ), with a mean of 33.1 for Kuwaiti students and 34.4 for non-Kuwaiti students. Also, there were statistically significant differences between nationalities in legal issues ( $t = 2.71, p = 0.008$ ), with a mean of 26.3 for Kuwaiti students and 24.6 for non-Kuwaiti students. However, the analysis indicated that the means of information privacy did not differ significantly at  $p \leq 0.05$  (see Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Information Ethics, Legal Issues, and Privacy of Information in Social Media by Nationality, Using t-test*

|                        |           | Nationality |             | Statistic                   |
|------------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------------|
|                        |           | Kuwaiti     | Non-Kuwaiti |                             |
| Information Ethics     | <i>M</i>  | 33.1        | 34.4        | $t(1096) = -3.11; p = .002$ |
|                        | <i>SD</i> | 4.46        | 3.80        |                             |
| Legal Issues           | <i>M</i>  | 26.3        | 24.6        | $t(1088) = 2.71; p = .008$  |
|                        | <i>SD</i> | 5.43        | 5.75        |                             |
| Privacy of Information | <i>M</i>  | 26.9        | 25.8        | $t(1080) = 1.61; p = .107$  |
|                        | <i>SD</i> | 5.64        | 7.09        |                             |

*p*: *p* values (2-tailed); *M*: mean score; *SD*: standard deviation; *t*: *t*-test

A *t*-test was employed to test the differences in the participants' knowledge of information ethics, legal issues, and information privacy when they were using social media depending on whether they had received a library instructional session. The results showed that there were statistically significant differences in the participants' knowledge of information ethics based on whether they had received a library instructional session ( $t = 2.18, p = 0.029$ ), with a mean of 33.5 for students who said yes and 32.9 for students who said no. Also, there were statistically significant differences in information privacy based on whether they had received a library instructional session ( $t = 2.14, p = 0.032$ ), with a mean of 27.3 for students who said yes and 26.4 for students who said no. However, the analysis indicated that the means of legal issues did not differ significantly at  $p \leq 0.05$  (see Table 5).

**Table 5**

*Information Ethics, Legal Issues, and Privacy of Information in Social Media by Library Instructional Session, Using t-test*

|                        |           | Library Instructional Session |      | Statistic                  |
|------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|------|----------------------------|
|                        |           | Yes                           | No   |                            |
| Information Ethics     | <i>M</i>  | 33.5                          | 32.9 | $t(1089) = 2.18; p = .029$ |
|                        | <i>SD</i> | 4.13                          | 4.60 |                            |
| Legal Issues           | <i>M</i>  | 26.5                          | 26.0 | $t(1081) = 1.53; p = .124$ |
|                        | <i>SD</i> | 5.54                          | 5.44 |                            |
| Privacy of Information | <i>M</i>  | 27.3                          | 26.4 | $t(1073) = 2.14; p = .032$ |
|                        | <i>SD</i> | 6.36                          | 5.37 |                            |

*p*: *p* values (2-tailed); *M*: mean score; *SD*: standard deviation; *t*: *t*-test

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test the research hypothesis that there are statistically significant differences based on the independent variable (age) in the dependent variables (information ethics, legal issues, and information privacy). The results showed that there were statistically significant differences between the participants' age groups in the dependent variables of information ethics and legal issues at  $p = .000$  and  $p = .007$ , respectively. However, the results showed that there was no statistically significant difference based on the participants' age in information privacy at  $p \leq 0.05$  (see Table 6).

**Table 6**

*Information Ethics, Legal Issues, and Privacy of Information in Social Media by Age, Using ANOVA*

|                        |           | Age   |       |       | Total | Statistic                     |
|------------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------------------------|
|                        |           | 19-21 | 22-23 | 24-53 |       |                               |
| Information Ethics     | <i>M</i>  | 32.0  | 33.5  | 34.2  | 33.2  | $F(2; 1060) = 26.9; p = .000$ |
|                        | <i>SD</i> | 4.6   | 4.0   | 4.1   | 4.4   |                               |
| Legal Issues           | <i>M</i>  | 33.2  | 26.0  | 25.6  | 26.2  | $F(2; 1052) = 4.97; p = .007$ |
|                        | <i>SD</i> | 4.4   | 5.2   | 5.9   | 5.5   |                               |
| Privacy of Information | <i>M</i>  | 26.7  | 26.2  | 27.2  | 26.7  | $F(2; 1043) = 2.36; p = .095$ |
|                        | <i>SD</i> | 5.6   | 5.2   | 5.7   | 5.7   |                               |

*p*: *p* values (2-tailed); *M*: mean score; *SD*: standard deviation; *F*: *F* test

Statistically significant differences were found between the participants' perceived levels of IT literacy in the dependent variables of information ethics and legal issues at  $p = .001$  and  $p = .05$ , respectively, based on ANOVA test results. Conversely, no statistically significant difference was observed in information privacy between participants' perceived levels IT literacy levels at  $p \leq 0.05$  (see Table 7).

**Table 7**

*Information Ethics, Legal Issues, and Privacy of Information in Social Media by participants' perceived levels IT literacy levels, Using ANOVA*

|                    |           | Participants' perceived levels IT literacy levels |              |          | Total | Statistic                     |
|--------------------|-----------|---|--------------|----------|-------|-------------------------------|
|                    |           | Beginner  | Intermediate | Advanced |       |                               |
| Information Ethics | <i>M</i>  | 32.0  | 33.2         | 33.8     | 33.2  | $F(2; 1096) = 7.40; p = .001$ |
|                    | <i>SD</i> | 4.8   | 4.1          | 4.8      | 4.4   |                               |

**Cont. Table 7**

*Information Ethics, Legal Issues, and Privacy of Information in Social Media by participants' perceived levels IT literacy levels, Using ANOVA*

|                        |           | Participants' perceived levels IT literacy levels |              |          | Total | Statistic            |
|------------------------|-----------|---|--------------|----------|-------|----------------------|
|                        |           | Beginner  | Intermediate | Advanced |       |                      |
| Legal Issues           | <i>M</i>  | 25.1  | 26.2         | 26.5     | 26.1  | $F(2; 1089) = 2.98;$ |
|                        | <i>SD</i> | 5.9   | 5.3          | 5.4      | 5.4   | $p = .05$            |
| Privacy of Information | <i>M</i>  | 27.4  | 26.7         | 26.7     | 26.8  | $F(2; 1081) = 0.75;$ |
|                        | <i>SD</i> | 5.4   | 5.7          | 5.9      | 5.7   | $p = .472$           |

*p*: *p* values (2-tailed); *M*: mean score; *SD*: standard deviation; *F*: *F* test

In this study, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to test the hypothesis that there are statistically significant differences between academic year levels (independent variable) in the dependent variables of information ethics, legal issues, and information privacy. A statistically significant difference between the participants' academic levels was found in the dependent variables of information ethics and legal issues at  $p = .000$  and  $p = .034$ , respectively. Nevertheless, the results showed no statistically significant difference in information privacy according to the participants' academic year levels at  $p \leq 0.05$  (see Table 8).

**Table 8**

*Information Ethics, Legal Issues, and Privacy of Information in Social Media by Academic Year level, Using ANOVA*

|                    |           | Academic Year Level  |                      |                      |                              | Total | Statistic            |
|--------------------|-----------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|-------|----------------------|
|                    |           | 1 <sup>st</sup> year | 2 <sup>nd</sup> year | 3 <sup>rd</sup> year | 4 <sup>th</sup> year & above |       |                      |
| Information Ethics | <i>M</i>  | 32.2                 | 32.8                 | 33.7                 | 33.9                         | 33.2  | $F(3; 1095) = 8.37;$ |
|                    | <i>SD</i> | 4.8                  | 4.5                  | 4.0                  | 4.1                          | 4.4   | $p = .000$           |

**Cont. Table 8**

*Information Ethics, Legal Issues, and Privacy of Information in Social Media by Academic Year level, Using ANOVA*

|                        |           | Academic Year Level  |                      |                      |                              | Total | Statistic                          |
|------------------------|-----------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|-------|------------------------------------|
|                        |           | 1 <sup>st</sup> year | 2 <sup>nd</sup> year | 3 <sup>rd</sup> year | 4 <sup>th</sup> year & above |       |                                    |
| Legal Issues           | <i>M</i>  | 25.3                 | 26.7                 | 26.1                 | 26.2                         | 26.1  | $F(3; 1087) = 2.89;$<br>$p = .034$ |
|                        | <i>SD</i> | 5.1                  | 5.5                  | 5.7                  | 5.3                          | 5.4   |                                    |
| Privacy of Information | <i>M</i>  | 26.1                 | 26.9                 | 26.8                 | 27.1                         | 26.8  | $F(3; 1078) = 1.55;$<br>$p = 0.19$ |
|                        | <i>SD</i> | 5.0                  | 6.4                  | 5.5                  | 5.6                          | 5.7   |                                    |

*p*: *p* values (2-tailed); *M*: mean score; *SD*: standard deviation; *F*: *F* test

An analysis of correlations among the dependent variables was performed for information ethics, legal issues, and information privacy. The results showed that knowledge of legal issues was positively and significantly correlated with knowledge of information ethics and information privacy. There was a moderate positive correlation, which was not particularly strong. Nevertheless, despite the absence of a strong correlation, the correlation could still provide valuable insights into underlying dynamics and should be investigated further. However, information ethics was not significantly correlated with information privacy (see Table 9).

**Table 9**

*Correlation Matrix of Measured Variables*

|                        | <i>M ± SD</i> | 1      | 2      | 3 |
|------------------------|---------------|--------|--------|---|
| Information Ethics     | 33.2 ± 4.4    | 1      |        |   |
| Legal Issues           | 26.1 ± 5.4    | .359** | 1      |   |
| Privacy of Information | 26.8 ± 5.7    | .048   | .276** | 1 |

Note. \*\*  $p \leq .01$

Linear regression was used to analyze the influencing factors of the knowledge of legal issues. The legal issues score was used as the dependent variable, and the two influencing factors of information ethics and information privacy were used as the independent variables. This approach was chosen because it allows for a clear understanding of how changes in information ethics and privacy impact the knowledge of legal issues. This study isolates the effects of these factors and draws more accurate conclusions by considering legal issues as a dependent variable. Numerous variables, including age, gender, nationality, academic year level, and participants' perceived levels IT literacy, were also controlled. The results showed that information ethics was statistically significantly associated with legal issues ( $t = 12.16$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $\beta = .350$ ), and information privacy was statistically significantly associated with legal issues ( $t = 9.41$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $\beta = .269$ ). The model was significant for predicting legal issues:  $F(7, 1005) = 40.07$ ,  $p = .000$ . The  $R^2$  for the model was 21.8%. To assess the impact of multicollinearity in the model, the tolerance and VIF values were calculated. The results showed that the tolerance values all exceeded .99, and VIF values were all less than 1.00, which indicates that multicollinearity is not a concern (see Table 10).

**Table 10**

*Factors Influencing Knowledge of Legal Issues*

|                        | <i>B (SE)/Standardized Coefficients</i> | <i>95% CI</i> | <i>t</i> |
|------------------------|---|---------------|----------|
| Information Ethics     | .438(.036)/.350                         | [.368, .509]  | 12.16*** |
| Privacy of Information | .258(.027)/.269                         | [.204, .312]  | 9.41***  |

**Cont. Table 10**

*Factors Influencing Knowledge of Legal Issues*

|                                | <i>B (SE)/Standardized Coefficients</i> | <i>95% CI</i> | <i>t</i> |
|--------------------------------|---|---------------|----------|
| Model summary                  |   |               |          |
| <i>F</i> value                 |   | 40.074***     |          |
| <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>          |   | .218          |          |
| Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> |   | .213          |          |

Note. *N* = 1137. *CI* = confidence interval. \*\*\**p* < 0.001.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This topic involves legal and ethical issues and thus has a rather negative and critical nature (Hudders et al., 2020; Lipschultz, 2020). However, social media tools can be an excellent means of communication among people and a method “for creating and sustaining relationships among faculty members, staff members, schools, students, and alumni” (Sarwar et al., 2018). Social media, as widely discussed in the literature, has the potential to encourage communication and tie people together. The openness of social media also creates the possibility for confrontations that are morally and legally complex. The legal and moral issues surrounding social media should be taught to all students, faculty, and staff as well as administration. A solid understanding of the issues can help avoid adverse social media-related incidents. It is necessary to examine students’ awareness to assess if they adequately address professionalism issues. Many articles on social media highlight the need to develop guidelines for using social media responsibly. Therefore, the focus of our current study is to investigate students’ awareness of information ethics, legal issues, and privacy.

Remarkably, the findings of this study show that students have high levels of awareness and an understanding of the ethical implications of using information on social media. Previous research has reported a positive correlation between ethical awareness and privacy-related behavior (Barrett-Maitland & Lynch, 2020); however, the present study observed this association to be negligible ( $r = .02$ ). This discrepancy suggests that, despite their conceptual proximity, ethical and privacy constructs may be governed by distinct cognitive and sociocultural mechanisms. Within the Kuwaiti context, ethical and legal awareness appears primarily shaped by institutional exposure and regulatory frameworks, whereas privacy attitudes are more deeply embedded in cultural norms and individual moral reasoning. Consequently, ethical awareness does not inherently translate into heightened privacy sensitivity, underscoring the context-dependent nature of moral cognition in digital environments. This result may indicate that the education system enhances social media ethics. At the same time, students show an inadequate level of knowledge regarding privacy concerns. Privacy is one of the most critical issues present in the technological era. Social media still involves severe privacy concerns for consumers despite its many positive aspects (Alex et al., 2018). Privacy is one's ability to control his or her personal information (Acquisti et al., 2020). Hence, showing a lack of awareness and knowledge regarding privacy is a concerning issue and a severe problem. Such a lack of knowledge and privacy awareness may be because of the lack of specialized IT courses or even because these courses do not exist. Students may never take any courses related to privacy concerns.

Moreover, the results show robust evidence of statistically significant differences between the genders regarding information privacy. Regarding IT ethics, gender has a tremendous impact on ethical

perspectives. Hence, male and female perspectives vary (Alnjadat et al., 2019; Lin & Wang, 2020). According to the results of the current study, males and females showed different views toward privacy on social media. As discussed in the literature, females in the Arab world are raised and treated differently than males, especially in masculine societies. For example, females in these societies value privacy highly.

This is probably because they were raised and strictly taught to protect their privacy. With respect to unethical behaviors, females are required to adhere to more stringent family morals, customs, and cultural values than males, who, in certain situations, may discover that unethical acts are somehow even condoned by both society and their families (Alnjadat et al., 2019). Differences between males and females in the Middle East may be linked to local customs, cultural influences, and early socialization for both genders. Given the socialization process, it is predicted, from a cultural and traditional standpoint, that females would initially have different values and, thus, act and be evaluated more ethically than their male counterparts in certain situations (Banks et al., 2021). The current study found that both genders had inadequate knowledge of privacy concerns. Several studies found similar results regarding privacy and gender differences among youth. Therefore, this leads females to adopt more conservative privacy settings or engage in selective sharing than their male counterparts. The latter reflects cultural expectations and pressures on women in the Middle East regarding reputation and public exposure (Issa et al., 2021b). In the same vein, it has been discussed that Saudi female users may adopt more conservative privacy settings and engage in selective sharing to conform to cultural gender norms (Saleh & Mohamed, 2024). Similarly, for Qatari women, privacy is a significant and pervasive concern in online education contexts (Yelland et al., 2023). Likewise, Emirati female students demonstrated

significantly greater concern for privacy and a greater reluctance to share personal data online than male students (Ashour, 2019). Concerns for females in MENA often center around reputational damage, familial scrutiny, and personal harassment, leading them to adopt more restrictive privacy settings (Farooq et al., 2024).

The results of this study also indicate that there are significant differences between nationalities regarding participants' knowledge of information ethics and legal issues, while the results regarding information privacy do not differ significantly. A reasonable explanation for this may be that each country's education system is different. Different levels of knowledge of information ethics and legal issues among students of different nationalities may be due to the different educational systems and curricula used in each country. For instance, the educational systems in some nations place a strong emphasis on imparting to students an extensive knowledge of information ethics and legal issues. Additionally, there may be a difference in the level of awareness regarding legal issues among students since the methods used to raise legal awareness among the general populace vary from nation to nation. This difference can be associated with sociocultural and methodological factors. Non-Kuwaitis frequently inhabit transnational social spaces characterized by cultural hybridity, which may generate heightened reflexivity and self-regulation in online practices. Their expatriate status often necessitates navigating host-country norms under conditions of increased visibility and potential scrutiny, fostering a form of moral vigilance. Also, many expatriates are situated within professional or contexts that impose formal codes of digital ethics and accountability, thereby reinforcing ethical orientations. Psychologically, the influence of social desirability bias in self-reported measures may further amplify the appearance of moral conscientiousness among non-citizens seeking alignment with perceived

host-society expectations. One of the recommendations here is to include concrete strategies such as culturally adaptive digital-ethics training and differentiated privacy-awareness initiatives.

In terms of privacy, based on the findings, there is no difference between students from different nations; as stated several times in the extant literature, privacy is related to the nature of society. As shown in cultural studies, societies might be either collectivist or individualist. Additionally, there is a relationship between culture and OPCs (Anic et al., 2019; Degirmenci, 2020). Likewise, scholars have recently questioned the idea of a universal definition of privacy, arguing that it is a socially created and culturally constrained term (Rahman et al., 2019; Siffels, 2020).

However, all participants in our study hail from the same Arab region. According to the literature, the Arab region is collectively minded. Collectivism emphasizes the relationship between the person and his or her group or community (Al-Omouh et al., 2022; Cohen & Abedallah, 2021; Hussein, 2022; Milla & Dos-Santos, 2019). Additionally, collectivistic societies promote "we" consciousness, a collective identity, community decision-making, and sharing (Hofstede, 1980). Perhaps a reasonable explanation for this result is that the participants come from the same cultural background. Thus, they have the same perception and level of awareness of privacy. Some scholars have argued about the impact of culture on the use of technology and privacy, noting that the Arabic language, religious affiliation, and cultural expectations have a significant effect on the adoption and usage of technology by Arab Gulf residents. Specifically, understandings of privacy are influenced by norms and expectations rooted in Muslim religious practice (Al-Amrani, 2021). Furthermore, privacy issues are more complicated because of the current use of social media. As discussed by several scholars, social media sites are

becoming more critical and often cause problems in the daily lives of people in the GCC (Homaïd, 2022; Beyari, 2023; Sartawi, 2021). Social media makes it difficult for this population to maintain their privacy and track who they are (Bandara et al., 2020; Bhatt et al., 2022).

People's ability to control the disclosure of their personal information is the main issue of privacy, which varies by culture. This means that digital technologies have severely compromised privacy (Budak et al., 2017). Differences in privacy concerns about the internet can be explained by cultural values and how long people have been using the internet. These cultural differences are mediated by differences in regulations (Kaplan, 2019; Livingstone, 2018). Privacy has been severely compromised by the internet, in conjunction with other forms of digital technology (Deep et al., 2020; Ogonji et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2019). That being said, cultures take different approaches to privacy (Al-Amrani, 2021; Cohen & Abedallah, 2021).

For the library instructional session, the results may be attributed to the students who received these sessions. There is a significant difference in students' knowledge of information ethics and information privacy depending on whether they attended a library instruction session. Nevertheless, the analysis reveals that legal issues do not differ significantly. These findings align with recent studies on ethical education (Balakrishnan et al., 2021; Megregian et al., 2020; Teshaboev & Karimov, 2022; West & Buckby, 2018). Because of the impact of the academic level, educational institutions must continue to include discussions of ethics in the courses they teach to aspiring IT professionals and executives (Burton et al., 2018; Califf & Goodwin, 2005; Grosz et al., 2019). Unlike the results for privacy, the study analysis reveals that the means of legal issues do not differ significantly. The findings at this point may reflect a gap in the library instructional session or in the overall educational system.

Finally, in terms of age as a variable, we find that while age does not impact privacy, it does have some influence on information ethics and legal issues. This concern is important in this context where youth are primarily more interested in the content and have little experience and exposure related to the ethics and legal issues that may arise due to the use of media (De Wolf, 2019). Age may shape ethical and legal awareness—namely, cumulative professional experience, exposure to institutional regulations, and generational variations in digital literacy. Conversely, privacy perceptions appear comparatively stable across age cohorts, reflecting their deep entrenchment within cultural norms.

An interesting finding of the current study is that levels of IT do not impact privacy, whereas they do impact information ethics and legal issues, which are neglected. Regarding the influence of academic level on attitudes toward ethics, the findings are mixed. The results indicate that while the academic year does not impact privacy, it does in fact impact ethics and legal issues. Therefore, further research on the ethics and privacy paradox is still needed (Barrett-Maitland & Lynch, 2020) as part of the pursuit of social media development. In this paper, a thorough study was conducted to assess the awareness of legal and ethical aspects among KUNIV students in the age of social media. As technology is advancing rapidly, threats also increase.

The findings of this research suggest that students had a considerable degree of consciousness and comprehension of the ethical ramifications associated with using information from social media platforms. Students must enhance their understanding of privacy-related issues. The research demonstrates that a need for more information and comprehension of privacy is a significant and pressing challenge. As anticipated, the findings indicate no discernible difference

among students from various countries.

In the context of IT ethics, the influence of gender on ethical viewpoints is significant. The findings of the present research indicate that female students are more concerned about privacy issues on social media platforms than their male counterparts. It is worth noting here that the overpopulation of females may have amplified ethical sensitivity reflecting broader trends in general digital behaviour reported in previous research.

The findings of the survey conducted also indicate that there are notable variations across nations in terms of participants' understanding of information ethics and legal matters. However, there is no substantial disparity in the results concerning information privacy.

The outcomes of the library instructional session may be ascribed to the students who participated in these sessions. The disparity in students' comprehension of information ethics and privacy is contingent upon their attendance at a library education session.

Teaching students how to communicate and use technology securely via social media is highly recommended. Creating policies and regulations that govern the use of technology in a manner that is readily comprehended is one method to achieve this goal. Library instruction should be included in the first year of college or at earlier education levels, such as elementary and secondary school.

This paper primarily concerns students' ethical and legal awareness in the digital age, where technology has become the primary method to study, search, purchase, and communicate. Designing a practical information security course, or at least training sessions that accommodate all ages and consider the varying specializations of students, became necessary. In addition, the outcomes of this study recommend some policy-level amendments to safeguard students'

personal data and digital rights within educational institutions, and these policies should be based on Kuwait Cybercrime law and the Right to Access Information Law.

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# مجلة دراسات الخليج والجزيرة العربية



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تقييم وعي الطلبة بالأخلاقيات والجوانب القانونية  
والخصوصية في جامعة الكويت

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