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Social Media, Teenage Romantic Relationships & Media Literacy

By

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Bashir and Raifa, who gave me the opportunity of an education and motivated me to pursue a master's degree. This work is also dedicated to my siblings, Mohammad and Tala, who constantly reminded me of my dreams and why I am pursuing this degree. Finally, this work is also dedicated to my close friends who tolerated me through this extensive process, always offering support and love, as they played a huge role in motivating me to finish my work.

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Social Media, Teenage Romantic Relationships & Media Literacy

Yasmeen Sakka

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to study teenage romantic relationships on social media platforms by testing if media literacy can ameliorate the problems that teenage couples face online. Social media can enrich romantic relationships, but they can cause problems such as relationship uncertainty, partner surveillance and online partner aggression. Media literacy encourages safe and appropriate use of media; hence, it can have a substantial role in teenage romantic relationships online. The significance of this research lies in its ability to test and analyze how media literacy can create a safer space for teenagers in online romantic relationships. Through testing teenagers' ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate online, this thesis will examine the relation between Media Literacy Level and the romantic problems faced online. This study used a survey questionnaire physically distributed on school campuses. The questionnaire was filled out by 398 teenagers between the ages of 15 and 18, attending six high schools across Lebanon. Research findings validated that media literacy is negatively associated to relationship uncertainty and online partner aggression. However, the finding also opposed one of the research hypotheses, revealing that media literacy is positively associated with partner surveillance.

Keywords: Teenage Relationships Online –Romantic Relationships - Social Media - Media Literacy – Relationship Uncertainty – Partner Aggression – Online Partner Surveillance

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Chapter One

Social Media, Teenage Romantic Relationships & Media Literacy

Teenage relationships are expanded with the use of social media (Ahn, 2012). With such utilization of the internet as a tool of communication, the dynamics of romantic relationships are in constant change (Chambers, 2013). The communication process has become easier, as social media has unchained communication from its physical barriers and provided several new channels for interactions (Amedie, 2015; Arikewuyo et al, 2020a), especially during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown (Nguyen et al., 2020). However, if not used appropriately, social media might lead to several relational problems between partners in teenage romantic relationships (Arikewuyo et al, 2020a; Lloyd et al., 2019; Prihastuty et al., 2019).

One of the problems that teenagers might face online is relationship uncertainty (Abbasi, 2019; Elphinston & Noller, 2011; Lenhart et al., 2015). Relationship uncertainty is the feeling of confusion and ambiguity regarding a romantic relationship, its sincerity, and its potential future (Fox & Anderegg, 2014). Uncertainty in a romantic relationship is predicted by low levels of trust between partners, dissatisfaction in communication, and low frequency of communication (Rogers et al., 2018). Moreover, relationship uncertainty is highly affected by monitoring the partner's actions on social media (Marshall et al., 2012).

Consequently, another problem that teenagers face is online romantic partner surveillance (Emrichová, 2018; Frampton & fox, 2018; Hertlein & Van Dyck, 2020). Online partner surveillance is a secretive approach to monitor partners' online and offline behaviors by frequently looking at their partner's profiles and shared content (Tokunaga, 2011). The act of

online partner surveillance might cover the partner's shared, and sometimes private, information (Van Ouytsel et al., 2019).

Furthermore, an issue commonly faced by teenagers in online romantic relationships is partner aggression (Alvarez, 2012; Bryant, 2017; Durán et al., 2015; Young et al., 2017). This issue is shaped by the behaviors and actions taken to, directly or indirectly, damage the partner's emotions or feelings of inclusion and threaten to end the relationship (Bryant, 2017). Online partner aggression is associated with low-quality relationships, and it can come from a current or previous partner (Young et al., 2017).

As teenagers are taking part in a media user society, media literacy plays a significant role in making meaning of media content, depicting risks and ensuring more effective online communication for romantic relationships (Kellner, 2015; Prakoso et al., 2017; Toma, 2016). Media literacy is the capability of accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and communicating different forms of media content (Hobbs, 2001). Media literacy skills are essential for digital media users to make wise decisions and take responsible actions, creating a safer online experience (Hobbs, 2010).

The purpose of this thesis is to test if media literacy can ameliorate the problems that teenage couples face online. This purpose contributes to a better understanding of how media literacy ensures a safer environment for teenagers in online romantic relationships. Previous research focused on media literacy as a catalyst for a safer online environment (Livingstone, 2014; Livingstone et al. 2017; Purnama et al., 2021; Turner et al., 2017; Tomczyk & Eger, 2020). Hence, this study focuses on assessing the relationship between media literacy levels to the

alleviation of the problems that emerge with teenage online romantic relationships by examining relationship uncertainty, online partner surveillance and online partner aggression.

Previous research focused on media literacy in children's experiences and online safety (Livingstone, 2014; Livingstone et al. 2017; Turner et al., 2017), adult online relationship uncertainty and attachment (Arikewuyo et al., 2020a; Fox & Warber, 2014; Ledbetter, 2014; Toma, 2016), and family connections through social media (Coyne et al., 2014; Procentese et al., 2019). Only a few studies have addressed media literacy and teenage online relationships; romantic relationships, in specific, have been almost neglected (Abbassi & Huang, 2020; Cernikova et al., 2016; Van Ouytsel et al., 2016). Therefore, this thesis fills the gap in research tackling teenage romantic relationships online and the relation between media literacy and problems faced by teenagers in such relationships, especially in the Arab region. This importance is reinforced by focusing on the Lebanese society that includes different classes, religions, beliefs, educational levels, and technological skills; the Lebanese society also suffers from a great number of gender-based violence cases (Schmitt & Jenkins, 2019), domestic violence (Usta et al., 2007) and Lebanese tend to view love as a bridge leading to marriage (Oghia, 2015). Thus, due to the different backgrounds and ideologies of the Lebanese society, media literacy can enhance the sense of coherence in online communication (Al Rawi, 2016) as it builds common consensus (Hobbs, 2005).

This thesis conducts a survey among Lebanese teenagers, between 15 to 18 years old, tackling their current and previous relationships to form a clear consensus of media literacy and teenage romantic relationships on social media. This survey examines the level of prevalence of

the three problems associated with teenage romantic relationships on social media, along with the level of media literacy of the participating Lebanese teenagers. This examination will associate media literacy skills with the alleviation of the online romantic relationship problems.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework

Youth, especially adolescents, are exposed to a large variety of media through their active engagement in recreational, educational, political, social, and several other forms of media (Sachdeva & Tripathi, 2019). This media exposure is not only present in the form of receiving content and consuming it. Youth are also media creators, actively constructing their identities, connecting with friends, interacting with media content, and developing new media content themselves (Michikyan & Suárez-Orozco, 2016).

This section provides a theoretical framework that defines media literacy and highlights its importance in the world of social media while focusing on the Arab region. This section also relates media literacy to online romantic relationships.

Media Literacy

Several scholars defined media literacy as media was evolving and constantly changing in context and form, especially with the digitization of media platforms and outlets (Potter, 2010). The different definitions of media literacy will be presented in this section, followed by the conceptualized definition used in this thesis. Following the definitions, the importance of media literacy in the world of social media will be reviewed, along with media literacy's aim of protecting media users and empowering media use for building a safe space online.

Anderson (1981) defined media literacy as being skillful in gathering, understanding, examining, and applying information for a specific cause through different platforms. Barton and Hamilton (1998) added to the previous definition by presenting media literacy as not only a set

of skills that should be learned, but as an important form of literacy that assists human interaction by connecting ideas and content.

Media Literacy as a contextual approach focuses on the examination of media content during media delivery and media creation (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009; Lewis & Jhally, 1998). Due to content examination, media literacy is considered a critical literacy that supports the ability not to only read, but to critically analyze and evaluate media content (McDougall, 2013).

A person that can examine media content by decoding, evaluating, analyzing, and producing is considered a media literate person (Aufderheide & Firestone 1993; Kellner et al., 2005; Martin & Madigan 2006). Rather than simply reading online content, a media literate person is able to evaluate and analyze this content in order to make meaning of it and gain its' information as knowledge (Baron, 2019). A media literate person in the online world can also display a variety of skills while using digital media technologies, like sending emails and operating web profiles (Wallis & Buckingham, 2016).

Media literacy skills are beneficial to the regular media user and creator (Friesem, 2019; Hobbs, 2005). Different media skills that contribute to the analysis, evaluation, and creation of media content are developed and accentuated through media literacy (Christ & Potter, 1998). These skills complement the process of receiving and creating media online, further confirming the importance of media literacy (Prakoso et al., 2017). This importance is long-established as media literacy can ensure consensus for people to partake, not only as individuals, but as media users in a media-based world (Hobbs, 2005).

With the digitization of media content through social media platforms, there is a change in the way that people connect with each other (Abreu & Mihailidis, 2013). The digitization has changed how scholars tackle media literacy in today's era, considering it as the ability to understand and evaluate material provided through the different forms that media content can be produced and delivered in (Bulger & Davison, 2018). Knowing how to operate a digital device is not enough; people should have the capacities to access and analyze information online (Friesem, 2019; Hobbs, 2019). These capacities are reinforced by media literacy skills that can build socially responsible people that know how to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media content (Hobbs, 2017).

In relevance to the definition adopted in this thesis, where media literacy is viewed as the capability of accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and communicating different forms of media content (Hobbs, 2001). Media content decoding can be considered part of the analyzing process of media literacy (Lopes et al., 2018). This adaptation was chosen as it is the most contextual and measurable for media literacy skills because it divides them from the retrieval to the creation phases of media content.

Media Literacy Skills

Retrieval starts with the ability to access media content through the different means and technologies provided (Reia-Baptista & Tavares, 2019). Media literacy in the digital world focuses on dealing with media content that is available online (Turner et al., 2017). However, the mere availability of content online and the presence of the means don't ensure accessibility

(Abreu & Mihailidis, 2013). Hence, accessing media content is the ability to use the technologies of online media to search and navigate through the platforms (Baron, 2019).

After content retrieval, users shall evaluate it for its reliability and credibility depending on where, when and who created this content (MediaSmarts, 2022). Through evaluating the media content, it is important to know how to read media and make meaning out of it (Baron, 2019). Even though social media has a major role in the lives of Arab teenagers (Al Rawi, 2016), many Arab youth suffer from poor evaluation skills for checking the credibility of media sources to which they are exposed (El Rayess et al., 2017). However, this low level of evaluation among Lebanese youth may be due to political affiliation and trust, as Lebanese media are owned by Lebanese political groups (Al Najjar, 2019).

As for the ability to analyze, it is a skill that works on interpreting and breaking down the content to understand its purpose and reveal any underlying messages behind it (Lewis & Jhally, 1998). This ability forms an analytical understanding of media content that people are exposed to (MediaSmarts, 2022), creating knowledgeable people that reflect and critically think about what they see, hear, and read about national and international topics (Abreu & Mihailidis, 2013).

Focusing on Lebanon, Lebanese youth are less likely to analyze the content that they read on the web, as they ignore the idea of evaluating its credibility (El Rayess et al., 2017). Media literacy can aid youth in avoiding potential risks and conflicts that might arise (Abbasi & Huang, 2020; Melki, 2010), due to the societal diversity present in Lebanon (Melki, 2013). This diversity is portrayed in the media, as the media in Arab countries are mostly political, sectarian, and

unstable due to the set agendas based on the connection between Lebanese media institutions and political groups (Al Najjar, 2019).

Additionally, media literacy skills assist not only with accessing, evaluating, and analyzing the content provided, but with creating media as well (Buckingham, 2003). The fourth skill of a media literate person is the ability to communicate by contributing to media creation, connecting with others, and producing content (Baron, 2019). This skill focuses on the ability to communicate with people on various topics using different media means and technologies (McDougall, 2013), such as sending texts and interacting with people's content online (Livingstone, 2003). When communicating online, a media literate person is cautious about what he/she posts and shares as their connections will evaluate the content posted, which might affect their relationships (Kimbrough & Guadagon, 2019).

Media Literacy from an Empowerment and Protectionist Perspective

Studies on media literacy focus on two perspectives: empowerment and protection (Hobbs, 1998). Digital media literacy mainly explores digital divide issues and the negative impacts that online media has on the youth's lives (Parks et al., 2014). However, media literacy also explores media as a tool for empowerment and connectivity (Ofcom, 2004; Yildiz & Keengwe, 2016).

Media literacy skills accentuate critical thinking for people to critically investigate the things they see, hear, read, and create on different media platforms (Hobbs, 2001). Taking this claim into consideration, Ofcom (2004) claimed that the main vision of media literacy is to empower the users of digital media and communication.

Digital media, specifically social media, might have negative consequences on the youth's exposure to and use of media shared online (Michikyan & Suárez-Orozco, 2016). These negative consequences and risks include psychological downfalls and anxiety (Egan & Moreno, 2011; Moreno et al., 2011; Shaw et al., 2015; Uhls et al., 2017), representation of the false self (Michikyan, 2020) and deception (Tsikerdekis & Zeadally, 2014). Hence, media literacy as a social practice instead of an individual skill set has a significant importance in online communication (Livingstone & Van Der Graaf, 2010). This significance is evident through the adoption of media literacy skills among people, reducing the risks and negative impacts of social media while enforcing the positive impacts (Turner et al., 2017). Media literacy skills can be effective in decreasing the possible potential harm of social media (Jeong et al., 2012) as they promise the ability to alleviate these negative impacts and risks by developing critical media thinking skills among youth (Bulger & Davison, 2018). Media literacy skills that focus mainly on traditional media can be expanded and applied on social media as a way of empowering youth's media usage and reducing potential risks to which they might be exposed to online (Tamplin et al., 2018).

The second perspective is protection (Hobbs, 1998). With the excessive use of the media by the youth, the protectionist perspective is used to highlight the risks that they might face when exposed to different forms of media online (Powers, 2017). Protectionists are motivated to guard people from the possible harms that come with the excessive use of social media by the youth, through impulse opportunities (Hobbs, 2019). The protectionist approach of media literacy views

young media consumers as victims and works on ways to protect them from the dangers that come with the use of media (Kellner & Share, 2007).

Media Literacy as a Life Skill

Similarly, social interaction and communication among the youth is shifting online with the use of social media daily, especially among adolescents who reportedly spend more than nine hours a day on several social media platforms (Probst, 2017). However, the content circulated on social media outlets is not always definite (Jeong et al., 2012); hence, media literacy can reinforce the experience of the socializing youth online by setting patterns of appropriate online behavior while texting, interacting, and sharing content on social media (Hobbs, 2019).

Setting appropriate media use patterns starts at an early age, as teenagers by age 12 start developing critical judgment (VanEvra, 1998). With the introduction of media literacy to their knowledge, media judgment can grow with them from a young age for them to protect themselves and use media wisely (Livingstone & Van Der Graaf, 2010). To incorporate these media literacy skills into the lives of the youth, there has to be a role for parents, educators, technologists, professionals, artists and activists (Hobbs, 2019). These influencers have the ability to provide the youth with the media literacy skills necessary for reviewing their online consumption and their online content creation (Friesem, 2019). This, in turn, leads to the social practice of media literacy (Livingstone & Van Der Graaf, 2010).

Globally, media literacy is considered as a necessity for the future (Bulger & Davison, 2018). In the Arab world, media literacy has a notable significance that shifts online media from a threatening place of surveillance and aggression to a positive place of learning and

communicating (Al Najjar, 2019). In Lebanon, there is a common consensus on advancing media literacy within the society and expanding it to the Arab region (Melki, 2013). The launch of the Media and Digital Literacy Academy of Beirut (MDLAB) in 2013 (Melki & Maaliki, 2016), had a goal to develop an Arabic media literacy curriculum based on Arab cultures and societies in collaboration with trained Arab media educators (Melki, 2015).

Media Literacy and Relationships Online

This section tackles the opportunities for online relationships provided by social media. The importance of media literacy in online relationships and the relation between them is further discussed.

According to Michikyan and Suárez-Orozco (2016), social media provides platforms and opportunities for the youth to express, uncover and discover different characteristics of themselves that create their online identities, along with enhancing their real-life identities. The notion that social media offer opportunities for the youth to communicate with different groups and people from all over the globe strengthens their online connectivity with families, friends, and romantic partners. Park et al. (2014) added by highlighting the development of new forms of relationships as social media provide a sufficient online presence and wide online social networking circles.

Livingstone et al. (2017) stressed the idea that having a digitally skilled individual is crucial when dealing with online relationships, since media literate teenagers have high levels of participatory, educational, and communicative behavior online (Festal, 2020). Hence, it is important to note that false understandings of the utility of online communication, on different

social media platforms, and the absence of strong online media literacy skills might produce negative consequences for people's social relationships online and offline (Newman 2015).

Media literacy takes a significant part in accomplishing interpersonal purposes and building relationships online (Kimbrough & Guadagno, 2019). Building online relationships is achieved through meeting new contacts on social media, sharing and informing people regarding life events through different media content forms, validating news sources and browsing other people's profiles (Festal, 2020).

Connecting with friends for entertainment, discussions, school projects or even business- and work-related communication is one form of online relationships where people require building and maintaining (Amedie, 2015; Livingstone, 2014). Connecting with families through online discussions, emotional connections and event documentation is another form (Coyne et al., 2014; Procentese et al. ,2019). Hence, building and maintaining relationships through instant communication on social media emphasizes the importance of media literacy today based on a person's ability to analyze, evaluate and create content online (Festal, 2020; Park et al, 2014).

Chapter Three

Literature Review

The literature review covers romantic relationships on social media, relates it to teenagers online and tackles the issues of romantic relationship uncertainty, romantic partner surveillance and online partner aggression, all in relation to media literacy and how it can alleviate these problems.

Romantic Relationships on Social Media

This section focuses on online romantic relationships and the importance of social media in the maintenance and formation of romantic relationships today. Also, this section sheds light on the importance of media literacy in online communication during romantic relationships, while highlighting the challenges that romantic relationships might face online.

Social media platforms are considered universal outlets for online communication (Abbasi, 2019). For children, social media is a tool for entertainment, researching, and interacting with family and friends, and for teenagers, social media is a tool to focus on building an identity and forming meaningful relationships (Livingstone, 2014). As for adults, they use social media as a way for communication to maintain their already existing relationships or building new ones (Ledbetter, 2014).

Some of the relationships that are taking place online are romantic relationships (Robards & Lincoln, 2016). The role of social media in mediating romantic relationships online is considered as a central point for communication between partners (Robards & Lincoln, 2016; Wilkerson, 2017). Accordingly, communication on social media for romantic relationships is

represented in the form of building connections and interacting with people from the real world (Hamilton, 2016), as social media offer the opportunity to initiate new relationships and maintain already existing ones (Abbasi, 2019; Lloyd et al., 2019; Toma, 2016). Such online romantic communication is accomplished through expressions of emotions and online romantic behaviors (Uusiautti & Määttä, 2017).

Social media make communication easier with its timely norm where people can reach each other at any moment (Bogaert et al., 2016) and with providing partners with the ability to communicate and flirt publicly on each other's pages or privately on their chats (Clayton et al., 2013). This timeliness of communication can maintain romantic relationships (Bogaert et al., 2016); this is especially relevant for people who are in long-distance relationships or couples who cannot always meet up due to their clashing schedules (Emrichová, 2018; Lloyd et al., 2019).

People's actions on social media regarding their romantic life are the main factor that determines whether, and to what degree, social media may help maintain or threaten romantic relationships (Uusiautti & Määttä, 2017). Consequently, social media platforms provide online communication with non-verbal features that enrich communication, and relationships can be more satisfying to partners when communication is richer (Lloyd et al., 2019). Those non-verbal online features can offer an experience close to offline relationships where people can share photos, opinions, and expressions (Abbasi, 2019) through media sharing, voice notes and video chats (Lloyd et al., 2019).

Furthermore, current relationship maintenance is not the only way social media are related to romantic relationships; according to Fox and Anderegg (2014) social media are a place for people to look for potential partners and get to know them. One feature that social media provide for its users to look for potential romantic partners is profile monitoring for information seeking (Hamilton, 2016). This feature takes place before chatting with a potential romantic partner, as people look for information about the partner's identities, activities, and circles on their social media profiles to find similar interests and attention-grabbing characteristics (Fox & Anderegg, 2014).

Online identities are just a representation of part of the actual human identity; they are determined by self-representation on a person's social media profile, and they can be seen through the content that social media users look at on a potential partner's profile before initiating online communication (Helsper, 2013). Arabs suffer from a tougher process of finding partners online due to the Arab societal norms (Jakobsson & Lindholm, 2014).

Fox and Anderegg (2014) classified three identity detection actions: passive actions, where users read a person's profile online to find out more about them; active actions, where users follow the profiles of a mutual third party; and interactive action, where users take actions on a person's profile, such as liking their photos or commenting on their posts to get to know them more before initiating a conversation.

Due to the presence of online identities and the ability for people to analyze them, relationships that were formed online seem to be more successful than the ones formed offline (Toma, 2015). Hence, communication online seems to be easier than face-to-face interactions

(Rubinsky, 2018), especially prior to the initiation of the potential relationship (Van Ouytsel et al., 2016).

Even though social media enhance social connections by bringing people closer with the ability to timely and globally communicate (Baglari et al., 2020; Emrichová, 2018; Lloyd et al., 2019), they can also generate relationship risks and challenges if not managed properly (Baglari et al., 2020; Powers, 2017; Toma, 2016). Hence, media literacy in online communication for romantic relationships on social media can be considered as a protecting tool that provides the ability to create a healthy environment online (Baglari et al., 2020; Powers, 2017; Toma, 2016).

One of the challenges that social media might produce in romantic relationships online is relationship uncertainty (Abbasi, 2019). Other challenges that social media misuse feature are partner surveillance and online partner aggression (Lloyd et al., 2019). Such negative consequences can be spread easily among online relationships (Lloyd et al., 2019). This spread is accentuated with the consistent and wide use of social media platforms for online romantic relationships (Powers, 2017), especially by the youth (Lenhart et al., 2015).

Teenage Romantic Relationships on Social Media

This section focuses on teenage online romantic relationships, highlighting the popularity of social media communication in teenagers' lives. The view of teenagers on social media is further explained, emphasizing the importance of media literacy and the impact of social media on teenage romantic relationships online.

With the popularity rise of social media platforms, teenagers have been relying heavily on social media as a tool to stay connected and communicate in a timely manner online with

their romantic partners (Lenhart et al, 2015; Sachdeva & Tripathi, 2019). Due to the timeliness of communication, Vaterlaus et al. (2017) highlighted the idea that romantic partners are interacting less face-to-face and more through the digital world of social media. This interaction is common among teenagers as they view social media as an easy way for constant communication, opposite to the absence of face-to-face communication (Sánchez et al., 2015; Sachdeva & Tripathi, 2019).

Moreover, teenagers also view social media in romantic relationships as outlets used before the relationship starts to collect information about the potential partner, express romantic feelings and initiate relationships online (Lenhart et al., 2015; Van Ouytsel et al., 2016). This collection of information through profile researching of a potential partner makes sharing personal information and starting a conversation easier (Sánchez et al., 2015).

However, with constant profile researching looking for the right partner and moving from one profile to another, teenagers are always looking for someone who seems perfect (Lloyd et al., 2019). Therefore, social media are creating unrealistic expectations of the romantic partner and pressuring teenagers into getting in a relationship (Vaterlaus et al., 2017).

Accordingly, media literacy has become crucial for teenagers (Abbasi& Huang, 2020; Lenhart et al, 2015; Powers, 2017), as they are constantly connected to social media platforms and are responsive to the constant updates (Sachdeva & Tripathi, 2019). This constant connection and dependency on social media platforms have reached the extent where teenagers trust such platforms and the content disseminated on them (Abbasi & Huang, 2020). Hence, the significance of media literacy for teenagers is highlighted through the benefits and alarming risks that teenagers might face through social media communication (Powers, 2017).

In a study by Cernikova et al. (2016), most teenagers reported that they know how to behave through the different stages of online communication with people that they may have never met before. Indicating a high level of media literacy, because media literate teenagers are aware that social media can have an impact on their relationships (Lenhart et al, 2015).

This impact of social media on teenage romantic relationships online can have both positive and negative implications (Emrichová, 2018; Lenhart et al, 2015; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2017). Looking at the positive impact, researchers have focused on the ability that social media provide for people to have long-distance relationships, communicate with ease, and engage with people through versatile ways, depending on the person's own pace and time preferences (Emrichová, 2018; Melki & Mallat, 2014).

However, negative impact can be identified as the lack of face-to-face communication, partner surveillance and partner aggression (Emrichová, 2018; Long, 2013; Pinter et al., 2017; Sachdeva & Tripathi, 2019). Also, connecting with strangers on social media can expose teenagers to unwanted content, photos, and videos (Livingstone & Smith 2014), along with misunderstandings in the interpersonal communication (Sachdeva & Tripathi, 2019; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2017)

Misunderstandings among teenage romantic partners can create confusion and uncertainty in relationships, and adolescents who are not media literate can possibly be caught in situations of relationship uncertainty (Sachdeva & Tripathi, 2019). This uncertainty is especially influential as teens are posting personal information on social media (Long, 2013) that may put

them at the risk of surveillance (Pinter et al., 2017) and offensive content targeted from their shared information (Chen et al., 2012).

Social Media and Uncertainty in Teenage Romantic Relationship

In this section, uncertainty in teenage romantic relationship is explored as one of the main problems faced in online romantic relationships. The types of relational uncertainty are explained, along with the role of social media in generating this uncertainty. The importance of media literacy is viewed in this section as a tool for alleviating relationship uncertainty in teenage romantic relationship.

Social media platforms make teenagers in online romantic relationships feel more connected to their partners, as they can express their feelings and emotions more efficiently (Lenhart et al, 2015; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2017; Van Ouytsel et al., 2016). However, this use of social media platforms during relationships can lead to several relational problems, including feelings of uncertainty about these relationships (Abbasi, 2019; Elphinston & Noller, 2011; Lenhart et al., 2015).

Relationship uncertainty focuses on the doubt that an individual may have regarding their romantic connections, and it can be categorized into three types of uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). The first type of relationship uncertainty is being uncertain about one's own feelings; the second type is about the partner's feelings; and the third one is about the relationship as a whole (Blight et al., 2019).

Relationship uncertainty may determine the success or failure of an online romantic relationship (Stein et al., 2019). Consequently, even when teenagers are confident about their

relationships and feel more secure about their relational commitments (Redlick, 2016), social media posts that teenagers interact with or create can sometimes cause disagreements in the relationship leading to uncertainty (Wilkerson, 2017).

Disagreement takes place due to certain actions performed online that can control the way a person feels about their relationship (Bowe, 2010). These actions include showing interest in others by liking and commenting, criticizing the partner's content, comparing them to others, posting a photo of an individual from the opposite sex and mentioning these individuals on their profiles (Stein et al., 2019; Wilkerson, 2017).

Usually, the cause of relationship uncertainty is a third-party connection, and mistrust must play a role in relationship uncertainty because not every connection is an unfaithful one (Stein et al., 2019). Teenagers on social media connect and interact with several individuals, and their romantic partner might not know about some of these connections (Fox & Anderegg, 2014). Hence, teenagers may feel insecure about their relationships when their partners have constant conversations with individuals that act as a threat to the relationship (Sanchez et al., 2015). These conversations and interactions via social media outlets in the forms of comments, posts, and shared pictures can be constantly viewed and monitored by their partner (Blight et al., 2019).

Due to these actions, the feeling of jealousy between partners might arise, leading to relationship uncertainty, especially for teenagers who are not experienced enough to know how to deal with romantic jealousy (Rogers et al., 2018; Wilkerson, 2017). These feelings of jealousy from the partner's use of social media to share their personal content (Muisse et al., 2009) can be

affiliated with interactions with former partners and new people who might act as a threat to the relationship (Sanchez et al., 2015).

Teenagers are now resorting to a modified way to reduce relationship uncertainty while avoiding raising misunderstandings (Blight et al., 2019; Sanchez et al., 2015). That is because traditional confrontation could lead to misunderstandings as online messaging lack extensive emotional explanations that can sometimes be misinterpreted and lead to even more relationship uncertainty (Van Ouytsel et al., 2019). Thus, the new and modified method is building trust by roaming profiles seeking for information about the people that their partner is interacting with (Blight et al., 2019).

One of the first studies to cover the topic of trustworthiness on social media profiles was by Toma (2014). The study explored how people who are not media-trained observe profiles cues for trust and how mistrust might create uncertainty in relationships online. The study results showed that most people tended to trust profiles only after looking into meaningful cues and activities on those profiles. The explored cues are the individual's profile picture, the number of friends that they have online, their tagged photos, their comments and number of likes found on their content, and their self-filled information. Findings also revealed that less information provided online can cause a lack of trust, which may in turn lead to uncertainty around the relationship.

Consequently, there is a need for building knowledge that would highlight the skills of online communication and effectively make use of social media features for consuming and posting relevant content online (Van Ouytsel et al., 2019). This knowledge building must feature

media literacy, as media literate people can understand messages, communicate better with their partners, recognize how to use the platforms efficiently and understand if they are receiving fake or real content (Fox & Anderegg, 2014; Stein et al., 2019; Toma, 2016).

Uncertainty in social media relationships is a negative occurrence that can be a main factor in the termination of a relationship (Stein et al. 2019). However, if used appropriately, social media can facilitate communication to enhance teenagers' romantic relationships (Sanchez et al., 2015; Van Ouytsel et al., 2019). Thus, instead of looking at social media as a source of relationship uncertainty, media literacy can perceive social media as a facilitator for a better relationship bond (Stein et al., 2019; Toma, 2016).

To test the relationship between media literacy and the alleviation of uncertainty in teenage online romantic relationships, the following has been hypothesized.

H₁: Media Literacy is associated with reducing Relationship Uncertainty in teenage online romantic relationships.

Social Media and Teenage Romantic Partner Surveillance

This section highlights the problem of teenagers' surveillance of their romantic partners on social media by tackling the monitoring behavior, the available opportunities for surveillance on social media, and the different forms of online partner surveillance. That is followed by shedding the light on the importance of media literacy in relation to surveillance.

One predictor of partner surveillance is relationship uncertainty (Frampton & fox, 2018; Fox & Warber, 2014; Wilkerson, 2017) as when romantic partners have doubts and uncertainties about their online relationships, they tend to develop suspicions and seek partner surveillance (Emrichová, 2018).

However, partner surveillance on social media can ruin the relationship more than it can save it, as people might fall into a continuous cycle of online monitoring (Emrichová, 2018; Lloyd et al., 2019; Van Ouytsel et al., 2019). This cycle of online monitoring starts with jealousy and uncertainty about the relationship and leads to online partner surveillance (Van Ouytsel et al., 2019). This might expose the person to more content about their romantic partner, push them to keep on monitoring their partner, and raise conflict (Emrichová, 2018).

In the social media world, it is easy to monitor the online behavior of a romantic partner (Emrichová, 2018; Hertlein & Van Dyck, 2020; Tokunaga, 2011). Even though asking the partner about the concerns that one might have seems to be a healthier approach, teenagers find it easier to use a passive approach of profile surveillance to get the answers they need themselves (Fox & Warber, 2013).

Tokunaga (2011) explained the surveillance approach with four different points. The first point is accessibility, all information needed for surveillance being present online. The second point is variety, information online comes in different forms such as posts, pictures, comments and likes. The third point is recordability, previously shared information can easily be recorded and found. The fourth and final point is the absence of geographical barriers, as social media profiles can be accessed from anywhere around the globe.

With such criteria, teenagers view online surveillance, or stalking as they refer to it, as a normal behavior (Hertlein & Van Dyck, 2020; Wilkerson, 2017). Online surveillance for teenagers is easily employed by examining social media profiles to access information about

their partners online and even learn more at their past relationships (Blight et al., 2019; Courtois et al., 2012; Frampton & fox, 2018; Lloyd et al., 2019; Wilkerson, 2017).

To gather such information, online surveillance takes place in two forms: message snooping and account monitoring (Sanchez et al., 2015). Message snooping usually happens when teenagers feel extreme uncertainty, they would access their partner's accounts to look at their private chats and even manipulate them (Emrichová, 2018; Sanchez et al., 2015). This accessing to a partner's profile is the result of password sharing, as teenagers view the act of sharing as a sign of trust and commitment (Elphinston & Noller, 2011; Van Ouytsel et al., 2019; Sanchez et al., 2015).

As for account monitoring, a person can gather personal information about their partner and their online activity, as this information can be found publicly on profiles (Emrichová, 2018). Additionally, information that is published online can be public or semi-public, which makes them accessible to anyone and prone to the potential risk of online surveillance (Van Ouytsel et al., 2019).

Due to the constant updates that teenagers share about their lives, partners may build their confidence, control, and dominance by monitoring the former's actions (Bowe, 2010; Hertlein & Van Dyck, 2020). Information used in online surveillance consists of a person's location, their online/offline status, their posts, the pictures they share, persons involved in liking and commenting on their posts and pictures, as well as posts and pictures they like and comment on (Emrichová, 2018; Hertlein & Van Dyck, 2020); pictures may be the most informative

surveillance tool, since they may show what the partners are doing, where they are and who they are with (Fox & Warber, 2014).

Moreover, how much is shared online can limit or encourage surveillance (Lloyd et al., 2019). Sharing too much can exploit a person's privacy, while sharing too little can cause people to doubt the authenticity of a relationship (Wilkerson, 2017). Therefore, the importance of media literacy for romantic social media use is highlighted by the simplicity of sharing information about one's life, because a media literate person understands the importance of online privacy and finds a balance between sharing too much or too little about their lives and relationships (Wilkerson, 2017).

Moreover, a media literate person understands how to use social media platform's privacy measures to control who can view their information (Van Ouytsel et al., 2018). Hence, media literacy skills are especially important for teenagers because being exposed to online surveillance invades their privacy and raises conflicts and disagreements with their partners (Arikewuyo et al., 2020b). This in turn may provoke online partner aggression (Lloyd et al., 2019).

H₂: Relationship Uncertainty is associated with the rise of Partner Surveillance in teenage online romantic relationships.

H₃: Media Literacy is associated with reducing Partner Surveillance in teenage online romantic relationships.

Social Media and Online Partner Aggression in Teenage Romantic Relationships

This section tackles online partner aggression as a problem that arises in online romantic relationships. The leading factors to online partner aggression are discussed while differentiating

between direct or indirect online aggression. The section also tackles the importance of media literacy in limiting actions of online partner aggression in teenage online romantic relationships.

It has become a norm for teenagers to be in an online romantic relationship, but how these teenagers monitor and operate their relationships through social media might expose them to the risk of online aggression (Alvarez, 2012; Bryant, 2017; Durán et al., 2015; Young et al., 2017). Online aggression affects one in every five teenagers (Livingstone & Smith, 2014).

Online aggression is conceptualized as violent communication online and is directly related to cyberbullying studies (Young et al., 2017). Researchers agree that online partner aggression can be direct or indirect (Bryant, 2017; Sanchez et al., 2015). Accordingly, direct aggression on social media is usually an intentional act, and it can be in the form of abusive messages, threats, manipulation of messages, exclusion from social groups, intentional reputation damage by spreading rumors, and public humiliation (Bryant, 2017; Chen et al., 2012; Livingstone & Smith, 2014; Sanchez et al., 2015).

On the other hand, indirect online partner aggression may be unintentional and takes place in the form of oversharing about their partner and of socially excluding them from social media groups (Young et al., 2017), gossiping and spreading rumors (Bryant, 2017), or obsessing over their actions (Sanchez et al., 2015).

Teenagers in online romantic relationships are prone to experience aggression on social media (Durán et al., 2015; Felmlee & Faris, 2016; Whittaker & Kowalski, 2015), and it usually happens among people who know each other and interact regularly (Felmlee & Faris, 2016). For

instance, teenagers may be involved in online aggression with people they have previously dated and ones that they are currently dating (Young et al., 2017).

The occurrence of online aggression is viewed to be a way for partners to feel like they are in power and that they could dominate the relationship (Felmlee & Faris, 2016). Accordingly, teenagers view online partner aggression as a way for them to control their relationships (Young et al., 2017). Thus, leading to the embarrassment and insecurity of the victim of online aggression (Sanchez et al., 2015).

Romantic partners often know enough about each other and what may infuriate each, hence they already have the knowledge of how to perform online aggression on their partners (Felmlee & Faris, 2016). Likewise, teenagers that share their social media passwords with their partners might encounter online partner aggression, as their partner can manipulate sent and received content and messages (Sanchez et al., 2015).

Moreover, relationship uncertainty can be a trigger for online partner aggression (Bryant, 2017). Teenagers in uncertain relationships may expose their relationship problems by actively monitoring and reacting to their partner's online activity (Len-Ríos et al., 2016). However, people are falling into online aggressive behaviors with their partners when controlling what can and cannot be shared on social media, even when the aim of this control is to protect their relationships from uncertainty (Bryant, 2017; Sanchez et al., 2015).

According to Felmlee and Faris (2016), another reason behind online partner aggression is whom the partner is interacting with on social media. Interactions on social media platforms open a door for constant communication in the form of flirting, and it can be seen as a

straightforward way of expressing one's feelings (Abbasi, 2019). Such interconnections can raise relationship uncertainty regarding potential third-party that provokes online aggression (Abbasi, 2019; Alvarez, 2012; Felmlee & Faris, 2016). Consequently, dominating the relationship through online partner aggression may prevent partners from interacting with a third party by seeking revenge after an argument, threatening the partner, and embarrassing them online when the dominance is displayed publicly (Felmlee & Faris, 2016; Young et al., 2017).

The dominance formed due to relationship uncertainty and partner surveillance (Young et al., 2017) highlights the harm that these two relational problems might cause in relationships (Felmlee & Faris, 2016). This harm takes form in online partner aggression (Alvarez, 2012), as online aggression is associated with psychosocial consequences (Alvarez, 2012; Livingstone & Smith, 2014).

Media literacy can alleviate the occurrence of online partner aggression and its negative consequences through the proper use of media (Alvarez, 2012; Livingstone & Smith, 2014; Prihastuty et al., 2019). That is because media literacy has a significant role in identifying aggressive social media behavior and analyzing aggressive content before interacting with it (Chen et al., 2012). Moreover, media literacy does not restrict the use of social media but teaches people the skills they need for analyzing and evaluating the content they receive (Prihastuty et al., 2019).

In this regard, even though social media can expose teenagers to online aggression, it can also be a place for healthy and peaceful encounters (Ahn, 2012). Media literacy disregards the fear of social media risks and promotes the importance of learning how to make the best use out

of it as an empowering form of media (Alvarez, 2012). Through empowerment, media literacy can build the capacities of teenagers to become knowledgeable enough to know how to deal with online aggression and even how to reduce the potential intentions of online aggression (Prihastuty et al., 2019).

H₄: Media Literacy is associated with reducing Online Partner Aggression in teenage online romantic relationships.

H₅: Relationship Uncertainty is associated with the rise of Online Partner Aggression in teenage online romantic relationships.

H₆: Partner Surveillance is associated with the rise of Online Partner Aggression in teenage online romantic relationships.

Chapter Four

Methodology

This study conducted a survey to collect data from the selected sample of participants. Teenagers attending six Lebanese private and public high schools chosen from all over Lebanon filled in the survey that measured the Media Literacy Level, Relationship Uncertainty Level, Partner Surveillance Level and Online Partner Aggression Level. The answers that resulted from the survey were run for regression to test the six hypotheses.

Sampling and Procedure

The population of this study is Lebanese teenagers in high schools in grades 10, 11 and 12. The teenagers in these school grades are between the ages of 15 and 18. According to the UNICEF (2021), teenagers make up less than 22% of the total Lebanese population. Hence, the sample size is 385 from an estimated population size of 1.6 million, with 95% confidence level and a confidence interval of ± 5 (Sample Size Calculator, 2021).

Stratified random sampling was used to choose the sample from the population of Lebanese teenagers. That is by contacting six Lebanese private and public high schools chosen from all over Lebanon, through the school networks across Lebanon. The school networks across Lebanon are local networks in different Lebanese cities that join the schools of the cities together for better educational communication and collaboration.

The contacted schools were chosen based on their school type (Private/Public), making sure that half of them are private schools and the other half are public schools. Based on this classification, six random schools with good a connection with the school networks across

Lebanon were chosen: Makassed Houssam Eddine Hariri High School, Sarafand Highschool, Dr. Nazih Bizri High School, Cadmous College, Al Azm New School, and Hariri High School II. The schools that took part in this study are schools of English education as the study and the survey are conducted in English and for the students to be able to understand the used terminologies referred to in the survey and they are familiar with online.

After the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the Lebanese American University, the six chosen high schools were contacted for participation approval. One of the contacted schools in Tripoli, Al Azm New School, rejected to participate claiming that the topic of romantic relationships contradicts with their school's culture. Consequently, Al Islah Islamic High School was contacted for participation by the schools' network. After contacting the second school in Tripoli, another rejection was received, agreeing with the claim of the previous rejection. Accordingly, the school's network assisted with contacting a third school in Tripoli that approved participation, Saba Zreik High School.

Subsequent to contacting the schools and getting their approval for participation, a consent email was sent to the parents/guardians of the students through the schools. In the consent email, a brief of the study was presented, and the parents/guardians were asked to reply to the email only if they disapprove of their child's participation in the survey (See Appendix A).

Afterwards, the researcher visited the campuses of the chosen high schools and distributed the questionnaire to the randomly chosen sample of students attending grades 10,11 and 12, where teenagers participating in the study signed an assent form. The assent form, on the first page of the questionnaire, explained the study to the participants through a brief that clearly

states its aim, declaring that they could answer freely and honestly as the information will remain confidential with no names mentioned in the study (See Appendix B).

The questionnaire was distributed among 400 students from all over Lebanon from the six different high schools. However, two students did not provide their assent to fill the survey. Hence, the research sample of this study is 398, with a response rate of 99.5%, fulfilling the calculated representative sample of 385 students.

During data collection at schools, students who opted out of the survey due to parental disapproval or personal preferences were given a general activity about media literacy. The aim of the activity was to engage students with the concept of Media Literacy and to trigger their analytical thoughts about the media that they encounter and create during their daily usage of social media.

Instrument

The instrument used to collect the data is a questionnaire (See Appendix C), covering the four variables: Romantic Relationship Uncertainty Level (Blight et al. 2019; Fox & Warber, 2014; Len-Ríos et al., 2016; Redlick 2016; Stein et al., 2019), Partner Surveillance Level (Fox & Warber, 2014; Hertlein & Van Dyck, 2020; Tokunaga 2011), Online Partner Aggression Level (Bryant, 2017; Durán et al., 2015; Prihastuty et al., 2019), and Media Literacy level (Festal, 2020).

Before collecting the data, the questionnaire was sent to a sample of 20 students from one of the contacted schools in order to test the instrument and its viability; however, no problems were detected. The questionnaire took around 15-20 minutes in each of the high school classes

and it consisted of five sections and 41 questions. The first section had questions that collected the demographic information of the participants. Subsequently, each of the following four sections collected data using Likert-type scales about each of the four constructs.

Variable Measurements

All variable measurements, except for Relationship Uncertainty Level, used a 7-points Likert-type scale (1= Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree), which is consistent with previous studies that tested such variables (Eristi & Erdem, 2017; Linder et al., 2002; Tokunaga, 2011). As for the Relationship Uncertainty Level, it was measured on a scale (1= Completely uncertain and 7 = Completely certain) that is consistent with Knobloch & Solomon (1999). The aforementioned scales for the four constructs have been tested previously for reliability (Blight et al., 2019; Bryant, 2017; Eristi & Erdem, 2017; Tokunaga, 2011). These scales were tested for internal reliability by measuring Cronbach's Alpha. The Relationship Uncertainty Level scale consisted of 15 questions and had an excellent reliability ($\alpha = .91$). This scale was divided into 3 subsections: self-uncertainty, partner uncertainty and overall relationship uncertainty. The Partner Surveillance Level scale consisted of 14 questions and had a good reliability ($\alpha = .89$). The Online Partner Aggression scale consisted of 10 questions and had a good reliability ($\alpha = .83$). As for the Media Literacy Level scale, it consisted of 8 questions and had good reliability ($\alpha = .8$). This scale was divided into four subsections: Access, Analyze, Evaluate and Communicate.

Relationship Uncertainty

Relationship Uncertainty has been tested for its Level by 15 questions on a scale developed by Knobloch & Solomon (1999). The scale questions used by previous researchers (Blight et al., 2019; Fox & Warber, 2014; Len-Ríos et al., 2016; Redlick, 2016; Stein et al., 2019) target how teenagers view uncertainty about their own feelings in the relationship, the feelings of their partner and the relationship as a whole (Blight et al., 2019; Fox & Warber, 2014; Len-Ríos et al., 2016; Redlick, 2016; Stein et al., 2019).

Items that were tested under the three subsections of self-uncertainty, partner uncertainty and overall relationship uncertainty were addressed by asking participants “How certain are you about...”. When asked about self-uncertainty, participants were asked about how long they see their relationship lasting, their feelings towards their partner, the importance of the relationship to them, how romantically interested they are and if they are ready to commit. As for partner uncertainty, participants were asked about how certain they are that their partner sees the relationship lasting, how attractive they are to their partner, the importance of the relationship to their partner, how ready their partner is to commit to them and the relationship. And looking at the relationship as a whole, participants were asked about how certain they are that the relationship will last, the mutual feelings, the romance in the relationship, set boundaries and agreed behavior among the couple.

Partner Surveillance

Partner Surveillance on social media has been tested for its level by previous researchers through the Interpersonal electronic surveillance scale (IES) scale, developed by Tokunaga

(2011). The scale items used by previous researchers (Fox & Warber, 2014; Hertlein & Van Dyck, 2020; Tokunaga, 2011) target surveillance actions that the teenagers use to monitor their partners on social media. The scale tested the Partner Surveillance Level through 14 questions focusing on profile visits, reading posts and interactions with friends, looking at pictures, paying close attention to the news feed, looking for constant updates, relating different posts together, reading other people's comments and messages, monitoring the partner's updates and online activity, getting updates on whereabouts and behaviors and evaluating online friends added on social media.

Online Partner Aggression

Online Partner Aggression on social media has been tested for its level by previous researchers through a scale inspired by the romantic relational aggression subscale of the Self-Report of Aggression and Social Behavior Measure (SRASBM) scale (Linder et al., 2002). The scale items used by previous researchers (Bryant, 2017; Durán et al., 2015; Prihastuty et al., 2019) target how teenagers view online aggression behaviors to be truly present in their online relationship. The scale tested the Online Partner Aggression Level through 10 questions, asking participants about threatening actions, jealousy triggers, cheating, the silent treatment, manipulation, exclusion and embarrassment.

Media Literacy Levels

Media Literacy Level was measured by 8 questions based on a scale developed by Eristi and Erdem (2017). The scale items used by previous researchers (Eristi & Erdem, 2017; Festal,

2020) target the media literacy knowledge and skills of the teenagers through four sections; access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate.

The first section measures the skill of accessing by asking participants about the effective use of media tools and functionally searching on different platforms. The second section on analyzing asks participants if they question the purpose behind the media content and if there are any implicit meanings behind it. The third section tests the participants' ability to evaluate by asking them if they can protect themselves from harmful content and if they can identify unethical media. As for the fourth section tackling the skill of communicating, the questions cover the participants' knowledge about sharing fake news, plagiarism and generating media content themselves.

Statistical Analysis

After collecting, cleaning, and organizing the data, the researcher imported them into SPSS, measured internal reliability and ran statistical tests. The mean of the items under each scale was calculated, as a measure of central tendency. The mean score for each of the questionnaire sections acted as the 'Level' of the tested variables. The hypotheses were tested by running linear regressions. Multiple linear regression was measured to examine the association of the independent variable (Media Literacy Level) to the dependent variables (Relationship Uncertainty Level, Partner Surveillance Level and Online Partner Aggression Level).

Method Limitations

The limitation of the method used is that explaining behaviors through surveys can be restricting for participants to talk about their social media use, especially about the issues related

to romantic relationships. However, due to the format of the measuring scales that are compatible with a survey and the financial and fuel crisis present in Lebanon at the time of the study, a questionnaire is the most convenient method to collect information from a large group of people.

Chapter Five

Results

The first section of the survey helped describe the sample distribution by looking at their age, gender, and high school grade. Since the sample was reached through their schools, the high school type (Public/Private) played a role in shaping the sample as well (Table 1).

Table 1:

Sample Demographic Distribution

Sample (N=398)		N (%)
Age	Younger Than 15 Years	1 (0.3)
	15 Years	71 (17.8)
	16 Years	126 (31.7)
	17 Years	116 (29.1)
	18 Years	75 (18.8)
	Older Than 18 Years	9 (2.3)
Gender	Male	201 (50.5)
	Female	195 (49.0)
	Non-Binary	2 (0.5)
High School Grade	Grade 10	117 (29.4)
	Grade 11	128 (32.2)
	Grade 12	153 (38.4)
High School Type	Private	216 (54.3)
	Public	182 (45.7)

Construct Levels and Distribution

The Study tested the overall levels of each of the four constructs: Media Literacy, Relationship Uncertainty, Partner Surveillance and Online Partner Aggression. These Levels were measured by calculating the total mean of the averaged scales and they represent the total level of the construct among the whole sample of teenagers (Table 2).

Table 2:

Total Levels of Media Literacy, Relationship Uncertainty, Partner Surveillance and Online Partner Aggression

Sample (N=398)	Mean	SD
Media Literacy Level	5.03	1.055
Relationship Uncertainty Level	2.77	1.105
Partner Surveillance Level	4.29	1.151
Online Partner Aggression Level	2.74	1.085

Media Literacy Level and Relationship Uncertainty Level

To examine if media literacy is associated with the decrease in relationship uncertainty among teenagers in Lebanon, the first hypothesis of this research suggested that the Media Literacy Level is associated with reducing the Relationship Uncertainty Level in teenage online romantic relationships. To test the hypothesis, a multiple linear regression was used with two blocks of variables (Table 3). For the first block, demographics (age, gender, and high school grade) were entered. The regression model was not significant, indicating that demographics are not associated with the Relationship Uncertainty Level. As for the second block, Media Literacy

Level was entered, which was significant. The three previous variables remained not significant. The second regression model was significant, explaining 5.4% of the variance ($F = 6.667$, $p < .001$). Results show that Media Literacy Level recorded a negative association ($B = -.239$, $p < .001$) with the Relationship Uncertainty Level.

Table 3:

Multiple Linear Regression Associating between Media Literacy Level and Relationship Uncertainty Level

Variable	Model 1 <i>B</i> (SE)	Model 2 <i>B</i> (SE)
Age	-.060 (1.11)	-.031 (1.07)
Gender	-.016 (1.11)	-.001 (1.07)
High school Grade	.091 (1.11)	.105 (1.07)
Media Literacy Level		-.250 (1.07) *
Adjusted R ²	-.004	.054
<i>F</i> for change in R ²	.441	6.667*

*Significant with $p < .001$

Relationship Uncertainty Level and Partner Surveillance Level

Examining if relationship uncertainty is associated with the increase in partner surveillance among teenagers in Lebanon, the second hypothesis of this research assumed that the Relationship Uncertainty Level is associated with the raise of the Partner Surveillance Level in teenage online romantic relationships. To test the hypothesis, a multiple linear regression was used with two blocks of variables (Table 4). For the first block, demographics (age, gender, and high school grade) were entered. The regression model was not significant, indicating that demographics are not associated with the Partner Surveillance Level. As for the second block, the Relationship Uncertainty Level was entered, which was significant. The three previous

variables remained not significant. The second regression model was significant, explaining 10.2% of the variance ($F = 12.231$, $p < .001$). Results show that the Relationship Uncertainty Level recorded a negative association ($B = -.306$, $p < .001$) with Partner Surveillance Level.

Table 4:

Multiple Linear Regression Associating between Relationship Uncertainty Level and Partner Surveillance Level

Variable	Model 1 <i>B</i> (SE)	Model 2 <i>B</i> (SE)
Age	.158 (1.15)	.140 (1.09)
Gender	-.045 (1.15)	-.049 (1.09)
High school Grade	-.059 (1.15)	-.031 (1.09)
Relationship Uncertainty Level		-.306 (1.09) *
Adjusted R ²	.010	.102
<i>F</i> for change in R ²	2.343	12.231 *

*Significant with $p < .001$

Media Literacy Level and Partner Surveillance Level

To test if media literacy is associated with the decrease in partner surveillance among teenagers in Lebanon, the third hypothesis of this research suggested that the Media Literacy Level is associated with reducing the Partner Surveillance Level in teenage online romantic relationships. To test the hypothesis, a multiple linear regression was used with two blocks of variables (Table 5). For the first block, demographics (age, gender, and high school grade) were entered. The regression model was not significant, indicating that demographics are not associated with the Partner Surveillance Level. As for the second block, Media Literacy Level was entered, which was significant. The three previous variables remained not significant. The

second regression model was significant, explaining 4.2% of the variance ($F = 5.341, p < .001$).

Results show that Media Literacy Level recorded a positive association ($B = .188, p < .001$) with Partner Surveillance Level.

Table 5:

Multiple Linear Regression Associating between Media Literacy Level and Partner Surveillance Level

Variable	Model 1 <i>B (SE)</i>	Model 2 <i>B (SE)</i>
Age	.158 (1.15)	.136 (1.13)
Gender	-.045 (1.15)	-.056 (1.13)
High school Grade	-.059 (1.15)	-.070 (1.13)
Media Literacy Level		.188 (1.13) *
Adjusted R ²	.010	.042
<i>F for change in R²</i>	2.343	5.341*

*Significant with $p < .001$

Media Literacy Level and Online Partner Aggression Level

Testing if media literacy is associated with the decrease in online partner aggression among teenagers in Lebanon, the fourth hypothesis of this research suggested that the Media Literacy Level is associated with reducing the Online Partner Aggression Level in teenage online romantic relationships. A multiple linear regression was used with two blocks of variables (Table 6). For the first block, demographics (age, gender, and high school grade) were entered. The regression model was significant, explaining 1.9% ($F = 3.482, p < .05$) of the variance in the dependent variable. All variables were not significant, except for gender. As for the second block, Media Literacy Level was entered, which was significant. Gender was still significant,

although it slightly dropped in value. The second regression model was significant, explaining 2.6% of the variance ($F = 3.635, p < .01$). Results show that Media Literacy Level recorded a positive association ($B = .101, p < .05$), while gender ($B = -.121, p < .05$) showed low correlation.

Table 6:

Multiple Linear Regression Associating between Media Literacy Level and Online Partner Aggression Level

Variable	Model 1 <i>B</i> (SE)	Model 2 <i>B</i> (SE)
Age	-.013 (1.07)	-.001 (1.06)
Gender	-.127 (1.07) ***	-.121 (1.06) ***
High school Grade	-.104 (1.07)	-.098 (1.06)
Media Literacy Level		.101 (1.06) ***
Adjusted R^2	.019	.026
<i>F</i> for change in R^2	3.482***	3.635**

**Significant with $p < .01$

***Significant with $p < .05$

Relationship Uncertainty Level and Online Partner Aggression Level

To examine if relationship uncertainty is associated with the increase in online partner aggression among teenagers in Lebanon, the fifth hypothesis of this research suggested that the Relationship Uncertainty Level is associated with reducing the Online Partner Aggression Level in teenage online romantic relationships. A multiple linear regression was used with two blocks of variables (Table 7). For the first block, demographics (age, gender, and high school grade) were entered. The regression model was significant, explaining 1.9% ($F = 3.482, p < .05$) of the variance in the dependent variable. All variables were not significant, except for gender. As for the second block, the Relationship Uncertainty Level was entered, which was not significant.

Age and high school grade remained not significant, and gender was still significant and barely dropped in value. The second regression model was significant, explaining 2.5% of the variance ($F = 3.543, p < .01$). Results show gender ($B = -.126, p < .05$) with low correlation value.

Table 7:

Multiple Linear Regression Associating between Relationship Uncertainty Level and Online Partner Aggression Level

Variable	Model 1	Model 2
	B (SE)	B (SE)
Age	-.013 (1.07)	-.008 (1.07)
Gender	-.127 (1.07) ***	-.126 (1.07) ***
High school Grade	-.104 (1.07)	-.113 (1.07)
Relation Uncertainty Level		.095 (1.07)
Adjusted R ²	.019	.025
F for change in R ²	3.482***	3.543**

**Significant with $p < .01$

***Significant with $p < .05$

Partner Surveillance Level and Online Partner Aggression Level

Associating partner surveillance with the increase in online partner aggression among teenagers in Lebanon, the sixth hypothesis of this research suggested that the Partner Surveillance Level reduces the Online Partner Aggression Level in teenage online romantic relationships. A multiple linear regression was used with two blocks of variables (Table 8). For the first block, demographics (age, gender, and high school grade) were entered. The regression model was significant, explaining 1.9% ($F = 3.482, p < .05$) of the variance in the dependent variable. All variables were not significant, except for gender. As for the second block, Partner Surveillance Level was entered, which was significant. Gender was still significant, although it

slightly dropped in value. The second regression model was significant, explaining 10.1% of the variance ($F = 12.102$, $p < .001$). Results show that Partner Surveillance Level recorded a positive association ($B = .293$, $p < .001$), while gender ($B = -.114$, $p < .05$) showed low correlation values.

Table 8:

Multiple Linear Regression Associating between Partner Surveillance Level and Online Partner Aggression Level

Variable	Model 1 <i>B</i> (SE)	Model 2 <i>B</i> (SE)
Age	-.013 (1.07)	-.060 (1.02)
Gender	-.127 (1.07) ***	-.114 (1.02) ***
High school Grade	-.104 (1.07)	-.087 (1.02)
Partner Surveillance Level		.293 (1.02) *
Adjusted R^2	.019	.101
<i>F</i> for change in R^2	3.482***	12.102*

* Significant with $p < .001$

***Significant with $p < .05$

Chapter Six

Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to study teenage romantic relationships on social media platforms by testing if media literacy can ameliorate the problems that teenage couples face online: relationship uncertainty, partner surveillance, and partner aggression. This research adds to previous studies on media literacy among teenagers as it focuses on how they behave online regarding their romantic relationships. This focus stresses on the idea of creating a safer space online for teenage couples. Fulfilling the aim of the research, the study was based on six hypotheses that were tested through a survey conducted with teenagers across Lebanon.

The research sample was distributed among several locations in Lebanon and almost equally between genders, ages, high school grades and high school type (private/public). This sample was tested for their Media Literacy Level and findings indicated that the average Media Literacy Level for teenagers in Lebanon is 5.03. Thus, implying that teenagers in Lebanon are somewhat media literate.

In order to test for association between the Media Literacy Level of teenagers and the three relational problems, the level of each problem was calculated. The first relational problem that was examined is relationship uncertainty. Results revealed that the Relationship Uncertainty Level for the representative sample of teenagers in this study was 2.77. This level of relationship uncertainty indicates that teenagers in Lebanon are somewhat certain about their relationships. In view of that, a low level of uncertainty is probably due to the Lebanese culture that views love and romance as a lifelong commitment, and people choose their partners to fit their religious,

political, and economic status even from a young age. According to Allouche (2019), romantic relationships within the Lebanese society are seen as a bridge for marriage.

After calculating the Media Literacy Level and the Relationship Uncertainty Level, the first hypothesis of this thesis was tested by a multiple linear regression test with Relationship Uncertainty Level as the dependent variable. Based on the results of the test, it was found that demographics are not associated with the Relationship Uncertainty Level. As for the Media Literacy Level, results showed a significant negative association for Media Literacy Level with Relationship Uncertainty Level. Such a finding suggests that as the Media Literacy Level increases, the Relationship Uncertainty Level Decreases. Hence, the first hypothesis is supported.

H₁: Media Literacy is associated with reducing Relationship Uncertainty in teenage online romantic relationships.

Building on previous research and data analysis, it was determined in this thesis that the way media literate teenagers deal with content online links to how certain or uncertain these teenagers are about their romantic connections. Toma (2014) found that misuse of information accessed online may lead to different forms of relationship uncertainty. However, relationship uncertainty can be ameliorated by the presence of media literacy because understanding online messages, communicating better with partners, recognizing the utility of online platforms efficiently and understanding if information accessed online is fake or real are at the forefront of media literacy (Fox & Anderegg, 2014; Stein et al., 2019; Toma, 2016).

The second relational problem tested for its level among teenagers in Lebanon is partner surveillance online. Findings of this thesis showed that the Partner Surveillance Level for

Lebanese teenagers is 4.29, signifying that the teenagers in Lebanon are almost neutral regarding monitoring their partners online. Such a neutral level of agreement on actions of partner surveillance related to the generational development among the Lebanese youth. In older Arab cultures, it is socially acceptable for people to control their romantic partners, specifically men controlling women (Oghia, 2015). However, the exposure to different cultures through social media and the knowledge that Lebanese youth are gaining regarding gender equity and individualism has probably contributed to the fading of the partner control culture.

The Partner Surveillance Level measured was related to the Relationship Uncertainty Level, as previous research indicated a relationship between the two problems (Emrichová, 2018; Fox & Warber, 2014; Frampton & fox, 2018; Wilkerson, 2017). The second hypothesis of this thesis was tested by a multiple linear regression that revealed a significant negative association between the Relationship Uncertainty Level and Partner Surveillance Level. As for demographics, they were not associated with the Partner Surveillance Level. The findings imply that, as Relationship Uncertainty Level increases, the Partner Surveillance Level decreases. Hence, the second hypothesis is rejected.

H₂: Relationship Uncertainty is associated with the rise of Partner Surveillance in teenage online romantic relationships.

Several scholars have claimed that relationship uncertainty is a reason leading to partner surveillance for doubt and suspicion relief (Emrichová, 2018; Fox & Warber, 2014; Frampton & fox, 2018; Wilkerson, 2017). This continuous cycle between relationship uncertainty and partner surveillance is built on the idea that the more teenagers monitor their partners online, the more media content they see and the more they analyze. Therefore, leading to more relationship

uncertainty among teenage couples online. However, the findings of this thesis oppose previous research and indicate otherwise, the more teenagers are aware of their partners' action online, the more certain they are. Moreover, when teenage couples are less uncertain about the romantic relationship, they trust their partner more and monitor their actions online less.

To ensure a safe space online where teenagers are not subjects of surveillance, the Media Literacy Level was tested for its relation to the Partner Surveillance Level. The results indicated that there is a significant positive association between Media Literacy Level and Partner Surveillance Level. It can be implied that as the Media Literacy Level increases, the Partner Surveillance Level increases as well. Hence, the third hypothesis is rejected.

H₃: Media Literacy is associated with reducing Partner Surveillance in teenage online romantic relationships.

Research has previously found that media literacy facilitates understanding the working dynamics of social media platforms and how to ensure privacy to control who can view shared information (Van Ouytsel et al., 2018). However, this thesis challenges this claim by highlighting the positive correlation between media literacy and partner surveillance. This correlation is due to the teenagers' knowledge and ability to navigate, access and understand online content on different platforms and in different formats, making it an easy task for them to monitor and find out more about their partners online.

The third relational problem tested for its level among teenagers in online romantic relationships is online partner aggression. The results of the study showed that the Online Partner Aggression Level is 2.74. This level indicates that teenagers in Lebanon somewhat disagree with

actions of online partner aggression. Such a low level of aggression was not expected, as Lebanese teenagers tend to be aggressive with their online behavior (Obeid et al., 2019).

To examine the association between media literacy and the presence of online partner aggression among teenage romantic relationships, the fourth hypothesis of this thesis was tested. Results confirmed that there is a significant negative association for the Media Literacy Level with the Online Partner Aggression Level. Consequently, this negative correlation indicates that as the media literacy level increases, the online partner aggression level decreases. Hence, the fourth hypothesis is supported.

H₄: Media Literacy is associated with reducing Online Partner Aggression in teenage online romantic relationships.

Previous scholars have claimed that media literate teenagers have the proper knowledge that enables them to approach and handle online aggression (Alvarez, 2012; Livingstone & Smith, 2014; Prihastuty et al., 2019). The abilities that teenagers build due to media literacy create a safe space for them online. This safety is present since media literate teenagers understand how to deal with online partner aggression and why it is not an action to be performed on their partner.

Aggression can be a coping mechanism that teenagers refer to when they are uncertain about their relationships (Felmlee & Faris, 2016). To test this relationship among teenagers in online romantic relationships, the fifth hypothesis of this thesis was tested. The result uncovered that there is a significant positive association for Relationship Uncertainty Level with Online Partner Aggression level. This finding indicates that as the Relationship Uncertainty Level increases, the Online Partner Aggression level increases as well. Hence, the fifth hypothesis is supported.

H₅: Relationship Uncertainty is associated with the rise of Online Partner Aggression in teenage online romantic relationships.

The validated hypothesis confirms previous research claiming that relationship uncertainty provokes online aggression (Abbasi, 2019; Alvarez, 2012; Felmlee & Faris, 2016). In addition, online partner aggression among teenagers in online romantic relationships is associated with psychosocial consequences, causing doubts and uncertainties in relationships (Alvarez, 2012; Livingstone & Smith, 2014).

Relating the two other relational problems together, the sixth hypothesis of this thesis was tested to find that there is a significant positive association between Partner Surveillance Level and Online Partner Aggression level. This finding signifies that, as the Partner Surveillance Level increases, so does the Online Partner Aggression Level. Hence, the Sixth hypothesis is supported.

H₆: Partner Surveillance is associated with the rise of Online Partner Aggression in teenage online romantic relationships.

Findings of this research confirm and add to previous research claiming that teenagers who monitor their partners on social media are at risk of online partner aggression (Alvarez, 2012; Bryant, 2017; Durán et al., 2015; Young et al., 2017). Online partner surveillance has a dual role among teenagers in online romantic relationships, as it acts not only as a trigger for online partner aggression, but as a technique for applying control and aggression. Teenagers tend to resort to online partner aggression as a way to observe their relationship and monitor their partners in order to control their activity and behavior (Sanchez et al., 2015; Young et al., 2017).

As for the gender dynamics, the analysis presented in this thesis regarding the Media literacy Level and the levels of the three relational problems revealed that gender is not a factor that

fluctuates the Media Literacy Level, Relationship Uncertainty Level and Partner Surveillance Level of teenagers. However, findings revealed that gender was negatively associated with Online Partner Aggression Level, indicating that males are more likely to perform online aggression on their partners than females.

Focusing on the aim of this research, it was discovered that media literacy has a significant role in ameliorating two out of the three relational problems faced by teenagers in online romantic relationships on social media platforms. This result emerged due to the validation of only two hypotheses claiming that media literacy and the problems, relationship uncertainty and online partner aggression, are negatively associated. Therefore, when the level of media literacy increases, the level of these two relational problems decreases. These results confirm previous research indicating that media literacy acts as a catalyst for a more certain relationship rather than a source of relationship uncertainty (Stein et al., 2019; Toma, 2016). As for online partner aggression, media literacy was presented as an alleviator for acts of online partner aggression on social media (Alvarez, 2012; Chen et al., 2012; Livingstone & smith, 2014; Prihastuty et al., 2019).

However, the hypothesis regarding the negative association between Media Literacy Level and Partner Surveillance Level was rejected. Instead, a positive correlation between the two was detected. This finding indicated that, as teenagers are more aware of utilizing online media on its different platforms, they find themselves monitoring their partners more. This is an unexpected finding, as previous literature stressed on the idea that media literacy assists with understanding the consequences of controlling and monitoring people online (Van Ouytsel et al., 2018;

Wilkerson, 2017). Nevertheless, media literacy enables teenagers to know more about accessing, analyzing, communicating, and evaluating; giving them more knowledge, tools, and facilities to monitor their partners. Hence, understanding the reasons behind this utilization of online media has a major importance, as it opposes the idea of media literacy creating a safer space for teenagers in online romantic relationships.

Additionally, it is important to point out that the levels of the two relational problems that media literacy negatively associates with, relationship uncertainty and online partner aggression, are low levels. These levels are related to the moderately high level of media literacy for Lebanese teenagers. Accordingly, Lebanese teenagers shall be exposed to media literacy education, creating a media literate Lebanese society, in order to decrease the levels of the relational problems even more and build a safer online environment.

The most successful type of media literacy education is the one given to students at school (Hobbs, 1998). Therefore, schools shall provide the opportunity for their teachers to participate in initiatives such as the Media and Digital Literacy Academy of Beirut (MDLAB) that works on developing a media literacy syllabi and trains on media literacy education (Melki, 2016). Such opportunities could aid with the incorporation of media literacy education into Lebanese high school as it has a positive impact on their online behaviors and habits (Festal, 2020; Hobbs, 2019).

Ensuring a safer space online by teaching Lebanese teenagers how to become media literate people is validated by the research findings indicating that media literacy can alleviate some of the problems that teenagers may face online during their relationships. This alleviation is a result

of teenagers' ability to utilize their media literacy skills and understand how to exploit content on social media platforms (Purnama et al., 2021; Tomczyk & Eger,2020).

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis discussed the relation between media literacy and online romantic relationship problems among teenagers in Lebanon, to understand if media literacy can ameliorate these problems or not. Building on the data collected by a survey distributed among teenagers from across Lebanon, research findings validated four of the six presented hypotheses and rejected the other two. Thus, implying that media literacy skills play a role in creating a safer environment for teenage couples online by alleviating some of the problems they face.

The significance of this thesis is in its ability to study media literacy on social media to create and sustain healthy romantic relationships for Lebanese teenagers. Such a study added to the theoretical framework of media literacy by focusing on building a safe space online through alleviating problems. This alleviation is supported by building the capacities of Lebanese teenagers on media literacy for them to understand how to use social media platforms for personal relationships while understanding how to avoid possible risks, conflicts, and challenges.

Results indicated that there is a negative association between media literacy and relationship uncertainty, as well as media literacy and online partner aggression. However, this thesis contradicts previous research, as it found a positive association between media literacy and partner surveillance. Therefore, it can be concluded that media literacy can ameliorate the relational problems of relationship uncertainty and online partner aggression, but it can trigger partner surveillance if media literacy skills are to be used for negative acts of monitoring and surveillance.

Therefore, it can be determined from this research that social media can be a place leading to romantic relationship problems online, and if used with bad intentions, such as partner surveillance, media literacy skills can simplify social media usage to enable such problematic acts. On the other hand, if used in a proper way, media literacy skills can enhance teenagers' experience in online romantic relationships by ameliorating problems, such as relationship uncertainty and online partner aggression, thus creating a safer online environment for teenagers.

Research findings rejected the positive association of relationship uncertainty with partner surveillance and validated its positive association with online partner aggression. This shows that uncertainty in teenage online romantic relationships reduces the problem of partner surveillance in teenager online romantic relationships on one hand and raises the problem online partner aggression on the other hand.

The findings of this thesis can be generalized across teenagers in Lebanon due to the chosen representative sample and their descriptive analysis. The analysis showed that there is no noteworthy impact of the sample's age and high school grade on Lebanese teenager's Media Literacy Level, Relationship Uncertainty Level, Partner Surveillance Level and Online Partner Aggression Level.

Recommendations

Several scholars agreed on the idea of introducing and integrating media literacy education into schools and teaching students, specifically teenagers, habits for a healthier online experience in forming relationships online (Al Rawi, 2016; Festal, 2020; Hobbs, 2019). This integration can take form through the following:

- Updating the Lebanese school curriculum by adding media literacy sessions as obligatory courses that students shall pass before graduation. The introduction and adaptation of media literacy skills can be gradually added into the student's schoolwork and increased when moving from one school grade to the other.
- Offering extra school courses for teenagers to enroll in as after-school activities or during regular awareness activities given to the students on school campuses. Such courses differ between students and their media literacy level and knowledge.

Limitations

Other than the method limitation of restricting participants to freely explain behaviors through surveys, another limitation of this study is that teenage students in two out of the six schools visited for data collections were in the middle of exam season. This limitation might have affected the results, as students had a difficult time concentrating on the survey and wanted to finish in order to leave and prepare for their upcoming exams.

Further Research

While conducting this research and analyzing its results, a few ideas for further research emerged. This study looked at Media Literacy Levels among teenagers across Lebanon. Further research could focus on media literacy distribution among different cities/regions in Lebanon along with the factors causing such distribution.

A second suggestion for further research is the elaboration on the differences between school types (Public/Private), looking at the curriculum given at such schools and taking into consideration the presence of media literacy education or any relevant offered courses that develop media literacy among teenage students.

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IRB Approval Form



Institutional Review Board (IRB)

لجنة الأبحاث

NOTICE OF IRB APPROVAL

To: Ms. Yasmeeen Sakka
Dr. Jad Melki
Associate Professor
School of Arts & Sciences

NOTICE ISSUED: 1 April 2022
EXPIRATION DATE: 1 April 2023
REVIEW TYPE: EXPEDITED – INITIAL

Date: April 1, 2022

RE: IRB #: LAU.SAS.JM2.1/Apr/2022

Protocol Title: Social Media, Teenage Romantic Relationships and Media Literacy

The above referenced research project has been approved by the Lebanese American University, Institutional Review Board (LAU IRB). This approval is limited to the activities described in the Approved Research Protocol and all submitted documents listed on page 2 of this letter. **Enclosed with this letter are the stamped approved documents that must be used.**

APPROVAL CONDITIONS FOR ALL LAU APPROVED HUMAN RESEARCH PROTOCOLS

LAU RESEARCH POLICIES & PROCEDURES: All individuals engaged in the research project must adhere to the approved protocol and all applicable LAU IRB Research Policies & Procedures. **PARTICIPANTS** must NOT be involved in any research related activity prior to IRB approval date or after the expiration date.

PROTOCOL EXPIRATION: The LAU IRB approval expiry date is listed above. The IRB Office will send an email at least 45 days prior to protocol approval expiry - Request for Continuing Review - in order to avoid any temporary hold on the initial protocol approval. It is your responsibility to apply for continuing review and receive continuing approval for the duration of the research project. Failure to send Request for Continuation before the expiry date will result in suspension of the approval of this research project on the expiration date.

MODIFICATIONS AND AMENDMENTS: All protocol modifications must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

NOTIFICATION OF PROJECT COMPLETION: A notification of research project closure and a summary of findings must be sent to the IRB office upon completion. Study files must be retained for a period of 3 years from the date of notification of project completion.

IN THE EVENT OF NON-COMPLIANCE WITH ABOVE CONDITIONS, THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR SHOULD MEET WITH THE IRB ADMINISTRATORS IN ORDER TO RESOLVE SUCH CONDITIONS. IRB APPROVAL CANNOT BE GRANTED UNTIL NON-COMPLIANT ISSUES HAVE BEEN RESOLVED.

If you have any questions concerning this information, please contact the IRB office by email at irb@lau.edu.lb

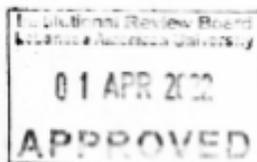


The IRB operates in compliance with the national regulations pertaining to research under the Lebanese Minister of Public Health's Decision No.141 dated 27/1/2016 under LAU IRB Authorization reference 2016/3708, the international guidelines for Good Clinical Practice, the US Office of Human Research Protection (45CFR46) and the Food and Drug Administration (21CFR56). LAU IRB U.S. Identifier as an international institution: FWA00014723 and IRB Registration # IRB00006954 LAUIRB#1

Dr. Joseph Stephan
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED:

LAU IRB Initial Protocol Application	Received 23 February 2022, amended 1 April 2022
Thesis Proposal	Received 23 February 2022
Letters to schools	Received 23 February 2022, amended 1 April 2022
Informed Consent Form - Parents	Received 23 February 2022, amended 1 April 2022
Assent form	Received 23 February 2022, amended 1 April 2022
Instrument Survey	Received 23 February 2022, amended 1 April 2022
Email script	Received 23 February 2022, amended 1 April 2022
Alternative Activity – Media Literacy	Received 1 April 2022
IRB Comments sent: 28 March 2022	PI response dated: 1 April 2022
NIH Training – Jad Melki	Cert.# 9339465 (dated 2 January 2014)
CITI Training – Yasmeen Sakka & CV	Cert.# 33497137 Dated (26 December 2019)



NOTICE OF ADDITION OF CENTERS

To: Ms. Yasmeeen Sakka
Dr. Jad Melki
Associate Professor
School of Arts & Sciences

APPROVAL ISSUED: 1 April 2022
EXPIRATION DATE: 1 April 2023
REVIEW TYPE: EXPEDITED – INITIAL

Date: April 12, 2022

RE: IRB #: LAU.SAS.JM2.1/Apr/2022

Protocol Title: Social Media, Teenage Romantic Relationships and Media Literacy

This is to confirm the addition of new center to the above named study:

Letter to Al Islah Islamic High School	Received 12 April 2022
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APPROVAL CONDITIONS FOR ALL LAU APPROVED HUMAN RESEARCH PROTOCOLS

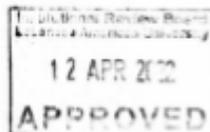
LAU RESEARCH POLICIES & PROCEDURES: All individuals engaged in the research project must adhere to the approved protocol and all application LAU IRB Research Policies & Procedures. PARTICIPANTS must NOT be involved in any research related activity prior to IRB approval date or after the expiration date.

PROTOCOL EXPIRATION: The LAU IRB approval expiry date is listed above. The Office of the IRB will send an email at least 45 days prior to protocol approval expiry - Request for Continuing Review - in order to avoid any temporary hold on the initial protocol approval. It is your responsibility to apply for continuing review and receive continuing approval for the duration of the research project

MODIFICATIONS AND AMENDMENTS: All protocol modifications must be IRB approved prior to implementation, unless they are intended to reduce risk. Any protocol deviations without IRB approval must be reported to the IRB.

If you have any questions concerning this information, please contact the IRB office by email at irb@lau.edu.lb

The IRB operates in compliance with the national regulations pertaining to research under the Lebanese Minister of Public Health's Decision No.141 dated 27/1/2016 under LAU IRB Authorization reference 2016/3708, the international guidelines for Good Clinical Practice, the US Office of Human Research Protection (45CFR46) and the Food and Drug Administration (21CFR56). LAU IRB U.S. Identifier as an international institution: FWA00014723 and IRB Registration # IRB00006954 LAUIRB#1



Dr. Joseph Stephan
Chair, Institutional Review Board



NOTICE OF ADDITION OF CENTERS

To: Ms. Yasmeeen Sakka
Dr. Jad Melki
Associate Professor
School of Arts & Sciences

APPROVAL ISSUED: 1 April 2022
EXPIRATION DATE: 1 April 2023
REVIEW TYPE: EXPEDITED – INITIAL

Date: April 14, 2022

RE: IRB #: LAU.SAS.JM2.1/Apr/2022

Protocol Title: Social Media, Teenage Romantic Relationships and Media Literacy

This is to confirm the addition of new center to the above named study:

Letter to Saba Zreik High School	Received 13 April 2022
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APPROVAL CONDITIONS FOR ALL LAU APPROVED HUMAN RESEARCH PROTOCOLS

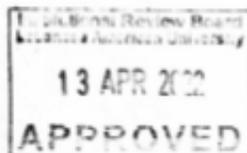
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Dr. Joseph Stephan
Chair, Institutional Review Board



Appendix A: Consent Letter

Parents/Guardians Consent Form to Participate in a Survey Social Media, Teenage Relationships and Media Literacy

I would like to invite your son/daughter to participate in a research project by completing a survey addressing social media, teenage relationships, and media literacy. I am a student at the Lebanese American University, and I am completing this research thesis as part of my master's degree. The purpose of this survey is to measure the levels of media literacy of Lebanese teenagers, along with the levels of the relational problems that they might face during online relationships. The relational problems measured in the survey are relationship uncertainty, partner surveillance and online partner aggression.

Approximately 384 teenage high school students will be invited to participate in this questionnaire for around 15-20 minutes. The answers can be about the student's current or previous experiences.

Responses to this survey will be voluntary and confidential. The aim of this thesis is to study teenage online relationships on social media platforms and to test if the level of media literacy can ameliorate the problems that teenage partners face online. Hence, no risk is associated with this survey. However, if the participant experiences any feelings of discomfort during filling this questionnaire, he/she can withdraw at any point.

If you accept the participation of your child in this survey, thank you for your trust. And if you disapprove of your child's participation, please reply to the email sent to you informing the school about your decision.

By accepting the participation of your child in the survey, you agree with the following statements:

1. I have been given sufficient information about this research project.
2. I understand that my child's answers will not be released to anyone, and my son/daughter's identity will remain anonymous. My child's name will not be written on the questionnaire nor be kept in any other records.
3. When the results of the study are reported, the participant will not be identified by name or any other information that could be used to infer their identity. Only researchers will have access to view any data collected during this research however data cannot be linked to individuals.
4. I understand that my child may withdraw from this research any time they wish.
5. I understand that my child's refusal to participate will not result in any penalty.
6. I have been informed that the research abides by all commonly acknowledged ethical codes and that the research project has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the Lebanese American University
7. I understand that if I have any additional questions, I can ask the researcher.
8. I have read and understood all statements on this form.
9. I voluntarily accept my son/daughter to take part in this research project by completing the survey.

If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedure, you may contact me by email at Yasmeen.sakka@lau.edu

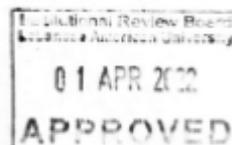
Thank you for your time and support.

Yasmeen Sakka
Communication Arts Department
Lebanese American University

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or you want to talk to someone outside the research, please contact the:

Institutional Review Board Office,
Lebanese American University
3rd Floor, Dorm A, Byblos Campus
Tel: 00 961 1 786456 ext. (2546)
irb@lau.edu.lb

This study has been reviewed and approved by the LAU IRB



Appendix B: Assent Form

Assent to Participate in a Survey Social Media, Teenage Relationships and Media Literacy

My name is Yasmine Sakka. I am an MA student at the Lebanese American University, and I am asking you to participate in a study conducted for the purpose of my research thesis. The objective of the survey is to measure the levels of media literacy of Lebanese teenagers, along with the levels of the relational problems that they might face during online relationships. The relational problems measured in the survey are relationship uncertainty, partner surveillance and online partner aggression.

I am asking you to complete a short questionnaire that will take about 15-20 minutes. Your parents/guardians have already given permission for you to participate in this study, but you do not have to participate if you choose so. You may quit this study at any time. Your participation in this study will not affect your schoolwork or your relationships in any way. The research intends to cause no physical or psychological harm or offense and abides by all commonly acknowledged ethical codes. There are no known risks involved in this study and you will receive nothing for your participation. To protect your confidentiality, the questionnaire will not be shared with anyone. All data and measurements obtained from this research study will be stored confidentially. Only the researcher will have access to view any data collected during this research. These questionnaires will be kept by the researcher. Neither the organization nor your parents/legal representatives will be informed of the answers you provide on the questionnaire.

You voluntarily agree to participate in this research project by signing below and filling the questionnaire. You have the right to ask the researcher any question regarding this project. You also have the right to reject participation. You may withdraw from this research any time you wish.

Student Signature

Date

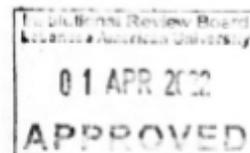
If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedure, you may contact me by email at Yasmine.sakka@lau.edu

Thank you for your time and support.
Yasmine Sakka
Lebanese American University

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or you want to talk to someone outside the research, please contact the:

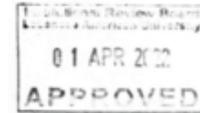
Institutional Review Board Office,
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Appendix C: Questionnaire

Instrument/Survey



A. Respondents Characteristics

Please Place a check mark next to the word or phrase that best matches your response.

1- Age <input type="radio"/> Younger than 15 years old <input type="radio"/> 15 years old <input type="radio"/> 16 years old <input type="radio"/> 17 years old <input type="radio"/> 18 years old <input type="radio"/> Older than 18 years old
2- Gender <input type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/> Female <input type="radio"/> Other....
3- Highschool Grade <input type="radio"/> Grade 10 <input type="radio"/> Grade 11 <input type="radio"/> Grade 12
4- Degree Type <input type="radio"/> Lebanese Bacculaureate <input type="radio"/> High school diploma (International Program) <input type="radio"/> International Bacculaureate <input type="radio"/> French Bacculaureate <input type="radio"/> Other....

B. Relationship Uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999)

How certain are you about ...?

Self-uncertainty	Completely Uncertain	Uncertain	Somewhat Uncertain	Neutral	Somewhat Certain	Certain	Completely Certain
How much you want the relationship to last							
How much you like your partner							
How important the relationship is to you							
How much you are romantically interested in your partner							
How ready you are to commit to your partner							

Partner Uncertainty	Completely Uncertain	Uncertain	Somewhat Uncertain	Neutral	Somewhat Certain	Certain	Completely Certain
How much your partner wants to be with you in the long run							
How much your partner is attracted to you							
How important the relationship is to your partner							
How much your partner is ready to commit to you							
How committed your partner is to the relationship							

Overall Relationship Uncertainty	Completely Uncertain	Uncertain	Somewhat Uncertain	Neutral	Somewhat Certain	Certain	Completely Certain
If the relationship will work out in the long run							
If you and your partner feel the same way about each other							
Whether the relationship is a romantic one							
The boundaries for appropriate and/or inappropriate behavior in the relationship							
How you can or cannot behave around your partner							

Tokunaga, Revised March
 01 APR 2012
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C. Partner Surveillance (Tokunaga,2011)

Please state your level of agreement regarding the following statements:

Partner Surveillance	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I visit my partner's social networking site page often							
When visiting my partner's social networking site page, I read the new posts of his/her friends							

I often spend time looking through my partner's social networking site pictures							
I pay particularly close attention to news feeds that concern my partner							
I notice when my partner updates his/her social networking site page							
I am generally aware of the relationships between my partner and his/her social networking site friends							
If there are messages on my partner's wall I don't understand, I try to investigate it through others' social networking sites							
I try to read comments my partner posts on mutual friends' walls. I am generally aware of my partner's social networking site activities							
I examine my partner's social networking site page to see what s/he's up to							
I see the friends my partner keeps on his social networking site page							
I know when my partner hasn't updated his/her social networking site page in a while							
I try to monitor my partner's behaviors through his/her social networking page							
I explore my partner's social networking page to see if there is anything new or exciting							
I know more about my partners' everyday life by							


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looking at his/her social networking site page							
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D. Online Partner Aggression (Linder et al., 2002)

Please state your level of agreement regarding the following statements:

Online Partner Aggression	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have threatened to break up with my romantic partner in order to get him/her to do what I wanted							
I try to make my romantic partner jealous when I am mad at him/her							
I have cheated on my romantic partner because I was angry at him/her							
I give my romantic partner the silent treatment when s/he hurts my feelings in some way							
If my romantic partner makes me mad, I will flirt with another person publicly							
My romantic partner tries to make me feel jealous as a way of getting back at me							
When my romantic partner is mad at me, s/he won't invite me to do things with our friends							
My romantic partner has threatened to break up with me in order to get what s/he wants							
My romantic partner doesn't pay attention to me when s/he is mad at me							
When my romantic partner wants something, s/he will ignore me until I give in							

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E. Media Literacy Levels (Eristi & Erdem, 2017)

Please state your level of agreement regarding the following statements:

Access	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I can effectively use various media tools to access the information, audio, image or other data that I need							
In order to access the information or data I need, I can functionally use different search platforms							

Analyze	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I question the media contents that I examine with respect to the purposes they were constructed and shared for							
I question whether there is an implicit meaning and purpose or not in the messages communicated via media tools besides the explicit meaning and purposes that are perceived immediately by readers							

Evaluate	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I can identify vicious and harmful media contents and I can protect myself from this kind of contents							
I can evaluate media contents or messages in media in terms of ethical principles and make a judgement about them							

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Communicate	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I can evaluate the possible consequences in case I share messages that contain unreal and purposeful information and images and that belong to other people and require permission to share							
Using media tools and platforms, I can arrange activities such as digital campaigns, discussions and blogs in order to find a solution to various problems or generate social sensitivity for a particular issue							

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey

Yasmeen Sakka
 Communication Arts Department
 Lebanese American University

