

INFLUENCE OF EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND ON USE OF NICKNAMES AMONG UNIVERSITY AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN JORDAN

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the most common reasons Jordanian users adopt nicknames on social media, focusing on the influence of three key factors: psychological, social and privacy. It also explores how nickname use relates to users' educational background, examines whether cultural differences exist between Jordanians and non-Jordanians, and identifies any significant gender differences in this practice. Data were collected through a Google Form questionnaire completed by 150 participants, comprising 100 Jordanians and 50 non-Jordanian social media users. These participants were drawn from two universities and two secondary schools in Jordan using a non-probability purposive sampling procedure. The results showed that privacy and security recorded the highest mean and percentage among Jordanian users, suggesting these concerns are the dominant motivation. School students were more motivated to use nicknames than university students, indicating that age and educational level shape this behaviour. Cultural factors also played a role, with non-Jordanian users scoring higher than Jordanian users. In terms of gender, male users scored higher than female users. The findings suggest that nickname use on social media is a pervasive phenomenon, with several reasons working in tandem.

Keywords: nicknames; psychological reasons; social and cultural reasons; privacy and security reasons; social media

Introduction

Social media platforms typically require users to create accounts holding the names of those users and other personal information relating to age, gender, nationality, date, and place of birth. These platforms allow users to use nicknames instead of their real names to keep their privacy or confidentiality. Nicknames can be used to hide real social identities and portray selected identities. Atanesyan et al. (2025) investigated the reasons behind using nicknames, "Virtual masks". The research employed Erving Goffman's Dramaturgical Theory to discover how users of social media choose nicknames to reveal their identities or change them for a specific purpose. Their study on 400 social media users in Armenia revealed that 35% of women and men favoured anonymity. Moreover, as the users' identities are unknown, they portray their profiles to be charming, cultural trends and express political issues freely.

The social significance of nicknames was examined by Setiawan et al. (2023) who found that they reflect a person's social reputation, ethnicity, or social status. The participants were 30 individuals known by their nicknames instead of their given names. The study also shows that the meanings behind these nicknames are diverse, ranging from physical traits to daily habits, family members, specific events, and unknown sources. Setiawan et al.'s (2023) results revealed that nicknames are mainly used to build strong relationships among social media users and not a source of shaming. Generally, individuals tend to react differently when addressed by their nicknames, which are associated with various feelings.

Motivation to use nicknames on using social media was examined by Zhou et al. (2021) in a study involving 394 Chinese active users of online communities. The results highlighted that virtual exploration, contextual adaptation, and social navigation were the factors behind the individuals' motivation to use nicknames on social media. Social, pragmatic, and emotional reasons for using nicknames were studied by Nikolenko (2023). The results showed a connection between nicknames and emotions such as pride and disgust. Humans experience a range of positive and negative emotions due to their spiritual and biological nature. Although various pragmatic factors influence the emotional meanings of nicknames, they universally reflect basic human feelings. Emotional lexemes convey emotional evaluations, subjective determinations of an object's status, and emotional expressions of approval or disapproval of someone or something.

Gender influences social media users' use of nicknames. The majority of marginalised gendered people try to use nicknames to maintain their identity and challenge traditional gender norms (Fu, 2022). Jadesi (2022) reported that female users may adopt gender-neutral or male-related nicknames to reduce bias and discomfort in interactions. In Jordan, Al-Saidat et al. (2023) found that both men and women tend to use terms with negative connotations more often than those with positive connotations. The study showed that men tend to prefer animal-related nicknames and do not prefer names of celestial bodies but female nicknames often

incorporate references to plants, such as Black Iris. Women tend to choose nicknames that convey a sense of superiority but use job titles and famous characters less frequently (Ai-Saidat et al., 2023). Kuranchie's (2012) study using a questionnaire showed that male high school students use nicknames more than females.

The influence of cultural background is seen in the users' name, words, and symbols used in social media communication. Madhi's (2025) results indicated that nicknames contribute to the formation of youth social identity among Arab social media users. The discourse analysis showed that users tend to mix words from various Arabic dialects, use formal and colloquial expressions, and include some foreign expressions. Moreover, the data reflected cultural influences, regional norms and emotions. She et al.'s (2022) comparison of Chinese and English internet nicknames indicated that cultural, psychological, and social factors influence the choice of nicknames among internet users.

Nicknames can make online interactions equal by breaking down social hierarchies and prejudices, resulting in fairer conversations as they reduce the influence of factors such as gender, age, and social status. Zhou et al. (2021) argued that expressing different identities through nicknames and online personas can give users the opportunity to represent themselves in creative perspectives. Nicknames can create familiarity and closeness between people.

However, use of nicknames can have negative consequences like bullying, shaming, and humiliation. Lee and Kim (2017) studied the value of using nicknames in social media communication. Their study on 200 participants showed a higher frequency of conflicts and instances where decisions were based on incomplete or inaccurate information. In addition, nicknames might make it confusing for others to know who the actual user of that nickname is (Al-Mubayyidin, 2017; Lee & Kim, 2017). Thus, having expressive online relationships with individuals is challenging since trust and understanding are artificial. When online relationships are built on uncertain identities and superficial trust, users may feel less accountable for their behaviour towards others. This may be why cyberbullying is becoming more common. Examples of social media cyberbullying include verbal abuse, public humiliation, ridicule of physical appearance, and many other aspects. The most common age groups using nicknames on social media are individuals and young adults between 13 and 25 years old (Smith, 2019). Bularca et al. (2024) found that the younger the participants were, the more likely they were to face some kind of harassment but there were no gender differences in likelihood of being harassed.

Thus far, research on use of nicknames on social media show that they are linked to identity expression and relationship building (Setiawan et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2021), as well as emotional and cultural influences (Madhi, 2025; Nikolenko, 2023; She et al., 2022). Use of nicknames is linked to the gender of the social media user (Al-Saidat et al., 2023; Fu, 2022; Jadesi, 2022; Kuranchie, 2012). Use of nicknames may lead to reduced accountability and increased risks of misunderstanding and online harm (Al-Mubayyidin, 2017; Bularca et al., 2024; Lee & Kim, 2017). Hudacs's (2024) analysis of 1,108 nicknames post of high school students showed that the dominant nickname type was symbols, such as animals, warriors, human figures, and abstract values. However, little is known about how these patterns differ across educational levels, cultural backgrounds, and gender among Jordanian social media users.

The study examined reasons for using nicknames among university and high school students in Jordan, and the influences of educational and cultural backgrounds. The research questions are:

- (1) What are the reasons for using nicknames on social media by social media users in Jordan?
- (2) Is use of nicknames on social media related to users' educational backgrounds?
- (3) Is use of nicknames on social media influenced by the cultural backgrounds of users?
- (4) Are there any differences between males and females concerning the use of nicknames on social media?

Theoretical Framework of Study

This study is based on Social Identity Theory, proposed by Henri Tajfel in 1979. He suggests that people typically define themselves in a social group they live in. Over time, individuals classify themselves according to gender, nationality, or online communities where these ideas become part of their self-concept. Consequently, people tend to maintain positive social identity, such as symbols, or language forms and nicknames, reflecting how they want to present themselves to online groups.

Hence, the Social Identity Theory provides a useful lens for understanding how social media users choose their nicknames. By selecting names that reflect prestige, humour, cultural association or belonging to a specific gaming group. Nicknames are not only a linguistic label but an identity marker which function as symbolic resources through which users construct, and display identity.

Methodology

In the descriptive study, non-probability purposive sampling procedures were used to select users with a nickname on social media. The sample consisted of two main groups. First, 50 Jordanian and 50 non-Jordanian students at Amman Arab University and the University of Jordan during the academic year 2023/2024. Second, 50 school students were selected: 25 studying at Madaba Vocational Secondary School for Boys and 25 at Al-Mamounia Secondary School for Girls. Male and female students were selected to investigate gender differences regarding the use of nicknames. Moreover, the sample consists of both high school and university students to investigate the influence of educational background on the use of nicknames.

The questionnaire consisted of 30 items on psychological elements, cultural elements, and security and privacy elements with 10 items each. Five-point Likert scale items were used (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree). Descriptive statistics (percentage, frequency, and mean) are used to report the results.

Results and Discussion

Reasons for Using Nicknames by Social Media Users in Jordan

Table 1 shows that the most common reasons behind using nicknames on social media for university and high school students in Jordan. The top reason is security and privacy reasons (mean = 3.36). People tend to protect their personal lives and personal information to have privacy and avoid cyberbullying. Social and cultural reasons (mean = 2.80), and psychological reasons (mean = 2.80) were less important reasons in the use of nicknames for the students in Jordan.

Table 1

Means and Ranking of Reasons to Use Nicknames

A. Psychological Reasons.

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	95% CI	Rank
1	I use a nickname for memorable and unique handles	3.10	0.81	[2.95, 3.25]	11
2	Nicknames on social media can help me build self-confidence	3.10	0.82	[2.95, 3.25]	22
3	The advantages of using a nickname on social media outweigh the disadvantages	3.00	0.83	[2.84, 3.16]	25
4	Having a nickname on social media allows me to highlight my interests or hobbies	3.00	0.84	[2.84, 3.16]	27
5	Using a nickname on social media helps increase my popularity	2.90	0.87	[2.73, 3.07]	23
6	Using a nickname on social media gives me more freedom	2.80	0.85	[2.63, 2.97]	21
7	Using a nickname on social media makes it easier to interact with others	2.80	0.88	[2.62, 2.98]	28
8	I prefer using a nickname on social media instead of my real name	2.70	0.89	[2.53, 2.87]	29
9	Having a nickname on social media makes me feel proud of myself	2.60	0.90	[2.42, 2.78]	30
10	Using a nickname on social media makes it easier for others to trust me	2.40	0.91	[2.22, 2.58]	26
Total psychological reasons		2.80	0.71	[2.68, 2.92]	

B. Social and Cultural Reasons.

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	95% CI	Rank
1	Having a nickname on social media allows me to highlight my society	3.10	0.79	[2.95, 3.25]	10
2	I use nicknames to promote my culture	2.96	0.83	[2.80, 3.12]	9
3	Cultural factors influenced my decision to use a nickname on social media	2.90	0.86	[2.73, 3.07]	8
4	My nickname depends on the situation and may change accordingly	2.90	0.84	[2.73, 3.07]	1

5	Traditional or cultural nicknames contribute to unity and identity	2.90	0.80	[2.74, 3.06]	13
6	I am open to sharing cultural nicknames across cultures	2.90	0.81	[2.74, 3.06]	12
	I use nicknames to attract tourists in my society	2.80	0.87	[2.63, 2.97]	14
7	I use nicknames to give a sense of community and belonging	2.80	0.82	[2.64, 2.96]	20
8	I use a nickname to share articles and information about my cultural background	2.80	0.84	[2.64, 2.96]	19
9	I use a nickname to hide my nationality	2.70	0.88	[2.53, 2.87]	5
Total social and cultural reasons		2.80	0.69	[2.69, 2.91]	

C. Security and Privacy Reasons.

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	95% CI	Rank
1	Using a nickname makes it harder for others to identify me	3.70	0.76	[3.55, 3.85]	17
2	Having a nickname helps protect my online privacy	3.60	0.78	[3.45, 3.75]	18
3	Nicknames allow the creation of multiple accounts for different purposes	3.60	0.77	[3.45, 3.75]	15
4	Using a nickname helps avoid risks associated with social media	3.50	0.79	[3.34, 3.66]	6
5	Using a nickname protects my personal information from cyber-attacks	3.50	0.80	[3.34, 3.66]	16
6	Using a nickname makes me feel more comfortable interacting online	3.40	0.80	[3.24, 3.56]	2
7	I use nicknames to communicate freely away from social control	3.30	0.81	[3.14, 3.46]	3
8	Using a nickname protects me from cyberbullying	3.30	0.83	[3.14, 3.46]	7
9	I feel safer using a nickname instead of my real name	3.30	0.82	[3.14, 3.46]	24
10	I trust people with nicknames on social media more easily	2.40	0.92	[2.22, 2.58]	4
Total security and privacy reasons		3.36	0.66	[3.24, 3.48]	

Note. Means are based on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). SD = standard deviation; CI = confidence interval. Confidence intervals are reported at the 95% level. Higher mean scores indicate stronger agreement with the statement.

For security and privacy reasons, the top reasons for the participants are using a nickname makes them more comfortable interacting online as they feel they are freed from social control. They also find it easy to trust people with nicknames on social media easily. The priority placed on privacy by Jordanian participants is similar

to past studies (Bularca et al., 2024; Lee & Kim, 2017) where the findings indicate nicknames can provide privacy and creative self-expression. As for the Jordanian participants in the study, nicknames may be used due to cultural traditions and a desire to protect personal information, highlighting the importance of privacy and community interaction.

Among the psychological reasons for using nicknames on social media, the results showed a strong desire by the participants to build self-confidence on social media. By using nicknames, their real social identity is hidden. Thus, they can express their authentic identity without being ashamed. Jordan is a conservative society where the position of females is usually lower than males. Thus, users feel more confident and proud of themselves, doing many things that social media users cannot do by using their real names.

As for social and cultural reasons, the results showed that the nickname chosen by the participants depends on the situation and they may change it accordingly. The participants also choose nicknames that hide their nationality. The opposite are choices of nicknames that highlight their society and promote their culture. For these participants, cultural factors influenced their choice of nicknames on social media, whether it is to hide their nationality and culture or to highlight these social identities.

Influence of Educational Background on Use of Nicknames on Social Media

The comparison between university and high school students in Jordan shows differences according to educational background (means of 1.44 and 1.97 respectively), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Mean and Percentage of University and High School Students' Nicknames

Item	High school students		University students	
	Mean	Percentage	Mean	Percentage
1 Nicknames on social media can help me build self-confidence	3.1	61.6%	2.7	49.8%
2 Using a nickname on social media makes it easier for others to trust me	2.8	55.6%	2.03	38.6%
3 Using a nickname on social media gives me more freedom	3.2	62%	2.5	47%
4 Using a nickname on social media makes it easier to interact with others	3.2	62%	2.5	47.4%
5 Using a nickname on social media helps increase my popularity	3.4	66%	2.6	49.1%
6 Having a nickname on social media makes me feel proud of myself	2.8	55.2%	2.1	40.3%
7 I prefer using a nickname on social media instead of my real name	3.1	60.4%	2.2	42.8%
8 Having a nickname on social media allows me to highlight my interests or hobbies	3.2	63.2%	2.8	53%

9	The advantages of using a nickname on social media outweigh the disadvantages	3.3	65.6%	2.6	49.8%
10	I use a nickname for memorable and unique handles	3.3	65.6%	2.7	51.6%
11	Having a nickname on social media allows me to highlight my society	3.2	64%	2.7	51.2%
12	Cultural factors influenced my decision to use a nickname on social media	3.1	60.8%	2.9	55.8%
13	My nickname depends on the situation and may change accordingly	3.3	64.4%	2.9	54.3%
14	I use nicknames to promote my culture	3.3	65.2%	2.7	51.9%
15	I use a nickname to hide my nationality	3.1	60%	2.3	43.8%
16	I use nicknames to attract tourists in my society	3.0	59.2%	2.5	47.7%
17	I use nicknames to give a sense of community and belonging	3.0	58.4%	2.6	49.5%
18	I use a nickname to share articles and information about my cultural background	3.1	60.4%	2.6	49.1%
19	Traditional or cultural nicknames contribute to unity and identity	3.2	63.6%	2.6	50.5%
20	I am open to sharing cultural nicknames across cultures	3.2	63.6%	2.8	54.1%
21	Having a nickname helps protect my online privacy	3.8	74.8%	3.5	66.3%
22	Using a nickname makes it harder for others to identify me	3.7	72%	2.9	54.4%
23	Using a nickname protects my personal information from cyber-attacks	3.7	71.6%	3.3	62.1%
24	I trust people with nicknames on social media more easily	2.4	46.8%	2.3	43.8%
25	I use nicknames to communicate freely away from social control	3.2	62.8%	3.2	60.7%
26	Nicknames allow the creation of multiple accounts for different purposes	3.6	70.4%	3.6	69.1%
27	Using a nickname protects me from cyberbullying	3.1	61.2%	3.2	61.1%
28	Using a nickname helps avoid risks associated with social media	3.6	70%	3.1	60.3%
29	I feel safer using a nickname instead of my real name	3.4	66.8%	3.0	56.5%
30	Using a nickname makes me feel more comfortable interacting online	3.2	64%	3.1	60.3%
Total		1.97	39.4%	1.44	28.8%

The high school students reported higher mean scores and percentages than university students for all items, indicating stronger agreement on the benefits of using nicknames on social media. The largest differences between the two groups of

students were found in social and self-presentation aspects, particularly “increasing popularity” (high school, 66%; university: 49.1%), “easier interaction” (high school: 62%; university: 47.4%), and “giving more freedom” (high school: 62%; university: 47%). The differences ranged from 13% to 17%.

The high school and university students had similar results for privacy and safety-related items. Both groups showed relatively high agreement, such as protection from cyber-attacks (high school: 71.6%; university: 62.1%) and comfort in online interaction (high school: 64%; university: 60.3%). Two items showed almost no difference between groups: “communicate freely away from social control” (High school: 62.8%; university: 60.7%) and “creation of multiple accounts for different purposes” (high school: 70.4%; university: 69.1%). Overall, high school students viewed nicknames more positively across social and identity functions, while both groups were relatively similar in privacy-related perceptions.

Influence of Cultural Backgrounds on Use of Nicknames on Social Media

The results on the participants are analysed based on their cultural background: Jordanian, and non-Jordanian. Table 3 shows the results of perceptions of Jordanian and non-Jordanian social media users regarding reasons for using nicknames. The levels of agreement with benefits of using nicknames on social media was slightly higher among non-Jordanians (mean of 39.4%) than Jordanians (mean of 38.8%). It is apparent that cultural values and norms may influence the decision to use a nickname on social media.

Table 3
Mean and Percentage of Jordanians and Non-Jordanians’ Nicknames

Item	Jordanian			Non-Jordanian		
	Mean	Percentage	Rank	Mean	Percentage	Rank
1 Nicknames on social media can help me build self-confidence	2.9	57.5%	22	3.8	75.6%	23
2 Using a nickname on social media makes it easier for others to trust me	2.5	57.8%	21	2.5	49.6%	26
3 Using a nickname on social media gives me more freedom	2.9	56.4%	26	3.1	61.2%	28
4 Using a nickname on social media makes it easier to interact with others	2.9	56.6%	23	3.1	62.4%	21
5 Using a nickname on social media helps increase my popularity	3.1	58.7%	28	3.2	64.8%	30
6 Having a nickname on social media makes me feel proud of myself	2.5	52.1%	30	3.1	61.6%	1

7	I prefer using a nickname on social media instead of my real name	2.7	53.9%	25	3.2	64%	29
8	Having a nickname on social media allows me to highlight my interests or hobbies	3.1	59.8%	29	3.2	64.8%	25
9	The advantages of using a nickname on social media outweigh the disadvantages	3.2	58.7%	27	3.3	66%	22
10	I use a nickname for memorable and unique handles	3.1	60.3%	13	3.3	66.4%	27
11	Having a nickname on social media allows me to highlight my society	3.1	59.2%	20	3.6	71.6%	11
12	Cultural factors influenced my decision to use a nickname on social media	3.1	60.3%	14	2.9	58.8%	10
13	My nickname depends on the situation and may change accordingly	3.1	62.1%	12	2.8	56.8%	9
14	I use nicknames to promote my culture	3.1	61.1%	10	3.0	60.4%	5
15	I use a nickname to hide my nationality	2.7	55.5%	8	2.9	58.4%	8
16	I use nicknames to attract tourists in my society	2.8	56.4%	11	3.1	62.4%	7
17	I use nicknames to give a sense of community and belonging	2.8	56.4%	9	3.0	61.2%	4
18	I use a nickname to share articles and information about my cultural background	2.9	57.1%	5	3.0	59.6%	16
19	Traditional or cultural nicknames contribute to unity and identity	3	57.9%	19	2.9	58.4%	6
20	I am open to sharing cultural nicknames across cultures	3.1	62.1%	1	2.8	55.6%	3
21	Having a nickname helps protect my online privacy	3.7	72.8%	18	3.8	76.8%	17
22	Using a nickname makes it harder for others to identify me	3.9	74.1%	4	3.7	74.4%	14
23	Using a nickname protects my personal information from cyber-attacks	3.5	70.5%	3	3.9	77.6%	18

24 I trust people with nicknames on social media more easily	2.4	47.8%	17	2.6	52.4%	12
25 I use nicknames to communicate freely away from social control	3.3	66.2%	16	3.7	74.8%	15
26 Nicknames allow the creation of multiple accounts for different purposes	3.7	72.7%	15	3.9	77.6%	19
27 Using a nickname protects me from cyberbullying	3.2	65.1%	7	3.6	72.4%	13
28 Using a nickname helps avoid risks associated with social media	3.4	69.2%	6	3.9	77.2%	20
29 I feel safer using a nickname instead of my real name	3.2	66.2%	2	3.9	75.6%	24
30 Using a nickname makes me feel more comfortable interacting online	3.3	67.1%	24	3.8	76.4%	2
Total	1.64	28.8%		1.97	39.4%	

The largest differences among the Jordanian and non-Jordanian social media users were for items related to privacy, safety, and emotional comfort online. The biggest difference in percentages was for “using a nickname to protect my personal information from cyber-attacks” (Jordanian, 70.5%; non-Jordanian, 77.6%). Similarly, the non-Jordanian were more likely to feel safer using a nickname instead of a real name than Jordanians (Jordanian: 66.2%; non-Jordanian: 75.6%). The non-Jordanian were also more likely to use nicknames to avoid risks associated with social media (Jordanian: 69.2%; non-Jordanian: 77.2%) and to feel more comfortable interacting online through nicknames (Jordanian: 67.1%; non-Jordanian: 76.4%). These results suggest that non-Jordanian users generally perceive nicknames as providing stronger security and psychological comfort online.

However, the differences in percentages were small for items related to trust, identity expression, and cultural use of nicknames on social media. For example, facilitating trust (Jordanian, 47.8%; non-Jordanian, 57.8%), hiding nationality (Jordanian: 55.5%; non-Jordanian: 58.4%), promoting own culture (Jordanian, 61.1%; non-Jordanian, 60.4%). Cultural background has less influence on identity aspects of social and cultural reasons for using nicknames on social media.

Differences Between Males and Females in Use of Nicknames on Social Media

Table 4 shows differences in male and female nicknames used by the participants. Examples of male nicknames in Arabic are AdHen, BamKer77 (77), BuGa55 (55), FaKe, Prince of Darkness, Alexander, Al-Nashmi, and Ahmed com. Examples of female nicknames in Arabic are SoCool, RizaMa, Darck stone, Flower Violet, Tota Ali, Rose Mary, Stranger in a strange world, and Flower October.

Table 4

Examples of Male and Female Nicknames Used by the Participants

	Male Nicknames	Arabic	Female Nicknames	Arabic
1	AdHen	أديت هنسم	SoCool	صوفيا كول
2	BamKer77 (77)	باميانج كيبرن	RizaMa	ريزال ماشو
3	BuGa55 (55)	بودي جانتينغ	Darck stone	أنيسة
4	FaKe	فهمي كيس	Flower Violet	زهرة البنفسج
5	Prince of Darkness	أمير الظلام	Tota Ali	توتا علي
6	Alexander	أليكساندر	Rose Mary	روزماري
7	Al-Nashmi	النشمي	Stranger in a strange world	غريبة بدنيا غريبة
8	Ahmed com	احمد com	Flower October	زهرة أكتوبر

Table 5 shows a higher mean for male participants (M=1.77) than female participants (M=1.63). The greatest gender differences are for privacy, safety, and evaluation of nickname benefits, but the male and female participants expressed similar views on online interaction comfort and account management.

Table 5

Mean and Percentage of Male and Female Social Media Users

	Item	Male social media users			Female social media users		
		Item	Mean	Percentage	Item	Mean	Percentage
1	Nicknames on social media can help me build self-confidence	1	3	60.4%	1	2.7	53.4%
2	Using a nickname on social media makes it easier for others to trust me	2	2.4	48%	2	2.4	47.7%
3	Using a nickname on social media gives me more freedom	3	3	61.5%	3	2.5	49.6%
4	Using a nickname on social media makes it easier to interact with others	4	2.9	59.6%	4	2.6	51.9%
5	Using a nickname on social media helps increase my popularity	5	3.2	63.8%	5	2.6	53.4%
6	Having a nickname on social media makes me feel proud of myself	6	2.7	53.8%	6	2.1	43.4%
7	I prefer using a nickname on social media instead of my real name	7	2.9	58.8%	7	2.3	46.1%
8	Having a nickname on social media allows me to highlight my interests or hobbies	8	3	61.5%	8	2.8	57.3%

9	The advantages of using a nickname on social media outweigh the disadvantages	9	3.2	64.2%	9	2.7	53.4%
10	I use a nickname for memorable and unique handles	10	3.1	61.9%	10	2.9	57.7%
11	Having a nickname on social media allows me to highlight my society	11	2.9	58.8%	11	2.9	58.8%
12	Cultural factors influenced my decision to use a nickname on social media	12	2.9	58.4%	12	3	61.1%
13	My nickname depends on the situation and may change accordingly	13	3.1	62.3%	13	2.9	59.2%
14	I use nicknames to promote my culture	14	3.1	62.3%	14	2.8	57.3%
15	I use a nickname to hide my nationality	15	2.7	55%	15	2.5	50.7%
16	I use nicknames to attract tourists in my society	16	2.8	56.1%	16	2.6	53.1%
17	I use nicknames to give a sense of community and belonging	17	2.9	57.7%	17	2.6	52.7%
18	I use a nickname to share articles and information about my cultural background	18	2.7	54.2%	18	2.9	57.7%
19	Traditional or cultural nicknames contribute to unity and identity	19	2.8	56.1%	19	3	60.3%
20	I am open to sharing cultural nicknames across cultures	20	3	61.1%	20	2.9	59.2%
21	Having a nickname helps protect my online privacy	21	3.7	73.4%	21	3.5	71.1%
22	Using a nickname makes it harder for others to identify me	22	3.9	78.4%	22	3.7	72.3%
23	Using a nickname protects my personal information from cyber-attacks	23	3.7	73.4%	23	3.2	63.4%
24	I trust people with nicknames on social media more easily	24	2.5	49.6%	24	2.1	43.4%
25	I use nicknames to communicate freely away from social control	25	3.3	66.9%	25	3	60%

26	Nicknames allow the creation of multiple accounts for different purposes	26	3.6	71.9%	26	3.6	71.5%
27	Using a nickname protects me from cyberbullying	27	3.3	66.9%	27	2.9	58.8%
28	Using a nickname helps avoid risks associated with social media	28	3.5	70.7%	28	3.1	62.7%
29	I feel safer using a nickname instead of my real name	29	3.3	66.9%	29	2.9	59.2%
30	Using a nickname makes me feel more comfortable interacting online	30	3.2	64.2%	30	3.2	63.4%
Total		Total	1.77	35.4%	Total	1.63	32.6%

The largest gender difference concerns using a nickname to protect personal information from cyber-attacks (male, 73.4%; female, 63.4%). Similarly, males were more likely to feel safer using a nickname instead of real name (male, 66.9%; female, 59.2%) as it reduces risks associated with social media (males; 70.7%; female, 62.7%). Males also felt that using nicknames has more advantages than disadvantages, compared to females (male, 64.2%; female, 53.4%).

There were little gender differences with regards to feeling comfortable interacting online (male, 64.2%; female, 63.4%), and ability to create many accounts for different purposes (male, 71.9%; female, 71.5%).

Discussion and Conclusion

The study showed a variety of reasons for using nicknames among university and high school students in Jordan, and the influences of educational and cultural backgrounds on use of nicknames in social media. The main reason for using nicknames is security and privacy reasons, which is considered more important than social and cultural reasons and psychological reasons. The study shows that high school students in Jordan are more likely to believe in the benefits of using nicknames on social media than university students. The non-Jordanians are more inclined to agree with the benefits of using nicknames on social media than Jordanians. Nationality differences are more strongly reflected in security-related perceptions of nicknames but less for cultural and identity-related uses. Gender differences are more obvious in perceived protection and risk reduction, while perceptions of daily use and functionality of nicknames are largely similar. The selection of male and female nicknames is different, with females inclined towards name of flowers. The study shows the influence of educational background, cultural background and gender on using nicknames on social media.

The present study involved high school and university students who belong to the younger generation, and are used to having nicknames in social media. Nicknames are seen as a form of self-expression and identity creation, with older

generations gradually adopting different online identities as their digital skills improve (Aggarwal, 2016).

The results concur with researchers who found that use of nicknames are influenced by educational background, cultural background (Bularca et al., 2024) and gender (Al-Saidat et al., 2023; Hudacs, 2024; Jadesi, 2022). Hudacs (2024) clarifies that males often choose animal-related nicknames, while females opt for those that convey a sense of superiority. Societal attitudes towards personal authenticity and formality can impact the choice of a nickname (Al-Saidat et al., 2023).

This study is limited by its use of high school and university students as representative of the younger generation, which restricts the generalisability of the findings to other age groups and older generations. In addition, the reliance on self-reported questionnaire data may introduce response bias, and the results may not reflect their actual use of nicknames online. Future studies using digital ethnography can obtain deeper insight into selecting specific types of nicknames across different cultural and social media contexts.

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