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The Impact of Internet Celebrities on Algerian EFL Learners' Lifestyle Habits

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Abstract
Social media paved the way for the emergence of a new type of celebrity: the internet celebrity. Internet celebrities have changed how young people speak, dress, and act. The present study examines the impact of social media and internet celebrities on the lifestyle habits of Algerian EFL learners. A lot of studies have been conducted on how social media can be used in EFL learning, yet very little is known about their effects beyond the EFL classroom. The findings of this study could provide insights into how excessive media usage could lead to the cultivation of new habits and lifestyle tendencies among young people. The main questions that guided this study were: to what extent are Algerian EFL learners exposed to social media? To what extent do they interact with internet celebrities? And how are they influenced by internet celebrities? One hundred and eleven students of English at Mostefa Ben Boulaid University, Algeria, were surveyed in this study. The findings suggest that Algerian EFL learners are heavily exposed to social networks due to the usefulness and efficiency of these networks as informal language learning tools. In addition to language learning, EFL learners are very attracted by other online content, such as fashion and cooking, which makes them continuously involved with, and influenced by, social media celebrities. Consequently, this continuous involvement with internet celebrities shapes EFL learners' lifestyle habits.
Keywords: celebrity involvement, social media, EFL learning, Algerian EFL students, internet celebrities, parasocial interaction

Introduction

Online media has changed the meaning of celebrity. The way celebrities are made, the way celebrity is practiced and the way fans are related to their celebrities have all changed. The new social media platforms, such as YouTube and Facebook, offered new places for celebrity production and practice characterized mainly by user-generated content (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). These platforms have led to the emergence of a new form of celebrity: Internet celebrities or so-called social media influencers. These Internet celebrities are ordinary people who found in social media a source of fame. These everyday people attract millions of fans on social media through sharing their stories online. By doing so, they have become influencers shaping people's beliefs and behavior (Xu & Pratt, 2018).

Young people have become so addicted to social network services that they regard them as an integral part of their daily life. The adoption of technology by young people has played a critical role not only in terms of interaction but also learning, sharing, and exchanging ideas. The popularity of social media, such as Facebook and YouTube, among young people as learning tools has attracted the attention of scholars. Research on the use of social media for educational purposes, in the field of foreign language teaching and learning in particular, revealed that using social media could have a lot of benefits for learners (Hamat & Abu Hassan, 2019).

Yet, the excessive use of social media by EFL learners cannot be without side effects. The learners adopt new ideas and beliefs along with language acquisition. Being exposed to social media for long hours indeed leads to some degree of celebrity interaction. Many studies have investigated social media influence, but integrating a new kind of celebrity—the internet celebrity—is a new field worthy of examination (Rasmussen, 2018).

Previous research on social media effects is divided into two categories. First, the impact of social media, in general, which tends to be limited to the impact on body image and purchase intentions (Baker & Rojek, 2019; Rasmussen, 2018; Abidin, 2018; Schlecht, 2020). Second, the impact of social media as an informal language learning instrument that tends to overlook the social and psychological aspects of social media use among EFL learners (Alm, 2015; Bosch, 2009; Codreanu & Combe, 2020; Kukulska-Hulme & Lee, 2020; Madge, Meek, Wellens & Hooley, 2009; Mubarak, 2016; Selwyn, 2009). That is, there has been no study about the social and psychological impact of social media in the context of EFL learning in Algeria. Hence, the purpose of this study is to fill this gap by exploring the effects of internet celebrity involvement on Algerian EFL learners. As a result, the following research questions were generated:

- To what extent are Algerian EFL learners exposed to social media?
- To what extent do Algerian EFL learners interact with Internet celebrities?
- To what extent do internet celebrities influence Algerian EFL learners?

In order to provide answers for the above questions, the first part will review the existing literature about the use of social media by EFL learners, the meaning of internet celebrity and parasocial interaction, and the impact of internet celebrity. After that, the sample and the research instrument used in this research will be discussed. Then, the major findings of the study will be reported and discussed. Finally, the paper is closed with a summary of the findings as well as suggestions for future research.

Literature Review
Social Media and EFL Learners

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as a set of "Internet-based applications" that "allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (p. 63). According to them, there are six forms of social media: (1) projects produced collaboratively by people, such as Wikipedia; (2) Social network sites, such as Facebook; (3) content communities, such as YouTube; (4) blogs and microblogs, such as Twitter; (5) virtual social worlds, such as Second Life; and (6) virtual game worlds, such as World of Warcraft.

Previous studies have pointed out the importance of social media in informal learning (Alm, 2015; Bosch, 2009; Codreanu & Combe, 2020; Kukulska-Hulme & Lee, 2020; Madge, Meek, Wellens & Hooley,

2009; Mubarak, 2016; Selwyn, 2009). They all agreed that learners commonly and naturally use social media as an informal academic vehicle to "work with their peers or to organize class projects or exchange information about coursework" (Hamat & Abu Hassan, 2019, p. 70). Social media applications encourage collaboration, offer important information sources, and provide space for active engagement between participants. This makes learners "active content creators" instead of "passive receivers of information" (Haque & Al Salem, 2019, p. 1031).

Researchers also were interested in areas in which social media could be beneficial for EFL learners. They found that students' writing skills, reading skills, communication skills, and vocabulary have all been improved as a result of using social media (Hamat & Abu Hassan, 2019). Besides, EFL learners can enhance their English proficiency through observing and commenting on their peers' posts on social media. They can also improve their English vocabulary through learning the basic English terminology that is used in social media (AbuSa'aleek, 2015).

The amount of literature offering valuable insight into the usefulness of social media as an EFL tool has grown tremendously recently. Nevertheless, the potential of this vehicle to affect learners in other ways and on other aspects has to be thoroughly investigated. Thus, this study attempts to gain a deep understanding of the impact of social media on EFL learners' lifestyle habits.

Internet Celebrity Involvement and Parasocial Interaction

Turner defined celebrity in three main ways: "(1) celebrity as a way that people are represented and talked about; (2) a process by which a person is turned into a commodity; and (3) an aspect of culture which is constantly being reinscribed and reformulated" (as cited in Marwick & Boyd, 2011, p. 140). In the three cases, media play a significant role as they facilitate the representation, the transformation, and the reformulation of celebrity. Abidin (2018) contended that celebrities are constructed by intentional media coverage that turns an ordinary person into a commodity and makes the public continually interested in them.

A new form of celebrity has emerged in recent years: the internet celebrity. According to Abidin (2018), internet celebrity "refers to all media formats (people, products, icons, figures, etc.) that attain prominence and popularity native to the internet" (p. 15). He added that internet celebrities have four main qualities that make them famous and celebrated by the audience. These qualities are exclusivity, exoticism, exceptionalism, and everydayness.

Continuous use of social media and exposure to internet celebrities' products lead the users to develop some sort of attachment or "Parasocial interaction." Parasocial interaction is a psychological media phenomenon which denotes that media users form relationships with media figures (Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012). The term was first used to describe the development of one-sided interpersonal relations with television and Radio popular characters by their audience members (Abidin, 2018).

Impact of Internet Celebrities

Technological advancement can affect, perhaps even change, a system of beliefs, traditions, and values (Kavakci & Kraeplin, 2017). One of the main ways this could occur is through internet celebrities. They can influence the social behavior and attitudes of young people. As Uzuegbunam (2017) argued, internet celebrities can "affect their confidence and determination to be successful in life, the way they dress, talk, and handle issues about relationship, marriage, and sex" (p. 130). Celebrities have great potential to shape the behavioral aspects of their audience because they are seen as role models by their audience (Juntiwasarakij, 2018).

In recent years, the study of celebrity influence has developed into a vast and flourishing field (Omenugha, Uzuegbunam, & Ndolo., 2016). However, most of this study has been limited to two main aspects: body image and purchase intentions (Baker & Rojek, 2019; Rasmussen, 2018; Abidin, 2018; Schlecht, 2020). A study about the influence of peers and media celebrities among young Chinese people found a strong correlation between celebrity imitation and materialistic values (Chan & Zhang, 2007).

Similarly, a strong correlation was found between attitudes toward celebrities and body image among female teenagers (Maltby, Giles, Barber, & McCutcheon, 2005).

The available literature about the influence of social media in general and internet celebrities, in particular, suggests that social comparison with internet celebrities on social media has a positive association with females' body image dissatisfaction, mood, and drive for thinness (Ho, Liao, & Le, 2016; Khan, Khalid, Khan & Jabeen, 2011; Drames, 2016; Nagar & Virk, 2017). For example, excessive exposure to Instagram images may lead to severe issues for women, such as self-objectification (Fardouly, Willburger, & Vartanian, 2018).

On the other hand, Jin and Phua (2014) found that celebrity endorsers have a great potential to promote advertisers' brands on Twitter. Likewise, Zafar, Shahzad, Wang, Qiu, and Li, (2019) found that "celebrities post authenticity, positive sentiments, and observational learning" have increased users' impulsive buying (p. 21). Xu and Pratt (2018) argued that online celebrities or social media influencers can have a significant impact on people's tourist intentions. They found that Social Media Influencer (SMI) endorser–consumer congruence positively affects the visit intentions toward the endorsed destinations in the same way that endorser–destination congruence does. Also, research has found that parasocial interaction on social media can be an effective marketing strategy as it creates a higher purchase intention (Rasmussen, 2018; Nouri, 2018). Social media "provides practical ideas to utilize parasocial interaction as a vehicle for brand building, public relations, and advertising" (Rasmussen, 2018, p. 291).

As the above review suggests, most of the previous literature about the impact of internet celebrities has been limited to body image and purchase intentions. Nevertheless, little is known about their effects on young people's lifestyle habits. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of internet celebrities on EFL learners' daily habits.

Method

Convenience sampling was used to select graduate and undergraduate students of both genders who were studying English at the department of English Language and Literature at the University of Mostefa Ben Boulaid, Batna (Algeria), during the academic year 2020-2021. The reason for selecting EFL learners is the fact that they spend a lot of time using social media for the sake of improving their English. As a result, they find themselves attracted to and ultimately trapped in the world of social media and internet celebrities. In addition, they are often accused of being westernized and living in a virtual world that exists only in social media.

One hundred and eleven students responded to an online survey. Analysis of the demographic data obtained from the survey show that the majority of the respondents (87.4%) were female, while 12.6% were male. This is actually because most of the students of English at the University of Mostefa Ben Boulaid are females. Furthermore, the data demonstrate that more than three-quarters of the survey participants (90.1%) were aged from 17 to 25, which is the usual range of age for a university student in Algeria. However, 7.2% of them were aged between 26 and 30, and only 2.7% aged more than 30. The data about educational level indicate that the students are almost evenly distributed among the five groups, as table one suggests.

Table 1. *Demographic information of the participants*

Participants	Groups	N	%
Gender	Female	97	87,4
	Male	14	12,6
Age	17-25	100	90,1
	26-30	8	7,2
	more than 30	3	2,7
Educational Level	First-year	6	5,4
	Second year	29	26,1
	Third year	12	10,8

| | Master one | 20 | 18,0 |
| | Master two | 44 | 39,6 |

This study used a survey as the main instrument for collecting data because it "provides a quantitative description of trends, attitudes, and opinions of a population" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 207). A self-response questionnaire was administered online to all the students of English at the University of Mostefa Ben Boulaid, Batna (Algeria). An online questionnaire was adopted instead of a pen-and-paper questionnaire due to the Corona Virus Confinement, which made face-to-face contact with the students almost impossible.

The online questionnaire consisted of four main sections. The first section measured the extent of students' exposure to social media. It contained questions about the type and the content of social media students are interested in, the amount of time they spend when, and the reason behind, using social media. The second section was made of ten statements about students' attitudes toward internet celebrities. The ten items were adopted from the Celebrity Attitude Scale (McCutcheon, Lange, & Houran, 2002). Participants were first asked to name their favorite celebrity (FIC); and then to indicate their agreement on a 5-point scale with the ten statements. The third section was about the impact of internet celebrities on students' appearance and lifestyle preferences. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with 12 statements. Statements three, four, five, and six were adopted from Danielsson's study entitled The Impact of Celebrities on Adolescents' Clothing Choices (Danielsson, 2009). The remaining statements were designed by the researcher. Finally, the last section dealt with demographics.

Results
Exposure to Social Media
The first research question sought to understand the extent of social media exposure among Algerian EFL learners. Hence, the first section of the questionnaire contained questions that measured students' use of different social media platforms. As figure one shows, the most used social media platform, according to the respondents, was YouTube (M= 3.42), followed by Instagram (M=3.29) and Facebook (M= 2.97). This indicates that the most frequently used social media platforms among Algerian EFL learners are: Youtube, Instagram, and Facebook.
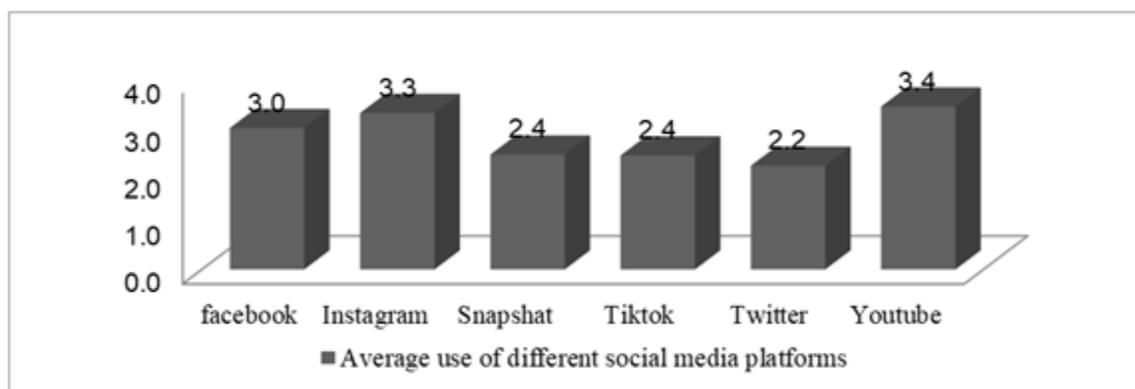

Figure 1. Social media platforms used by participants

The respondents were also asked about the amount of time they spend using social media and the type of media content they are interested in. The results indicate that the students spend a lot of time on social media. As table two shows, more than a third of the survey respondents (36.9%) said they spent more than four hours daily, and another third (32.4%) said they spent from two to four hours a day. The results also suggest that the participants were interested in all types of content that reflect lifestyle habits. As table two indicates, the majority of the participants were interested in 'fashion and lifestyle' (68.5 %), 'food and cooking' (68.5 %), 'health and sport' (55%), and 'art and décor' (52.3%).

Table 2. *Time spent on social media and interesting content for EFL learners*

	Groups	N	%
Time spent on social media	more than 4 hours	41	36,9
	from 2 to 4 hours	36	32,4
	from 1 to 2 hours	30	27,0
	less than 1 hour	4	3,6
Content of social media EFL learners are interested in	Fashion and lifestyle	76	68.5
	Food and cooking	76	68.5
	Health and sport	61	55.0
	Art and décor	58	52.3
	Travelling and adventures	48	43.2
	Science and technology	46	41.4
	Entertainment and celebrities	45	40.5

Concerning the reasons for using social media, the findings (figure three) suggest that most participants used social media to stay up-to-date with current news and events (64%), to improve their English (56%), and to stay in touch with friends (55%). Only 30% used social media to follow the news of their favorite celebrities.
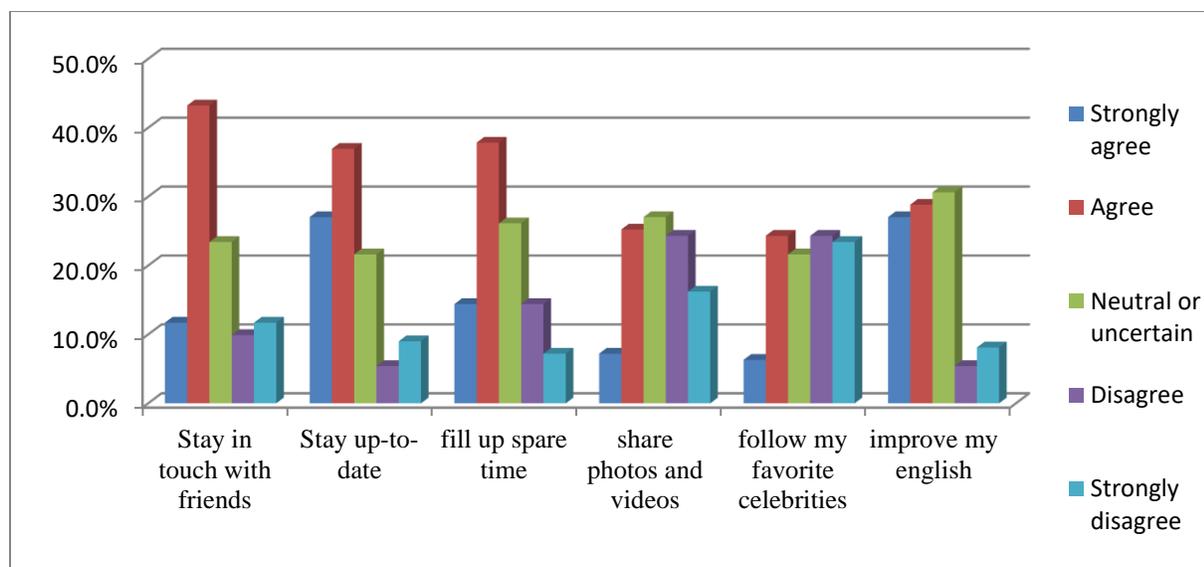

Figure 3. Reasons behind the use of social media

Celebrity Involvement

The second research question sought to find out the extent of interaction and involvement with Internet Celebrities on social media. To answer this question, the second section of the survey contained statements that measured the respondents' celebrity involvement. The majority of the survey participants (80%) replied to this section. They named their favorite Internet Celebrity (FIC), and then they responded to the ten statements about their FIC.
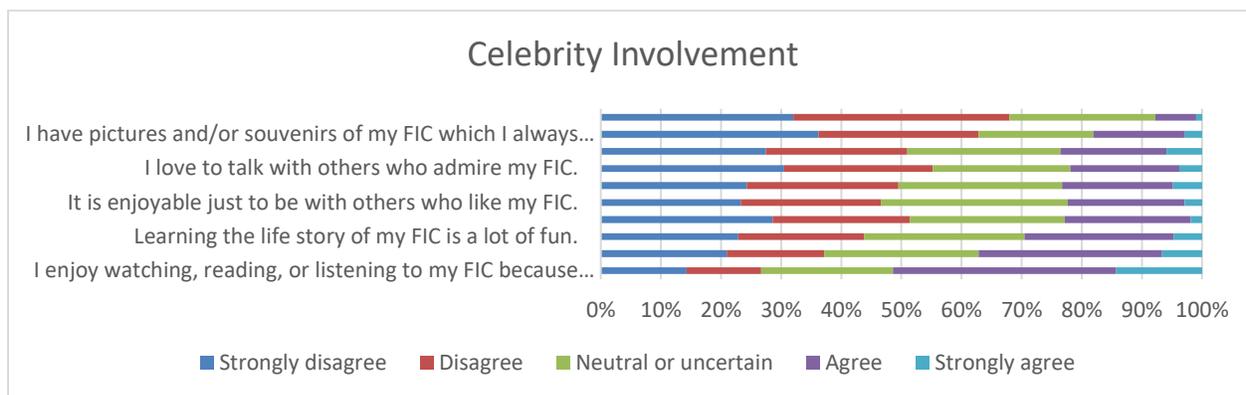
Figure 4. EFL learners' celebrity involvement

Unexpectedly, data indicated low celebrity involvement. As figure four demonstrates, only 7.8% claimed they were obsessed with the details of their FIC's life, and 18.1% said they had pictures and/or souvenirs of their FIC which they always kept on their phones/ tablets/ computers. However, half of the students (51.4%) revealed that they enjoyed watching, reading, or listening to their FIC, and more than a third (37.2%) agreed that keeping up with news about their FIC is an entertaining pastime.

Impact of Internet Celebrities

The results of the data analysis, displayed in figure 5, indicate that the impact of internet celebrities varied from one item to another. The participants were influenced mainly by internet celebrities' housing and décor (54.9%), traveling (39.6%), and fashion (40.5%). However, the influence on other aspects, such as purchase intentions, food habits, clothing, and appearance, is insignificant. For instance, only 19.8% had the habit of buying clothes similar to those of internet celebrities. Regarding purchase intentions, only 21.6% preferred shopping at high-end quality stores, 20.7% spent a lot of money to purchase brandy clothes and cosmetic products, and 24.4% bought products recommended by internet celebrities. Lastly, only 24.3 % of the participants agreed that internet celebrities were successful people who should be followed and imitated.
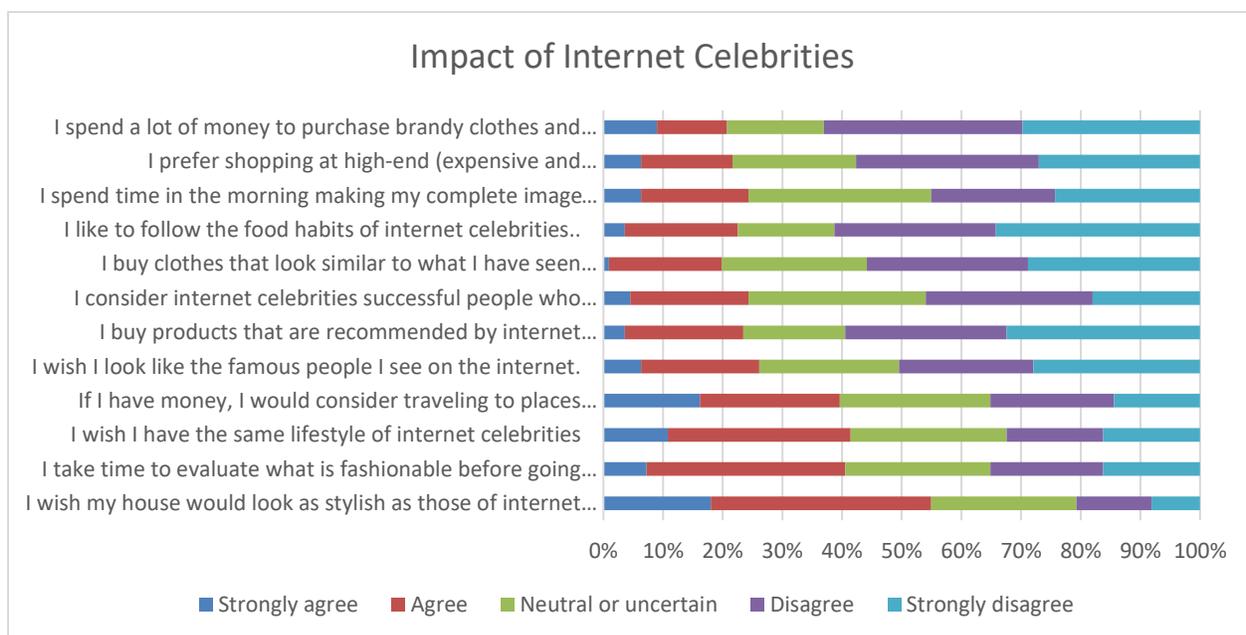

Figure 5. Impact of internet celebrities on EFL learners

Overall, the findings of the survey suggest that the majority of the respondents used social media to a great extent. YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook were the most commonly used social media platforms by EFL students. Most of them spent at least two hours per day using social media and most of them were very interested in lifestyle content, such as food and fashion. The results also indicat that 80% of the respondents had a favorite internet celebrity, yet they did not show high celebrity involvement. Only few students agreed with the celebrity involvement statements while the majority either disagreed or were neutral. Finally, according to the survey findings, the impact of internet celebrities on EFL learners was insignificant for most items. While most respondents agreed with statements about celebrity housing and décor, fashion, and travelling, only few of them agreed with the remaining statements about different aspects of celebrity lifestyle. A discussion of these findings will be included in the following section.

Discussion

This study sought to answer the following research questions: To what extent are Algerian EFL learners exposed to social media? To what extent do Algerian EFL learners interact with Internet celebrities? And to what extent do internet celebrities influence Algerian EFL learners? The results of the data analysis revealed that EFL learners are exposed to social media to a great extent as 69% of them spent more than two hours daily on social media. The results also demonstrated that most EFL learners have favorite internet celebrities (80%), yet their celebrity involvement was very low. Likewise, the impact of celebrity involvement on EFL learners was found to be weak and limited to specific aspects, such as housing, fashion, and travelling. These findings are discussed below in the light of the reviewed literature.

First, as the results above suggest, Algerian EFL learners were highly exposed to social media in their different forms. This fact is bolstered by the extended time most of them spend using social media every day (more than two hours). It had become a part of their daily life. Additionally, they used all types of social media to varying extents. Yet, the most frequently used social media platforms were YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. This is not surprising as these three platforms scored the highest percentages in the Algerian media landscape reports in 2020 (BBC Media Action, 2020). As suggested by previous studies, the results indicate that most EFL learners did use social media to improve their English (56%) in addition to staying up-to-date with current news and events (64%) and staying in touch with friends (55%). This ties up with the earlier findings that EFL learners commonly and naturally use social media as a learning vehicle since they allow them to do many things, such as collaborating with peers, organizing their projects, and exchanging information (Bosch, 2009; Madge et al. 2009; Selwyn, 2009; Hamat & Abu Hassan, 2019).

Second, one of the effects of using social media is getting so attached to internet celebrities or what is called *celebrity involvement*. The findings suggest that Algerian EFL learners were not very involved. As indicated by the results, the percentages of the students who disagreed with the FIC statements are higher than the percentages of those who agreed with them in most of the items. However, a considerable fraction of them felt so happy to watch, read, and follow the news and the life updates of their FIC, which indicates some degree of celebrity involvement.

Third, Celebrity involvement, in return, affects social media users in different ways. It can even change their beliefs and attitudes (Uzuegbunam, 2017; Kavakci & Kraeplin, 2017; Juntiwasarakij, 2018). The findings of this study further support previous literature and emphasize the influence of social media in general and internet celebrities in particular. Although the influence is not apparent in all the items, the results indicate that EFL learners have been affected in some way by internet celebrities. The majority of the EFL learners wanted to have the same lifestyle as internet celebrities. A significant proportion of the students liked the style of housing of internet celebrities, wished to visit the same places as them, and aspired to look as fashionable as them. These results corroborate the existing research about celebrity influence on users' materialistic values (Chan & Zhang, 2007). They also support Xu and Pratt's idea that celebrities have the potential to direct their followers' visit intentions toward the endorsed destinations.

The results revealed a growing cultural phenomenon in the Algerian university due to pervasive internet celebrity among Algerian students. Algerian EFL learners, the most exposed people to foreign social media, are being transformed into individuals similar to those they see on mobile screens. This represents a challenge to Algerian cultural and social practices. Contemplating these issues, we should raise the need for media literacy skills. Media literacy should be integrated in EFL academic programs, not only as a way of incorporating media in the classroom, but also as an instrument for analyzing multiple layers of media messages.

Conclusion

To sum up, this paper contributes to existing but limited literature about the impact of social media in EFL context. The findings suggest that Algerian EFL learners, more than other users, are exposed to social networks on a daily basis due to their usefulness and efficiency as an informal language learning vehicle. It is also found that they are very interested in other content, such as fashion and cooking, which makes them continuously influenced by social media celebrities. Online celebrities, on the other hand, affect them in multiple ways and shape the way they dress, speak, and act. However, this study has some limitations. Since the findings were drawn from a small sample from the department of English in one Algerian University, it is feared that they are not widely generalized. Moreover, this study relied on the questionnaire, as the main data collection instrument, which is not sufficient for exploring this social phenomenon. More varied instruments, such as interviews and focus groups, would generate more insightful data about EFL learners' habits and attitudes. The generated data provide the raw material for further research that should dig deeper into the phenomenon. More research should be carried out about the impact of this technological revolution on EFL learners beyond the classroom. This may include how they think about themselves, their culture, and their identity.

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