Social media and its impact on Tunisian teens and youth: Teachers` perspective

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Abstract

This study broadly aims at probing into the impact of social media on the Tunisian society. It does so by particularly investigating how Tunisian teachers view social media and its influence on Tunisian teens and youth. A mixed questionnaire of fifteen closed-ended and two open-ended questions is used for a random sample of teachers to fill out online. The analysis of the questionnaire demonstrates that Tunisian teachers have a significantly critical outlook on social media. First, they strongly believe that not only does social media have a negative impact on teens and youth`s lives, but rather it controls their thoughts and way of life. Second, Tunisian teachers believe that, by agency of fashion and entertainment influencers, social media has become a social and moral authority that determines what is morally and socially acceptable in Tunisian society. That is the constitutive social power of social media, which is, also, considered by the participants in this study as one of the main causes of moral decadence. At last, Tunisian teachers view social media as a medium for propagating and perpetuating western cultural values within teens and youth. What is academically more significant is that the findings of this study are consistent with numerous other studies. Specifically, the idea that social media controls reality and how we perceive it, that it constitutes an ideological apparatus that molds our thoughts and practices, and that is run by western ideologies and agendas is well established across multiple studies dealing with social media and its impact on culture and youth.

1. Introduction

Leaving aside its crude definition as a tool for creating and transmitting a message, media is an ideological tool (Henslin, 2008; Orbe, 2013; Lule, 2015; Havens & Lotz, 2017). This ideological tool exercises power and define and redefine reality and culture at its will (Miliband, 1979; Postman, 1993; Chomsky, 2001; Chomsky & Herman, 2008; Curtis, 2016). Subsequently, it can be postulated that media, ideology, power, and culture are a quadripartite concomitant. Social media, which "can be broadly defined as the set of interactive Internet applications that facilitate (collaborative or individual) creation, curation, and sharing of user-generated content" (Davis, 2016, p. 1), is part of a similar, yet drastically more powerful and effectual quadripartite. In other words, social media, via its algorithms, serves as an ideological tool for certain ideologies (Chun, 2004; Lanier, 2010; Lazer, 2015) that use its platforms to exercise power and promote certain ideology (Beer, 2017; Amer & Noujaim, 2019; Orlowski, 2020; Flisfeder, 2021). Of these ideologies perpetuated by social media is the body culture ideology manifested in the the sexualization of young girls and the objectification of women (Engeln; 2017; Davis, 2018; Feltman, 2018; Kennedy, 2020; Catherine, 2021; Paasonen, Attwood, McKee, et al., 2021; Stuwe, Wegner, & Prommer, 2022; Yang, 2022; Lorenz, 2023). This body ideology is initially procreated by conventional media and social media is just pressing on with it, amplifying and fine-tuning it. Another ideology that dictates the design and the functionality of social media algorithms is the neoliberalism capitalism that pushes for antisocial behaviors and the commodification of the self on social media platforms to generate more profit within the attention economy, as Flisfeder (2021) extensively explains. Other researchers, particularly non-western, put forth an argument that social media is an apparatus for western hegemony used to further disseminate western values and lifestyle, which has its toll on the fabric and the durability of local culture.

2. Media

It can be argued that a down-to-earth classic definition of media is that it is a medium for creating and transferring a message to an audience (Pearce, 2009). This simple definition has seen various adaptations, or even mutations by reason of the technological advances that has been modifying media, both in form and content (Henslin, 2008; Pearce, 2009; West & Turner, 2010). Despite all the shifts, a common thread in all the changing definitions persists, which is that media is "the process by which a person, group of people, or large organization creates a message and transfers it through some type of medium to a large, anonymous, heterogeneous audience" (Pearson, 2009. p. 622- 623).

Media is, also, defined from other angles. Form a sociological perspective, it is dealt with as a dominant socialization apparatus that drastically interferes with our education, self-concept, and worldview (Henslin, 2008). The ideological angle of media is summed up in the following question: "what are the underlying messages in media content, and whose interests do these messages serve?" (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 279). In other words, how does media content shape and define what is appropriate and acceptable for people and whose interest does this

serve?   (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019). This ideological impact of media is stressed by many researchers, like Oswald (2009), Gershon (2010), West and Turner (2010), Orbe (2013) and others who assert that media defines reality and that fending off its influence is "an impossible thing to do" (Orbe, 2013, p. 236).

3. Ideology and media

Ideology is concomitant to power, and media or discourse are the means of that power. For Thompson (1990, p. 7), ideology is defined as "meaning in the service of power", and, for Fairclough (1995, p. 44), it "involves the representation of 'the world' from the perspective of a particular interest", that is creating meaning of the world from the perspective of power. In not so much a different fashion, Kellner (1995) approaches ideology in relation to media and culture. He considers culture as a fluctuating ground on which different ideologies compete for supremacy and for sustaining and reshaping power relations. The agents of this ideological altercation are "images, discourses, myths, and the spectacles of media culture" (Kellner, 1995, p. 2).

The upper hand or the dominant ideology in this altercation has always been the ideology of the ruling class, and more accurately the ideology that this class wants to spread (Miliband, 1979; Postman, 1993). Put differently, the group that owns the means of media production owns and manages the means of thought control (Miliband, 1979; Postman, 1993; Chomsky, 2001; Chomsky & Herman, 1988), or of 'awareness management', as the CIA calls it (Curtis, 2016). In plain terms, media conglomerates are the ones who give meaning to the world, who define reality, and who manage the public awareness. All this boils down to showcasing that the entanglement of media and ideology is thick and bona fide.

4. Culture

Different definitions of the concept of culture are found in the literature. Most of them revolve around the idea that culture is the ensemble of language, ideas, beliefs, behaviors, and norms specific to a group of people sharing a territory. A more accurate and archetypical definition to this sociological phenomenon is offered by Tylor (1871) in his formative work *Primitive Culture*. In it, he demarcates culture as " that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society" (Tylor, 1871, p. 1). In a similar, yet more compact fashion, Lederach (1995, p 9) defines culture as "the learned and shared behavior of a community of interacted human beings". The essence of those, more or less, remote definitions is still detected in the extant literature. For instance, Varnum and Grossman (2017) state that culture is "a set of ideas, beliefs, norms, and behaviors shared by or common to a group inhabiting a geographical location" (p. 2). The last thing that bears stressing with this regard is that the different elements that make up the matrix of culture are not stagnant; they are liable to change and are shifting (Tylor, 1871; Malinowski, 1935; Escobar, 2001; Spencer-Oatey, 2008; Salawu, 2009; Crane, 2011; Varnum & Grossmann, 2017; Pandia, 2018).

5. Media, ideology and culture

Media as a vessel or a medium for ideology has a drastic impact on culture. This is a fact driven home by numerous researchers. To name just a few would include: Ewen (1976); Chomsky and Herman(1988); Chomsky(2001);Oswald(2009); Curtis(2016); Havens and Lots(2017); Russo(2020), and others. To start with, Russo (2020) affirms that media`s organic ability to affect large scale shifts in culture has been the hallmark of media since the conception of the radio. In his investigation of the impact of radio on culture, he concludes that "mass advertisement, national news and shows" broadcast on the radio between 1924 and 1940 "played a key role in breaking down geographical and cultural barriers to create a common national identity around white native culture" (Russo, 2020, p. 40).

With the invention of the TV, commercialized media emerged and, as Chomsky and Herman (1988) note, it managed to transform the American culture into a different culture: consumer culture. This intrinsic aptitude of media to disseminate a particular way of life, worldview or ideology instead of another has been given a thrust by media companies that have "diversified beyond the media field, and non-media companies have established a strong presence in the mass media" (Chomsky & Herman, 1988, p. 12). Put differently, media companies have become business companies that use media to serve their own interests, ideologies and that of their shareholders (Chomsky & Herman, 1988; Havens & Lots, 2017).

This cosubstantive interpenetrative triad- media, ideology and culture- operate not only on the local culture. Having the world`s top 10 media companies and top 10 news companies in the U.S.A (Seth, 2022) does have heavy bearings on non-American and non-western cultures. Those media conglomerates control the means of information and information itself; thus becoming the "cultural gatekeepers" of the world that "groom our tastes and shape the programming we enjoy" (Havens & Lots, 2017, p. 186). Haven and Lots (2017), also, accentuate that frequently watching or following entertainment outputs, particularly, television programs that "incorporate foreign styles and production practices", has caused "the loss of one`s distinct national culture and its replacement with global commercial culture that values consumption over anything else" (p. 239). This propagation of western lifestyle and practices, via media and other means, has led to what several researchers call cultural imperialism. A term that initially emerged in colonial times, but, in the globalized age, it is conceived of as the domination or subjugation of non-western local cultures by the American culture and its values and lifestyle (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1998; Havens & Lots, 2017; Hsu, 2017).

It stands to reason to say that this culture-shifting trait inheres media since the invention of the radio and the TV technology. This is owing to the simple fact that that "a new technology does not add or subtract something. It changes everything" (Postman, 1993, p. 18). This technology logic entails that the advent and rise of series and movies platforms, like Netflix or Amazon, "have only sped up the process of change" and added more momentum to it (Havens &

Lots, 2017, p. 239). By the same analogy, social media has changed everything and has taken cultural change to a groundbreaking and alarming level.

6. Social media

Prior to defining social media, it is imperative to draw the line between it and conventional media, dealt with in the previous sections. Safco and Brake (2009) assert that the most evident distinction is that conventional media is a 'one-way street'. The newspaper, the TV, or the billboards share the content with an audience that is passive, in the sense that it cannot react and interact instantly with the content (Safco & Brake, 2009). Social media, on the other hand, the same researchers elucidate, is a 'tow-way street, allowing the public`s reaction and interaction to be instant and their narrative to be heard. This basic distinction is only the tip of the iceberg. Social media has several other key features that sets it apart from any other form of media.

Taking up defining social media, several researchers claim that social media is challenging to define due to its rapidly evolving nature (Fox & McEwan, 2019). To start with, Boyd and Ellison (2008) conceive of social media as websites that allow users to create and profile profiles, build relations and exchange content. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), on the other hand, define it as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (p. 61). In a similar fashion, Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre (2011, p. 241) argue that social media "employ[s] mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content" (p. 241). A common thread runs through all those definitions, and it is that social media is an internet-based applications that let people interact in various ways.

A more thorough and extensive definition of social media is provided by Fox and McEwan (2019). They ground their understanding on the affordances that are idiosyncratic to social media. Those affordances, as they report, are many, and the most important of which are: interactivity, accessibility, visibility and personalization. First, social media, Fox and McEwan (2019) elucidate, offers two layers of interactivity: interacting with a responsive interface or application, and interacting with others using this application. Second, it is ever-present, effortlessly accessible and functional, regardless of time, place, or any other particularities (Fox & McEwan, 2019). The third and fourth main affordances of social media are personalization and visibility. Social media allows users to personalize their content as they want, and it offers visibility to their shared content with the option of controlling the audience (Fox & McEwan, 2019). Other social media-specific affordances underscored by the same researchers involve: anonymity and identifiability, synchronicity, editability, and permanence of messages and content. It bears stressing here that social media as a new technology has changed everything, the same way its Radio and TV predecessors did.

6.1. Social media and ideology

Fusing ideology into programs and softwares, it can be argued, has been uncloaked by Wendy Chun (2004). Chun (2004) asserts that a "software is a functional analog to ideology" and that "computers understood as comprising softwares and hardwares are ideology machines" (p. 43). The same can be said about the algorithms that constitute social media. A simple definition of algorithms is that they are "programs that size us up, evaluate what we want, and provide a customized experience." (Lazer, 2015, p. 1090).

While Lazer`s (2015) definition stresses the intelligence of social media algorithms, other researchers` underscore their ideological aspect and function. They affirm that social media software and algorithms have a society and reality-changing power. Lanier (2010), a distinguished computer scientist and computer philosophy writer, for instance, states that a "software expresses ideas about everything from the nature of a musical note to the nature of personhood" (p. 1) and that those ideas via algorithms "are solidified into effectively permanent reality" (p. 5). In an identical fashion, Beer (2017) postulates that algorithms are "taking on some constitutive or performative role in ordering that world on our behalf." (p.4). He further explains that this constitutive social power of algorithms is not ideology-free. Rather, it has "outcomes in mind, outcomes influenced by commercial or other interests and agendas" (Beer, 2017, p. 4). Those agendas are achieved via the control of information feeds, a control that shapes our desire and choice (Beer, 2017; Flisfeder, 2021). The upshot is that ideology holds the strings that code algorithms and, thus, the social media platforms within which these algorithms function.

This ideological side of algorithms is factually illustrated in Amer and Noujaim` (2019) and Orlowski` (2020) documentaries, *The Great Hack* and *The Social Dilemma*, respectively. In the former, Brittany Kaiser, a former business development director for the big data company Cambridge Analytica, blows the whistle on how the company used certain algorithms and exploited facebook users` data to manipulate the 2016 presidential election in the favor of Donald Trump. This showcases how algorithms are designed to serve certain political goals and ideologies. In *The Social Dilemma*, Orlowski (2020) breaks down, in technical details, how algorithms are calculatedly designed to evaluate users` preferences, regulate their social media feeds to those preferences, and eventually turn common users into hyper-dependent users. A darker reality of social media is brought to light by the hotshot Silicon Valley techs interviewed in this documentary. They all warn how algorithms can be subversively used to stir social unrests or even ignite a civil war in a country. In other words, and as pointed at by *The Great Hack* as well, social media algorithms can lend themselves to serve political agendas, agendas that can be cataclysmic.

Now, what ideology or ideologies control the algorithms? Flisfeder (2021), for example, affirms that it is the neoliberal capitalism ideology that controls and propels social media algorithms. In addition to managing people`s opinions, desires, and tastes of everything in life from the social, to the cultural, the political and even the economic (Steiner, 2012; Lazer, 2015; Diakopoulus, 2016; Beer, 2017; Orlowski, 2020), Flisfeder (2021) stresses that the antisocial

spirit of neoliberalism is the fundamental ideology of social media. He argues that at first glance it appears that social media "is ruining our lives and is making us *anti*social" (p. 56), while in fact "capitalism is ruining our lives, not social media; capitalism is making us antisocial" (p. 56-57), because it is the one pulling the strings, i.e. algorithms, of social media (Flisfeder, 2021). The same researcher elucidates the cogent link between neoliberalism and materialism, or the objectification of man. He advances that "what the neoliberal subject produces is not the Self as subject, but the Self as object. Investing in one's own "human capital" is the production of the Self as object- commodity" and that "Like *Gone Girl*, social media shows us that reified appearances of the Self, our objectification, is one of the historical conditions and effects of neoliberalism" (Flisfeder, 2021, p. 159). This objectification is starkly detected in the body culture and the sexualization of children on social media.

6.2. Social media, body culture and the sexualization of children

If conventional media is conceived of as a socialization tool and a powerful device for engendering cultural shifts (Chomsky & Herman, 1988; Postman, 1993; Curtis, 2016; Havens & Lots, 2017; Russo, 2020), then social media is viewed as a hyper-socialization tool with a dreadful impact on people and culture. This altitude in impact is by dint of the idiosyncratic features of social media. Adding to the insidiously intelligent nature of its algorithms, social media is ever-present, idly accessible and has all sorts of content (Fox & McEwan, 2019), contrary to conventional media which is more localized and restricted in content and accessibility.

Before talking about body culture and the sexualization of children as part and parcel of the impacts of social media, it bears stressing that they were initially propagated by conventional media and that social media is just a continuation to this pre-established trend or agenda (Bessenoff, 2006; Zurbriggen, Collins, Lamb, et al., 2007; Ward, 2016; Engeln, 2017). Multiple researchers, like Engeln (2017), Davis (2018), Feltman (2018), Paasonen, et al., (2021), and Venditto, Set, and Amaambo (2022) underscore how social media is a tool for objectifying women. The same studies and others, like Llovet, Diaz-Bustamante and Karan (2017), Catherine (2021), and Van Oosten (2021), focus on the sexualization of children and argue that it is alarmingly propagating all social media platforms. It is worth reiterating, here, that this sexualization ideology is not the offspring of social media, but rather of conventional media, and that social media has just given it a big thrust and momentum (Engeln, 2017; Kennedy, 2020; Paasonen et, al,. 2021).

Instagram, Tiktok and Snapchat are the front-runners of today`s body culture (Van Oosten, Vandenbosch& Peter, 2017; Feltman, 2018; Kennedy, 2020; Paasonen et, al., 2021). As Van Oosten et al. (2017, p. 149) assert, they are "platforms in which both the exposure to and the production of sexual content take place". Not only do they set unrealistic metrics of beauty, sending women into an endless chase of beauty, but they, also, objectify women: they only exist to be looked at and to be evaluated by their looks (Engeln, 2017; Feltman, 2018; Paasonen et, al., 2021). In other words, and to use Engeln`s (2017) term, women and girls have become 'beauty

sick'. Highlighting this magnificent impact of social media, Engeln (2017) states that we "cannot pretend that what we see in the media doesn't shape our thoughts and behaviors" and that "We are *all* affected by these images. Their influence is insidious, and there is no magic force field to keep it out." (p. 121).

What is grimmer and more alarming about social media is its sexualization of children, especially teenage girls (Engeln, 2017; Feltman, 2018; Zuo &Wang, 2019; Kennedy, 2020; Van Oosten et al., 2017; Guo, 2021; Paasonen et al., 2021; Yang, 2022). Most of the studies investigating this issues fixate on Intagram and Tik Tok as the two mostly used visual-based applications where sexual content is traded. To start with, Engeln (2017), in her seminal book *Beauty Sick*, argues that social media, particularly, Instagram "teaches young girls that learning to apply make-up is a more important skill than learning to do science or math" (p. 18). This self-sexualization and objectification to feel accepted is visible in young girls reactions to the photos they share: "By watching patterns of likes and comments, young girls learn quickly which photos are acceptable to their peers. Tween and teen girls report frantically deleting pictures that aren't getting enough likes, determined to post something better another day" (Engeln, 2017, p. 148). Stated differently, Instagram rendered childhood sexualization "rationalized and accepted into nearly every young girl`s life" (Catherine, 2021, p. 34). Catherine (2021), also, points to the dilemma that social media creates for both young girls and grown women. While young girls "are expected to appear older, more mature, and sexy", grown women "are expected to appear youthful and hairless" (Catherine, 2021, p. 34). All this boils down to one conclusion, agreed upon by many researchers: young and sexy are the only metrics of beauty.

On Tik Tok, being "an app with a strong focus on bodies" (Stuwe, et al., p. 34) makes it by design a tool for objectifying and sexualizing women and girls (Van Oosten et al., 2017; Kennedy, 2020; Dekhil&Sarnou, 2021; Liu, 2021; Stuwe et al., 2022; Yang, 2022). For starters, Kennedy (2020) takes note of the prevalent bedroom-dancing videos of girls on Tik Tok, with their clothes, shoes and dressing table in the background. This unorthodox novel trend of private content videos can be perceived as a mediatic construction of reality and normality. This normality hinges upon blurring privacy and promoting "TikTok`s particular aesthetic of goofiness and relatability" (Kennedy, 2020, p. 1072). Within the same vein, Stuwe et al. (2022), in their examination of German girl TikTokers, reveal that most of them "present themselves in skimpy clothing (e.g. with their stomach and legs exposed)", contrary to 97% of men who dress casually in their videos on TikTok (p. 34). Furthermore, the same researchers demonstrate that girls have a distinct propensity to self-sexualize themselves by displaying sexually suggestive body and facial movements and gestures: S body posture, hip movement, and pouting lips. The last means "for the alluring presentation of bodies is also reflected in the use of make-up" by the vast majority of female TikTokers (Stuwe et al., 2022, p. 34), a skill that young girls cannot do without amidst this beauty sick mania of social media (Engeln, 2017). It bears stressing that, although the sexualization of teens and girls is most visible on Tik Tok, all social media apps, form Instagram, to Snapchat, Twitter, and Facebook, are apps with a spotlight on the body (Van Oosten et al., 2017; Kennedy, 2020; Guo, 2021; Stuwe et al., 2022; Yang, 2022).

6.3. Social media and other impacts on culture

Social media has several detrimental impacts on everyone across culturally. Guo (2021), examining the influence of Tik Tok on teenagers in China, concludes that Tik Tok damages teens` perception of important values, like happiness. It is purely material for them: possessing things and leisure pursuit (Guo, 2021). This perception is "in line with the 'beauty, fashion and funny' of TikTok platform" (Zuo & Wang, 2019, p. 5). Aesthetic fatigue is another deleterious impact of social media, emphasized by Guo (2021) and other researchers. It simply means that when exposed to the same stimulus repeatedly, monotony takes matter and boredom kicks in (Xu & Zhao, 2023). In more technical neurological terms, social media apps "produce the same neural circuity that is caused by gambling and recreational drugs to keep consumers using their products as much as possible" (Cheik, 2022, p. 1). This dopamine feedback loop "continues as the addict seeks out the source of his addiction, and the brain responds by producing less and less dopamine after each hit", or after each notification, video, or post (Alter, 2017, p. 57). To further elaborate, Alter (2017) cites Tristan Harris, a design ethicist, who affirms that it is not that users don't have the willpower to break this loop, but that "there are a thousand people on the other side of the screen whose job it is to break down the self-regulation you have" (p. 10). Looking at things form another perspective, Mujica, Crowell, Villano and Uddin (2022) point out to the link between the "compulsive engagement with social media apps" and the financial incentives behind their addictive design (p. 7). They plainly assert that when "users spend more time on the platforms, more advertisements are shown, and more revenue is generated" (Mujica et al., 2022, p. 12). This is the attention economy: making profits from users` attention (Fuchs, 2015).

Other impacts of social media are more pertinent to culture per se and the very fabric of society. Radwan (2017), investigating the impact of social media on 360 rural Egyptian people, concludes that those users by reason of social media have adopted values alien to the Egyptian culture. He states that values of individualism and separateness have become apparent in a society that is known of its connectedness and communities values. In a similar high context culture (Rosenberg, 2004), Dekhil and Sarnou (2021) examine the influence of Tik Tok`s non-verbal language, as smirks, winks, pouting lips, tongue and cheeks gestures, and hips movement, on Algerian adolescents. Their study yields to the conclusion that the propagation of those body kinesics on Tik Tok has a baneful impact on teens` local cultural values and behaviors as most of them are vulgar and sexually suggestive; thus, at odds with the Algerian culture (Dekhil&Sarnou, 2021). They are in congruence only with one type of culture: the sexy body culture.

Having the same focus, Chima and Oneyma (2019) and Mukhtar O. and Ganiyat K. (2022) have looked into the impact of social media on Nigerian culture and value system. The two studies yielded to similar results: that social media platforms threaten the cultural, social, and ethical fabric of the Nigerians. Chima and Oneyma (2019), for instance, argues that, by way of social media, the family value system is breaking down. The father figure is defanged, ripped of its deference, reverence, and authority, and decency values have lost ground to promiscuity (Chima &Oneyma, 2019). This moral decadence caused by social media is more underscored by

Mukhtar O. and Ganiyat K. (2022). They advance that social media platforms propagate pervert sexual behaviors that are alien to and in diametric opposition to the Nigerian culture. Such behaviors involve 'lesbianism', 'homosexualism' and pornography, as the two researchers state.

Several other studies validate this value-shifting impact of social media. Of these studies, we can mention: Peters` (2013) study on facebook`s influence on Namibian society; Bhatti et al. (2016) who examine the impact of mass media and social media on Lahore colleges` students; and Melaku and Kirubakaran`s (2021) study on the impact of social media on Ethiopian and African students. Those studies, and their like, stress how social media is the driving force for local cultural change. It propels youngsters to adopt western trends, ways of life, and value system. In short, non-western cultural values are the goat slaughtered at the altar of social media`s western neo-liberal values.

Western cultures are not immune to similar impacts. Diaz-Bustamente-Ventisca and Llovet-Rodriguez (2017), for instance, investigate how Spanish adults look at the sexualization of girls on Instagram. Their survey concludes that "the sexualized photographs of girls damages and undermines the general image that society has of childhood" (Diaz-Bustamente-Ventisca& Llovet-Rodriguez, 2017, p. 83). Put differently, young girls are no longer looked at innocently, i.e. non-sexually. In the same study, it is stressed that this unnatural precipitated passage from childhood to adolescence can cause serious mental health damages and disorders for young girls, as they "are neither physically nor psychologically prepared for it" (Diaz-Bustamente-Ventisca& Llovet-Rodriguez, 2017, p. 79). In a likewise fashion, Sheldon, Rauschnabel, and Honeycutt (2019), in their book *The Dark Side of Social Media*, point to the obsession with sex and sexuality as one of the fallouts of social media. They, also, report numerous studies that reveal how cyberbullying, sexting, and sextortion have become omnipresent among American teens, and how cyber emotional and sexual infidelity has proliferated American family and society. Within the same line, Nelson (2018) accentuates that social media platforms "operate on our sense of personal identity, community, and, at a more fundamental level, our morality" (p. 159) and that they make American teens and people slip into immorality easily. Other impacts on American girls, reported by Stephanie (2016) in her commentary on the American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, include "decreased cognitive functioning (e.g., impaired ability to concentrate), worsened physical and mental health (e.g., eating disorders, low self-esteem, depression), unrealistic expectations about sexuality, and reductionist beliefs of women as sexual objects" (p. 14). This cultural shift in how girls dress and appear and in how they are looked at by men, as emphasized earlier, is initiated by conventional media but it is heightened and fine-tuned by social media.

7. Methodology

This section deals with the sampling procedures and the research instrument opted for in this investigation. Clearly, a rationale for each methodological decision is provided.

7.1. Population and sampling

The population targeted in this investigation is secondary school teachers. It is the most convenient as it perfectly aligns with the purpose of this study: the impact of social media on teens and youth. Secondary school teachers are acute observers and eye witnesses to the changes that teens and youth undergo over the years, particularly amid the social media emergence and dominance. It can, also, be argued that since teachers share the same environment with the students, they both have a close and, sometimes, intimate relationship. This proximity makes the teachers the best judge of character and change.

7.1.1. Sampling

The consensus among researcher is that there are basically two types of sampling. They are probability and non-probability sampling. The selection of any of which ultimately aims at aptly providing an insight into or answering the research questions of the investigation (Teddlie & Yu, 2007; Etikan& Babatope, 2019; Polas, 2024). More importantly, sampling is pivotal in any research because it is through it that "the conclusion is generalized to the population" (Etikan& Babatope, 2019, p. 50). The same is accentuated by Polas (2024, p. 1) who affirms that sampling "affects the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the study's conclusions".

Although motivated by the same objective, probability and non-probability sampling are quite distinct. To start with, probability sampling is customarily used in quantitative research, it is based on randomization and aims at achieving representativeness (Teddlie & Yu, 2007; Battaglia, 2008; Etikan& Babatope, 2019; Polas, 2024). This representativeness of the population is attained via a randomization that gives every member of the targeted population "a known non-zero chance of being selected" (Battaglia, 2008, p. 523). Three methods are mostly known in random sampling: random sampling, stratified sampling, and cluster sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007; Battaglia, 2008; Etikan& Babatope, 2019; Polas, 2024). Another note to add to this brief description of random sampling is that its sample is more likely to be more representative than any other non-probability sample.

The hallmark of non-probability sampling is that it does not involve randomization (Teddlie & Yu, 2007; Battaglia, 2008; Etikan& Babatope, 2019; Polas, 2024). It can be simply defined as ""the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities that the participant possesses" (Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim, 2015, p. 2). Others state that it is a "subjective method" (Battaglia, 2008, p. 523) or technique that "is based on researcher preference and discretion" (Etikan& Babatope, 2019, p. 52). Although more limited, "the information-rich cases" selected via random sampling (Battaglia, 2008, p. 169) often provide "a greater depth" and a more thorough understanding of the investigated issue (Teddlie & Yu, 2007, p. 87). Quota sampling, purposive sampling, criterion sampling, snow ball sampling, and convenience sampling are the most common methods of non-probability sampling (Pattan, 1990; Teddlie & Yu, 2007; Battaglia, 2008; Etikan et al., 2015; Etikan& Babatope, 2019).

7.1.2. Random sampling in the study

It has already been mentioned and explained that the population of this study is Tunisian secondary school teachers. Those teachers are randomly selected online to participate in a questionnaire about the impact of social media on Tunisian teens and youth. Yet, none of the conventional means of random sampling are opted for: no drawing numbers or names from a box, nor a random number software generator or algorithm. The questionnaire of the study was posted on a Facebook page of Tunisian secondary school teachers and all the teachers were asked to participate in it. No specific criteria or division for the respondents were required. All teachers of different specialties, geographies, backgrounds, genders, and age could participate in the questionnaire. In other words, the researcher did not interfere in the selection of the participants in whatever way and each one was free to participate or not. That is how the sample is random in this investigation. This random participation and selection of participants has yielded to 87 teachers participating in the questionnaire and, thus, in this study.

7.2. Research instrument: online mixed questionnaire

The research instrument of this study is both quantitative and qualitative. It employs a questionnaire survey that combines both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The questionnaire survey is used on the account that it is the archetypical "means for gathering information about the characteristics, actions, or opinions of a large group of people" (Pinsonneault & Kraemer, 1993, p. 77). Moreover, it is considered "one of the efficient means of collecting data on a large-scale basis" (Zohrabi, 2013, p. 255) as it can be easily transferred or transmitted to respondents (Pinsonneault & Kraemer, 1993; Creswell, 2003; Zohrabi, 2013).

Conventionally, there are two types of questionnaires used in research: closed-ended or structured questionnaire and open-ended or unstructured questionnaire. The basic discrepancy between the two is that while the former are more objective (Zohrabi, 2013; Dawson, 2020) and "are used to generate statistics in quantitative research" (Dawson, 2020, p. 229), the latter are "used in qualitative research to gather in-depth attitudes and opinions" (Dawson, 2020, p. 288). In other words, closed-ended questionnaires provide the researcher with numerical quantitative data, whereas open-ended questionnaire with textual qualitative data (Zohrabi, 2013; Dawson, 2020; Hansen &Świderska, 2023).

Each type does have its own advantages. Closed-ended questionnaires are easier for both the participants to respond to - they select options provided by the researchers - and for the researcher to design and analyze its quantitative data (Fowler, 1995;Zohrabi, 2013; Dawson, 2020). Conversely, "the main benefit of using open-ended questions in research is that participants' responses are freely constructed rather than suggested by the options provided by the researcher" (Hansen &Świderska, 2023, p. 4803). This generates richer and more detailed data that allows for a better understanding of participants` attitudes and opinions (Fowler, 1995; Zohrabi, 2013; Dawson, 2020; Hansen &Świderska, 2023), an advantage that "otherwise might

not be possible to obtain from theory and the researchers' reasoning" (Hansen &Świderska, 2023, p. 4803).

This study opts for a mixed method approach in its collection of data. That is it integrates quantitative and qualitative elements in its questionnaire for investigating teachers` assessment of the impact of social media on students. Prior to dealing with the study`s questionnaire per se, it is essential to state that the use of mixed method research, i.e. both quantitative and qualitative methods in collecting data, is a common technique in research (Creswell, 2009; Dawson, 2020; Nagpal, Kornerup & Gibson, 2020; Dawadi, Shrestha, & Giri, 2021). This technique`s methodological advantage basically lies in "interweaving qualitative and quantitative data in such a way that research issues are meaningfully explained" (Dawadi et al., 2021, p. 25), which in turn leads to "extend and reinforce the findings of a report" (Naglal et al., 2020, p. 12).

Likewise, this study mixes closed-ended and open-ended questions in its questionnaire. This combination, as Dawson (2020, p. 288) underscores, is used "to generate statistics and to explore ideas, beliefs, and/or experiences". It gives the participants the opportunity to respond by selecting from limited researcher-provided options and, at the same time, to express themselves freely regarding a particular issue (Creswell, 2009; Dawson, 2020; Nagpal et al., 2020; Dawadi et al., 2021; Hansen &Świderska, 2023). As for the research itself, mixing closed-ended and open-ended questions gives the researcher a deeper insight and better understanding of the investigated phenomenon.

Another crucial point about this study`s questionnaire is that it is designed online via google sheets and is transmitted online via social media to participants. This use of the internet as means for collecting data from participants has permeated scientific research in multiple disciplines since its invention and the advances in communication technologies (Creswell, 2017; Fielding, Lee and Blank, 2017; Dawson, 2020; Dawadi et al., 2021; Ponchio, Barth &Zambaldi, 2021). Online questionnaires are simply defined as "questionnaires that are administered over the internet to gather data about behaviour, experiences, attitudes, beliefs and values" (Dawson, 2020, p. 288). They, along with other online methods for collecting data, "can be carried out using different interfaces that require internet browsers or a smartphone application" (Ponchio et al., 2021, p. 257).

The use of online methods, particularly online questionnaires offer several vantages for the researcher and the research itself (Creswell, 2017; Lee et al., 2017; Dawson, 2020; Dawadi et al., 2021; Ponchio et al., 2021; Keat, Gauhar, Castellani & Teoh, 2023). To start with, by reducing costs for reaching the targeted sample and reducing the waiting time for respondents to participate (Ponchio et al., 2021), the internet and smartphones have "contributed to the ever-increasing share of respondents participating in social media-based surveys via their mobile devices from anywhere and at any time" (Keat et al., 2023, p. 119-120). More significantly, online and social media has multiple research affordances. Aside the anonymity of respondents and the easier distribution and access to the sample (Keat at al., 2023), the use off the internet and social media apps allows for: the customization of the questionnaire, team collaboration in

its design, embedding content into it, sharing among participants, notification of submissions, and analysis of quantitative data (Creswell, 2017).

Those are the reasons and the rationale for using a closed-ended and open-ended online questionnaire in this study. The make-up of the questionnaire is 17 questions: 15 closed-ended and 2 open-ended questions. All the questions are in Standard Arabic only, which makes for more teachers to participate. The use of French or English would be to excluding many teachers. A sample of the questionnaire is provided in the appendix.

8. Findings

The finding section reports Tunisian teachers` answers to the different questions of the questionnaire about the impacts of social media. Given that the questionnaire has 17 questions, each question is dealt with separately. Quantitative questions` findings are sequentially transformed into figures and charts and commented on numerically and statistically, whereas qualitative questions are commented on descriptively. In certain cases, a one figure or graphic is used to showcase the findings of two questions, when they are cogently related. This is done in: Figure 2, covering questions 2 and 3; Figure 5, combining questions 5 and 6; and Figure 7, dealing with questions 8 and 9.
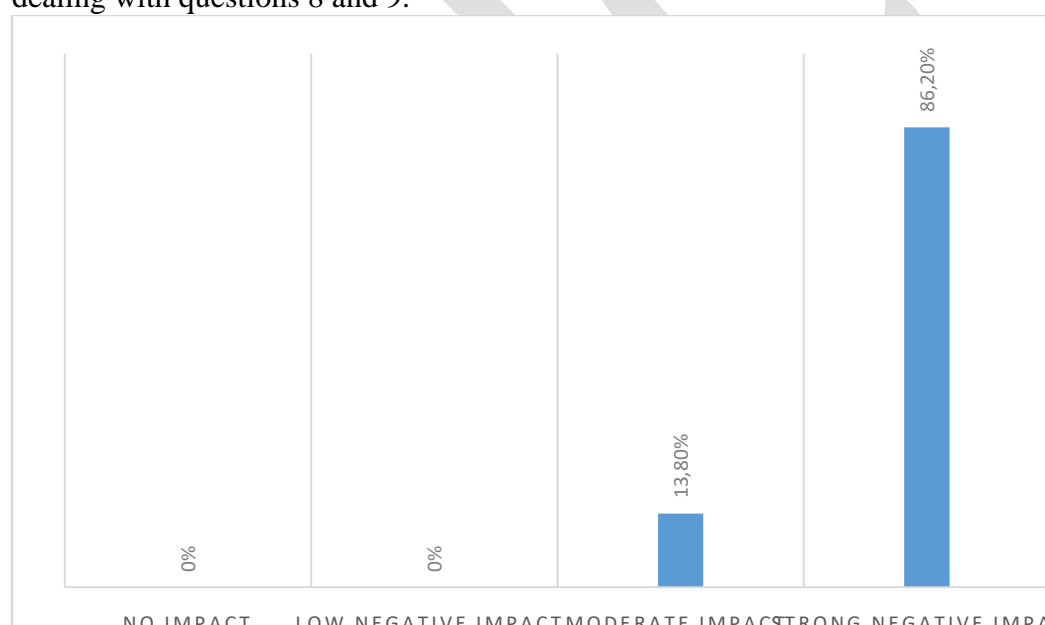

Figure 1 Tunisian teachers` assessment of social media impact

Figure 1 showcases that there is a consensus among Tunisian teachers regarding the impact of social media. First, all teachers agree that social media has an impact on teenagers and youth: none of the participants view social media as having no impact or even depicts its impact as low.

On the contrary, an absolute majority of 86.20% consider social media to have a strong negative impact, whereas the other 13.80% consider its impact as moderate. That is how teachers assess social media in terms of influence.
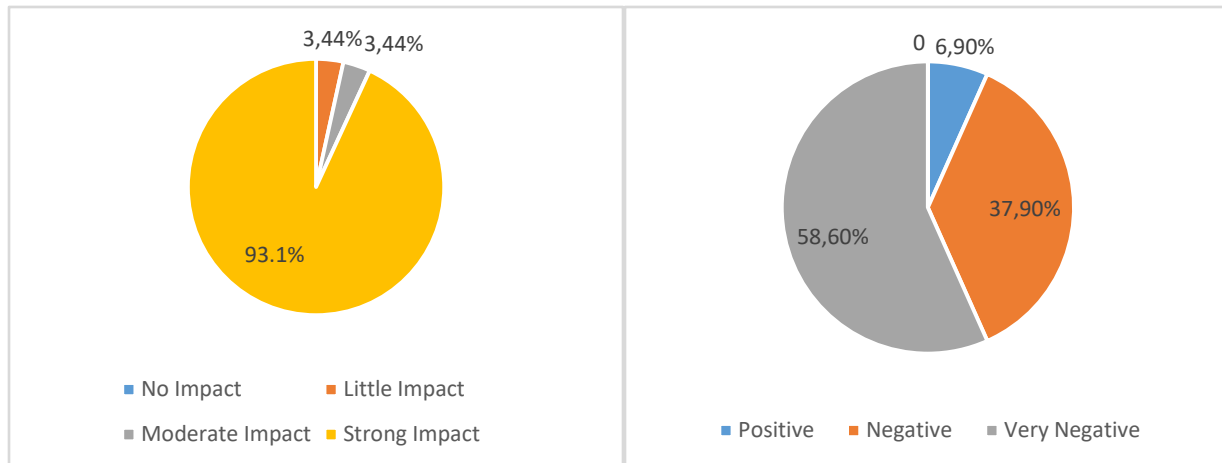

Figure 2. Social media`s influence on thought and lifestyle of teenagers and youth.

Figure 2 elucidates the impact of social media on teenagers and youth. First, as shown in Figure 1, it projects an agreement among teachers on the impact of social media on teenagers and youth`s thought and lifestyle. 93.1% of teachers believe that social media has a strong impact on those aspects, and equally 3.44% believe it has a moderate or little impact. Figure 2, also, demonstrates that 93.10% of teachers qualify this impact as negative and very negative, as opposed to 6.90% who qualify it as positive. That is how teachers assess social media`s impact on teenagers and youth`s thoughts and lifestyle: a strong and a very negative one.
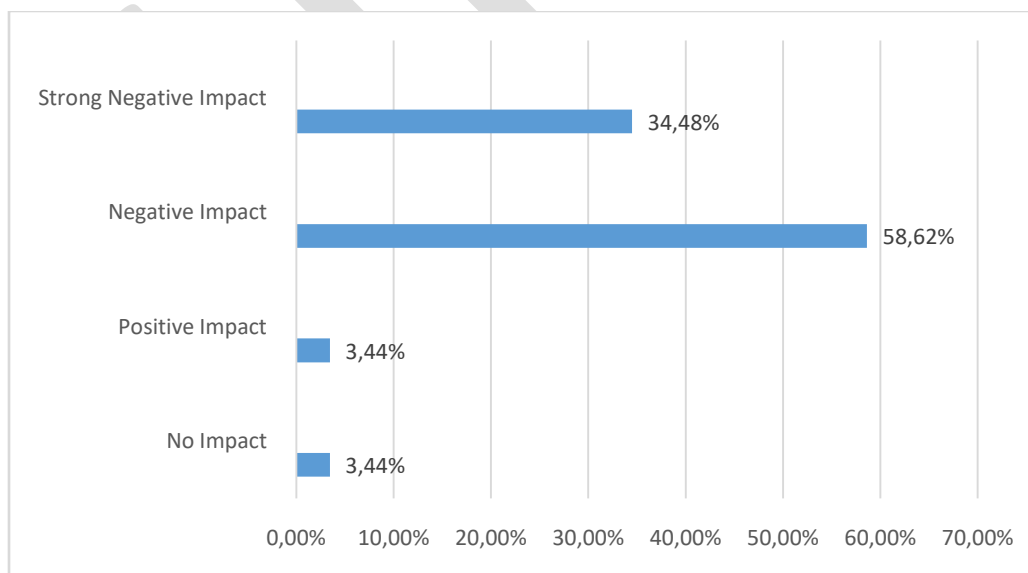

Figure 3. Social media`s impact on teenagers and youth`s social and family relations

Figure 3 focuses on the relational impact of social media. First, in a similar fashion to earlier findings, Figure 3 reflects another consensus that teachers have with regards to the impact of social media. 93% of teachers, that is 81 of the participants, agree that social media has a negative impact on teenagers and youth`s social relations with each other, with their family and with friends. 58.62% of them qualify this impact as strong and negative and not just negative. Conversely, 3.44% of teachers qualify the impact in this respect as positive and the other 3.44% believe that social media has no impact on teenagers and youth`s social and family relations.
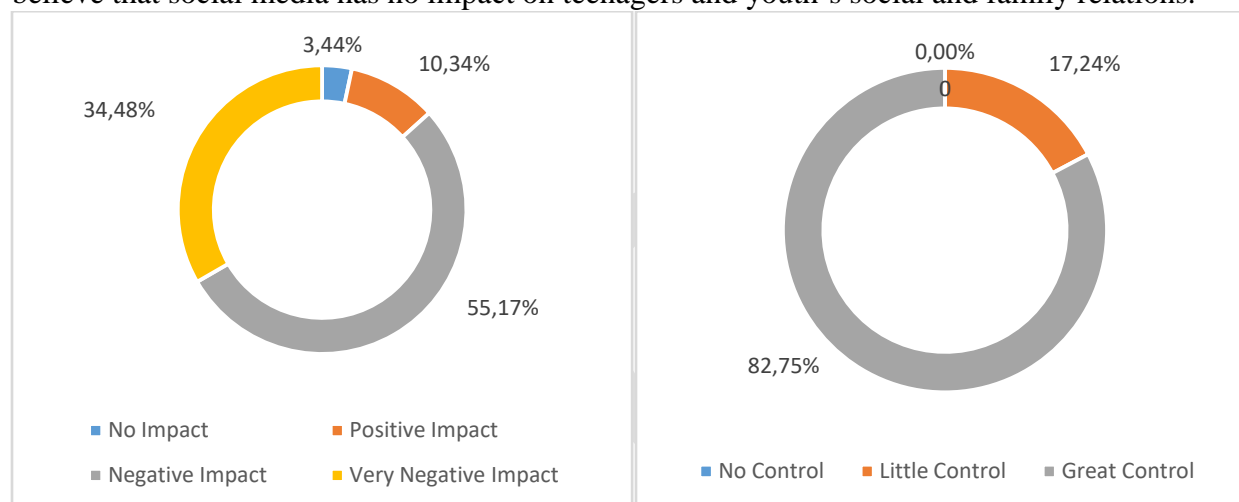

Figure 4. Social media and its impact and control of teenagers and youth`s fashion

Figure 4 displays how teachers perceive the impact of social media on teens and youth`s fashion. As seen in the first pie chart, the absolute majority of teachers concur that social media has a negative impact on fashion: while 34.48% depict its impact as negative, more 55% consider it very negative. The first pie chart, also, portrays that only 10.43% of teachers believe that social media has a positive impact on teenagers and youth`s fashion, whereas the remaining 3.44% state that it has no impact at all. In total alignment, the second pie chart in Figure 4 showcases that all teachers are of one mind believing that social media has a control over teenagers and youth`s taste of fashion. More accurately, 82.75% of teachers depict this control as great and 17.24% as little.
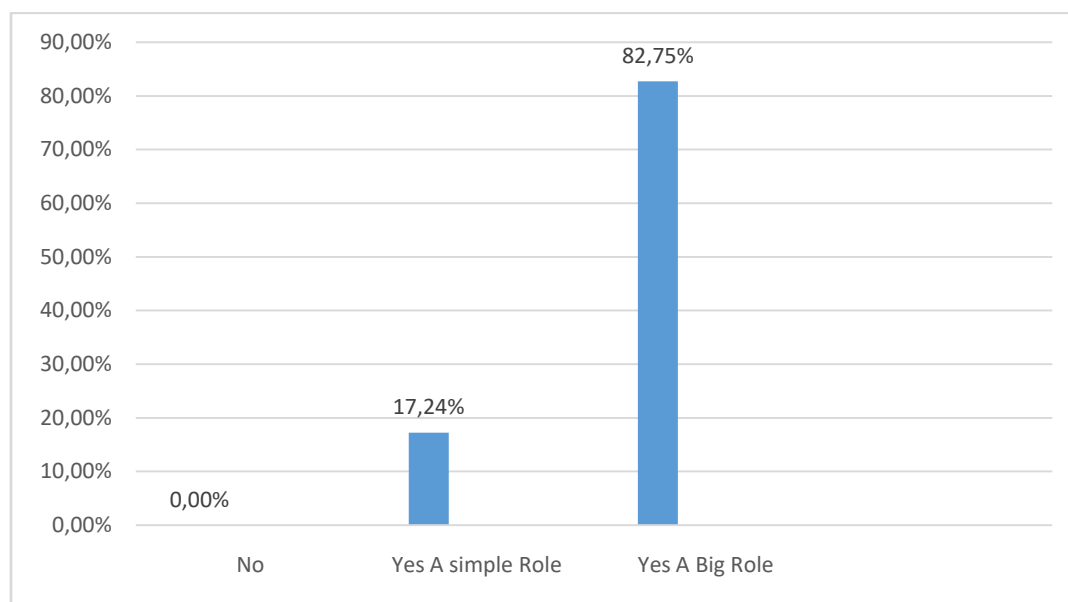
Figure 5. Social and its role in reshaping social relationships

Figure 5 fixates on whether teachers believe that social media has a role in altering and reshaping social relations, and, if yes, how do they qualify this role. The answer to the first question, as shown in Figure 5, is a consensus of yes: all teachers believe that social media plays a role in this respect. The only discrepancy within this 'yes' consensus is that while 82.75% believe that social media plays a big role in altering and reshaping the social relations of teenagers and youth, 17.24 believe that it plays a simple role in this regard.
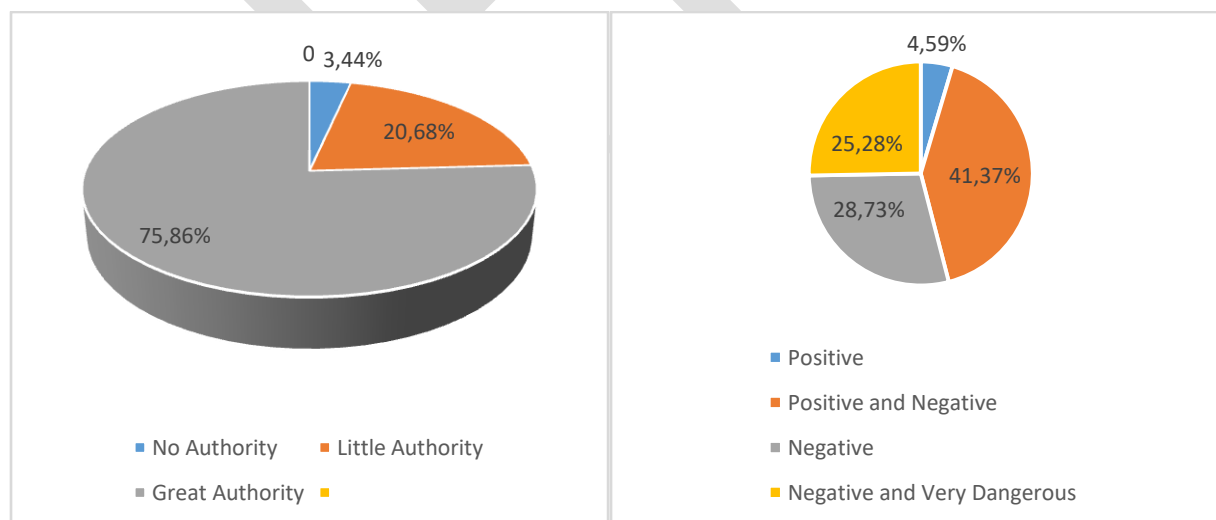

Figure 6. Social media and moral authority

Figure 6 examines teachers` opinion about social media as a moral authority. It showcases that more than 96% of teachers agree that social media has gained moral and social authority in determining what is socially and morally acceptable. More importantly, the first pie chart in Figure 6 demonstrates that 75.86% of this 96% believe that social media has gained a great authority in this aspect, whereas the other 20.68% believe it has gained little authority. The remaining 3.44% of teachers consider that social media does not have such authority.

The second pie chart in Figure 6 projects teachers` assessment of this moral authority of social media. It reveals that while 41.37% assess this authority as positive and negative, 25.28% and 28.73% assess it as negative and negative and very dangerous, respectively. That is more than 54% of participating teachers. The second pie chart, also, indicates that only 4.59% of teachers evaluate the moral and social authority that media has as positive.
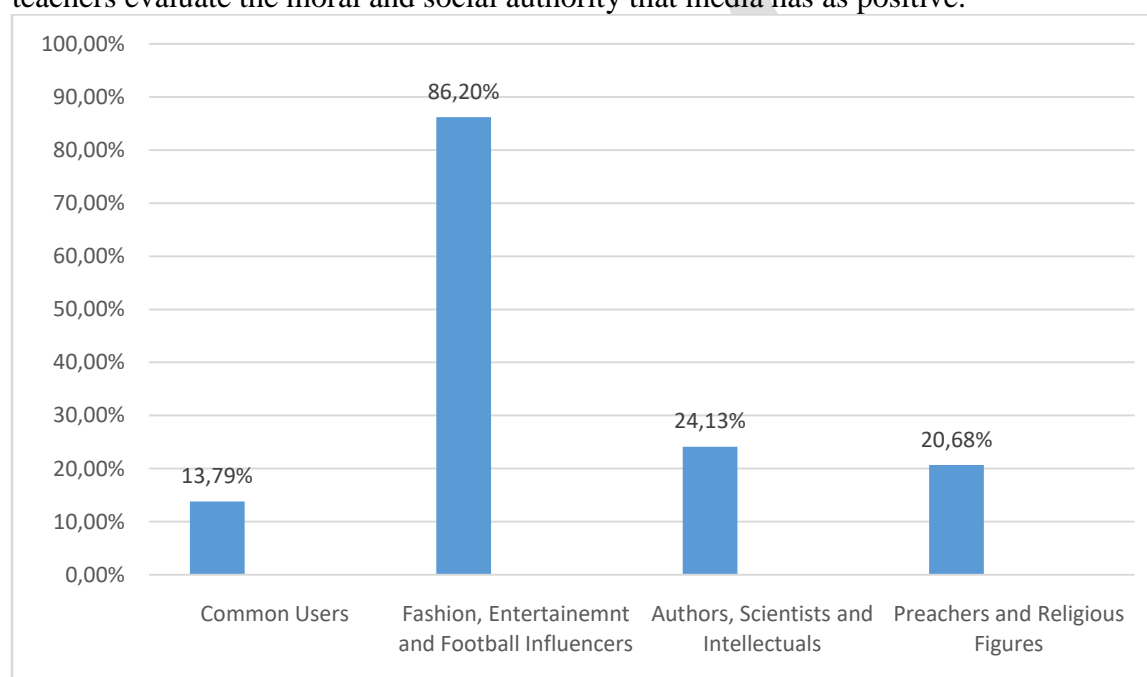

Figure   7.   Authority   holders   on   social   media
Cogently linked to the previous Figure, Figure 8 asks teachers who are the holders of this moral and social authority on social media. From the outset, it ought to be noted that some teachers in answering this question have chosen more than one alternative. That is why the total percentage of all answers is beyond 100%. Having clarified that, Figure 7 demonstrates that the absolute majority of teacher, 86.20%, view fashion, entertainment and football influencers as the determiners and holders of moral and social authority on social media. They are in the first rank. The second, third, and fourth ranks, as displayed in Figure 8, are for authors, scientists and intellectuals, preachers and religious figures, and common users, respectively.
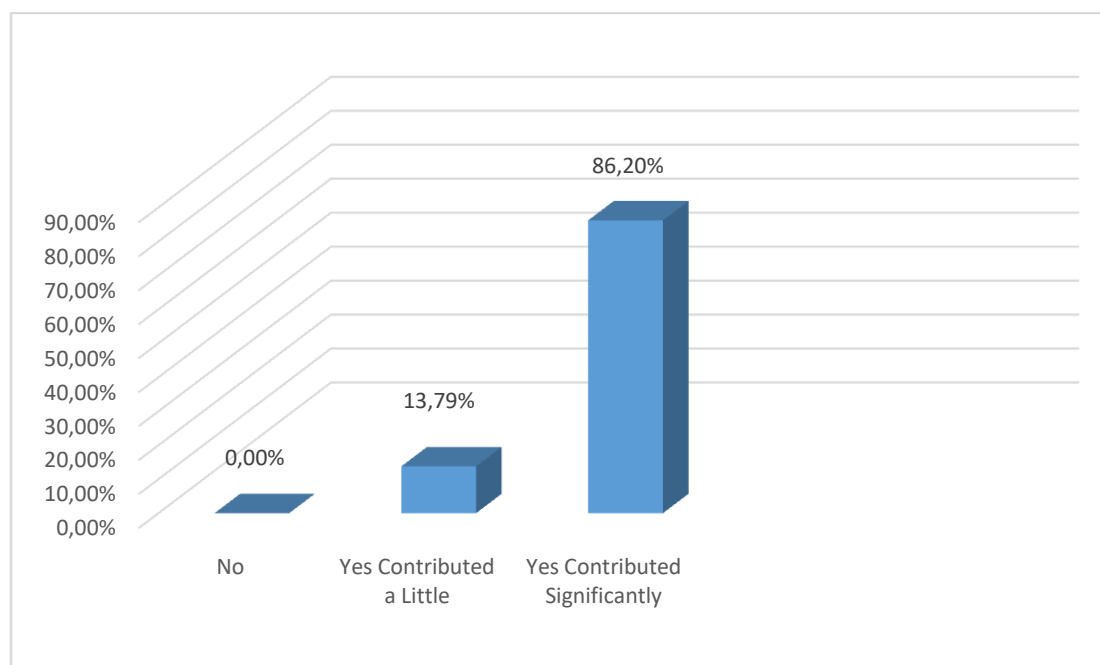
Figure 8. Social media and the domination of western culture
Figure 8 presents teachers` answers when asked about the contribution of social media to the domination of western culture. It reveals that 100% of them believe that it does, with a significant variance in the degree of contribution. As seen in Figure 8, 86.20% of teachers think that social media has significantly contributed to the domination of western culture and lifestyle in our society, whereas the other 13.79% think that it has contributed a little.
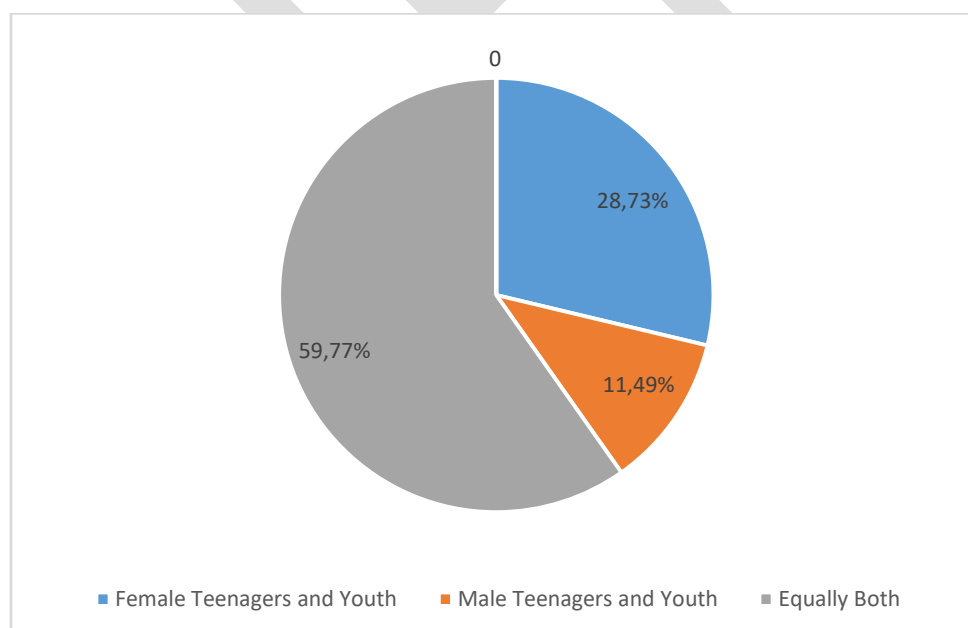
Figure 9. Social media targets

Figure 9 aims at identifying the group that is targeted by social media from the teachers` perspective. It showcases that it is mainly female teenagers and youth that are being targeted by social media, according to teachers. 59.77% of them believe so. The percentage of teachers who believe it is male teenagers and youth is 28.73% and it is 11.49% for those who think that social media targets both groups equally.
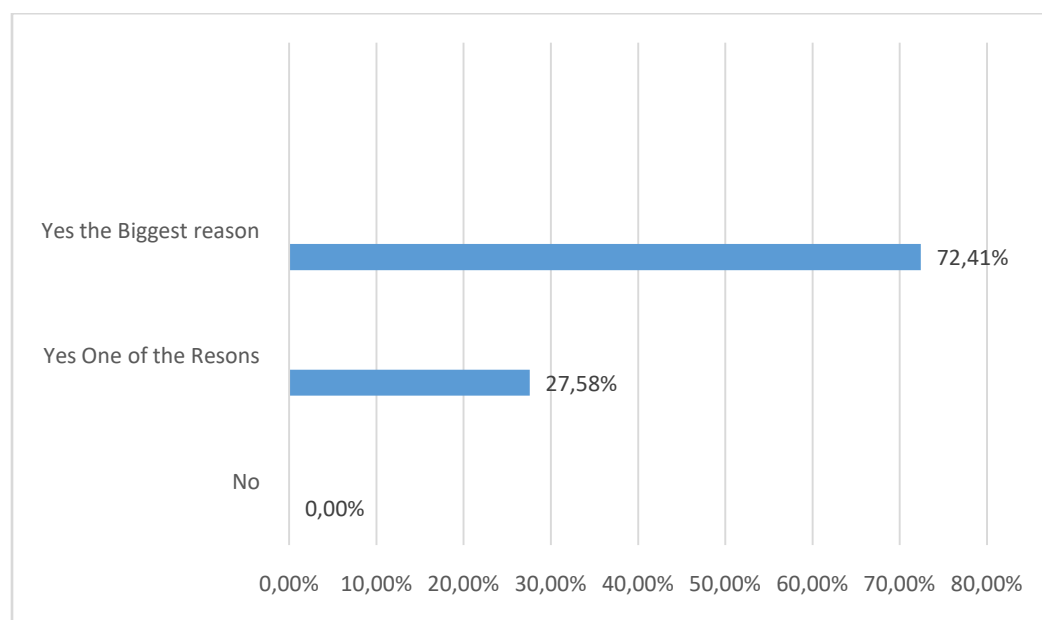

Figure 10. Social media and moral decadence

Figure 10 projects teachers` opinion on the interplay between social media and moral decadence. First, it shows a unanimous consensus among teachers on the role of social media in moral decadence. None of the teachers thinks that social media has no role in that matter. Second, Figure 10 indicates that while 27.58% consider social media as one of reasons, 72.41% believe it to be the main and biggest reason of moral decadence in our society.

Question 14 of the questionnaire, as indicated in the appendix, is a qualitative question. It asks teacher instances of the moral decadence they believe it is engendered by social media. The following provides an account of the most visible and recurrent expressions in teachers` replies. First, most teachers believe that there is strong correlation between social media and the proliferation of materialism in Tunisian society. They believe it to be one of the main reasons for the mushrooming of vanity and the ostentation of material stuff. Second, teachers draw attention to the naturalization with homosexuality that social media aims at, which is part of the fall of local culture under the hegemony of western culture, as they report. Moreover, teachers` response reveal that religious authority and, particularly, family authority have been weakened and substituted by social media authority, resulting in serious violations of cultural and social

norms. With regards to teaching itself, Tunisian teachers believe that social media is one the main factors for dismantling the figure and the symbolic value of the teacher. They verbally state that it is the main reason for the spread of verbal and physical violence in schools. Those are the most important and common replies to the question of moral decadence caused by social media. Other replies report damaging art and artistic taste, the diminishing of privacy, and neglecting studies.
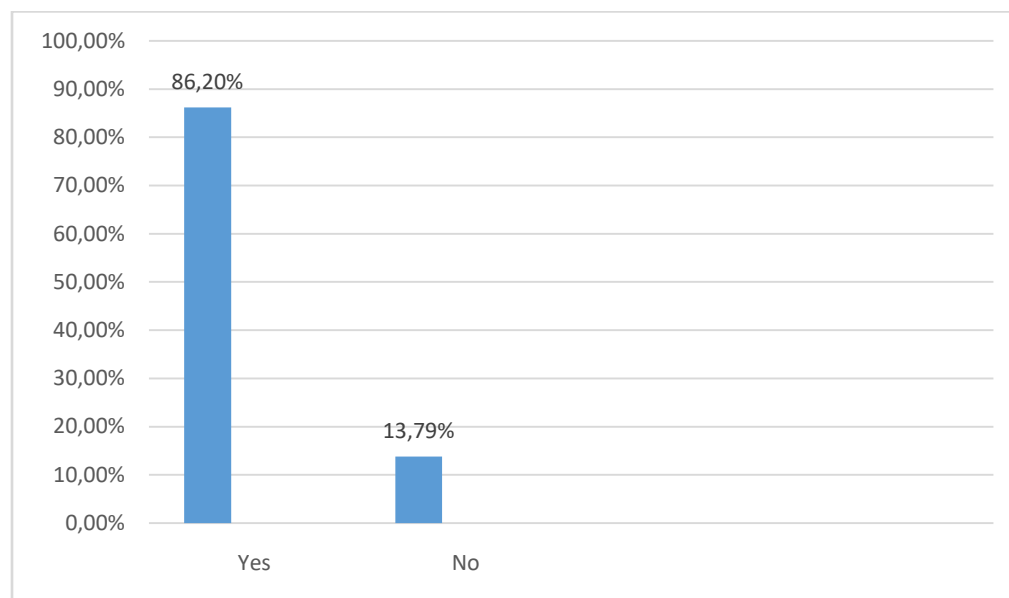

Figure 11. Social media and generation gap

Figure 11 simply reports teachers` answers regarding whether social media has deepened the generation gap and rendered it more complicated. The findings unequivocally shows that 86.20% of teachers believe it does, and only 13.79% think otherwise.

Question 16 of the questionnaire is a qualitative open question that invites teachers to freely talk about their opinion on social media, its other impacts, and to suggest some solutions to the problems they believe are caused by it. Pertaining to the other impacts of social media, Tunisian teachers reiterate that social media is reshaping the cornerstones and canonical patterns of Tunisian culture and society. It promotes body culture, the sexualization of children, and it is shifting social relations towards the western style. Another impact is related to teaching itself. In their replies, Tunisian teachers mention that social media is a main reason for the deterioration of students` mental performance. They state that it deteriorates their memory, their ability to retain and recall information, and their critical and analytical skills. Other teachers, also, believe that social media negatively impacts the quality of students` handwriting: it has rendered it illegible.

   In connection to solutions, Tunisian teachers offer several solutions. First, most of them underscore that the best solution to reduce the impacts of social media is to educate students and parents equally on the impacts of social media and how to deal with it. Another

solution highlighted by several teachers is the integration of smartphones and social media in the education process. Codifying social media, enforcing age restrictions, and resorting to censorship when necessary are, also, countermeasures proposed by teachers. Moreover, Tunisian teachers suggest encouraging children and students to engage in real life and to socialize, like in cultural clubs, civic associations, or practicing sports. One last countermeasure suggested by teachers is providing an alternative purposeful content that is simple, concise and appealing to teenagers and students. Those are the solutions offered by Tunisian teachers to counteract the negative impacts of social media.
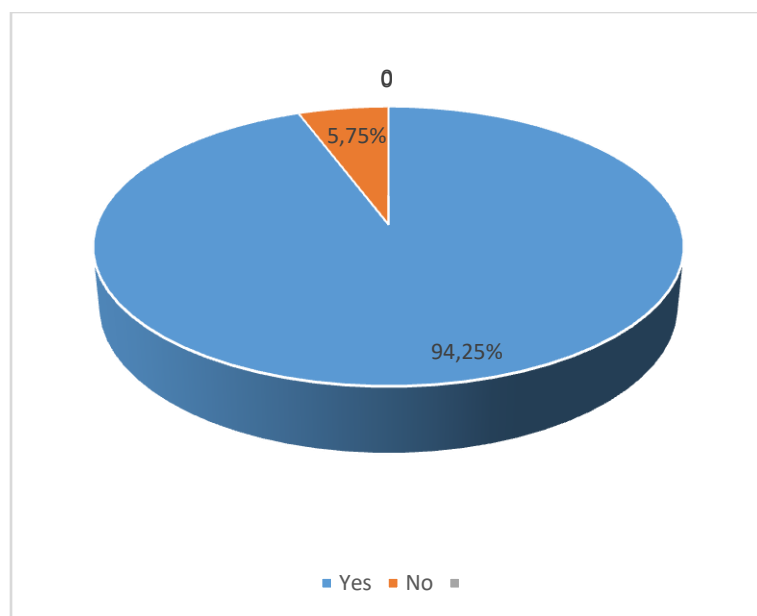
Figure 12. Teachers` participation in questionnaires about the impact of social media
The last figure in this study reflects teachers` previous participation in questionnaires or surveys about the impact of social media. It exhibits that the absolute majority, 75 teachers out of 87, have never participated in a questionnaire about the impacts of social media. Only 5 teachers, corresponding to 5.74%, have done so.

9. Discussion

This section discusses the findings of this study and their pertinence to the extant literature and studies. To start with the impact of social media on teenagers and youth, the findings unequivocally indicate that Tunisian teachers believe that social media has a strong negative impact on teens and youth, particularly, on their lifestyle and their social relations with each other, family and friends. Those findings fully resonate with the findings of multiple studies across different cultures on the impact of social media. Radwan (2017), for instance, arrives to similar conclusion when analyzing the impact of social media on Egyptian youth. He concludes that by dint of social media values of individualism and separateness have permeated the Egyptian society and social relations. The same impact on the social fabric is highlighted by

Chima and Oneyma`s (2019) and Mukhtar and Ganiyat K. `s (2022) studies on the influence of social media on Nigerian society. Sheldon, Rauschnabel, and Honeycutt (2019), also, highlight how social media has a detrimental effect on Amercian teens and family relations. To mention one aspect, they explain how the emergence of internet-based sex or social media sex have destabilized family relations, especially for partners. In the American context as well, Sales (2016) and Lorenz (2023) underscore how social media metamorphosed teens` social life, making it bent on sex. "There are a lot of Yik Yak posts about sex. And many of these seem to be describing something different from what we know of young people in the past. There are posts about wanting sex, and seeking sex, even just cybersex, immediately, it doesn't seem to matter with whom" is one of the ways how Sales (2016, p. 8) describes this metamorphosis. In short, Tunisian teachers` stance that social media plays a role in altering and reshaping social relations for teens and youth echoes several others studies in different contexts. One last note in this regard is that the plenty of studies and books addressing and warning about social media plainly speak of its dangerous impacts on teenagers, youth and family. The findings of this study just re-state the obvious.

Probing deeper, Tunisian teachers strongly agree that not only does social media negatively impact girls` fashion, but rather controls it. This view fits perfectly with the tight grip of social media on fashion highlighted throughout multiple studies and books. Engeln (2017p. 73), for instance, asserts that girls "wear what fashion moguls have decided to be the in style of the season". Those fashion moguls, as Sales (2016), Engeln (2017), Sheldon et al., (2019), Lorenz (2023) and other researchers factually state, use social media as their prime advertising tool. This is clearly visible on apps like Instagram and TikTok which are permeated by company ads and instagrammers and TikTokers that, via their content about beauty, fashion and lifestyle, tell users what and how to wear in clothes and make-up and how to look. This is the status cross-culturally as all the following studies assert: Sinha and Fung (2021) and Distenfeld (2022) in America; Gouveia and Chabata (2023) in South Africa; Kondort, Pelau, Gati, and Ciofu (2023) in Romaina and Hungary; Lozada, Baclea-am, Crisologo, Magallanes, and Tesiorna (2024) in the Philippines;Torregrosa, Sánchez-Blanco, SanMiguel and del Río Pérez (2023) in Spain; and Ciprian (2024) in Sweden. Having said that, it follows that Tunisian teachers` assessment of the interplay between social media and fashion is just another piece of this worldwide puzzle; a piece that further validates the control of social media on teens` taste of fashion.

Similarly to fashion control, Tunisian teachers believe that social media has become a moral authority. More accurately, they consider this authority as negative and very dangerous and that it is the biggest reason for moral decadence in the Tunisian society. Instances of moral decadence recurrently mentioned in their responses include the mushrooming of vanity and materialism and the naturalization with homosexuality, which, as they highlight, is part of the capitulation of local culture to the hegemony of western values. Other examples of moral decadence that Tunisian teachers believe are caused by social media involve the defanging and the replacement of family and religious authority by social media authority, engendering anti local culture and society behaviors, and the dismantling of the figure and symbolic value of the teacher, which reverberates in the spread of violence against teachers.

Multiple studies, especially in high context cultures (Rosenberg, 2004), provide ample support to Tunisian teachers` view. To start with, Dekhil and Sarnou (2021) conclude that social media, namely TikTok, has promoted within Algerian adolescents values and conducts that are normally alien to the Algerian culture. In Nigeria, Chima and Oneyma (2019) argue that social media has played a pivotal role in dismantling the family value system and in propagating promiscuity among youth. In another study in the Nigerian context, Mukhtar O. and Ganiyat K. (2022) underscore the moral decadence caused by social media. They advocate that the latter has promoted and disseminated immoral sexual behaviors, like lesbianism and homosexualism in the Nigerian society. Similar results on the negative moral impact of social media are reported in: Peters`s (2013) study on Facebook influence on Namibian society; Bhatti et al. `s (2016) investigation of the impact of social media on Lahore colleges` students; and Melaku and Kirubakaran`s (2021) study on how African and Ethiopian students are influenced by social media. All those studies are aligned with Tunisian teachers` view that social media has gained a moral authority in determining what is morally and socially acceptable for teens and youth, at least in high context cultures.

In low context cultures, i.e. western countries (Rosenberg, 2004), the moral authority of social media can be inferred to by the latter`s hyper emphasis on body culture, in general, and on the sexualization of girls, in particular. This hallmark of social media is accentuated in a multitude of studies. As a first example, Van Oosten et al. (2017) assert that social media platforms are typically "platforms in which both the exposure to and the production of sexual content take place" (p. 149). Likewise, Stuwe et al. (2022) describe TikTok as "an app with a strong focus on body" (p. 34), and Engeln (2017) concludes that Instagram "teaches young girls that learning to apply make-up is a more important skill than learning to do science or math" (p. 18). A more explicit statement, however, on the moral authority of social media is articulated by Catherine (2021). She plainly states that social media has rendered girls sexualization "rationalized and accepted into nearly every young girl`s life" (p. 34). Another revealing study, in this regard, is carried by Diaz-Bustamente-Ventisca and Llovet-Rodriguez (2017). It has investigated how Spanish adults look at the sexualization of girls on Instagram and has concluded that "the sexualized photographs of girls damages and undermines the general image that society has of childhood" (Diaz-Bustamente-Ventisca and Llovet-Rodriguez, 2017, p. 83). In other words, by means of social media, the innocently non-sexual view Spanish society has of young girls is no more (Diaz-Bustamente-Ventisca and Llovet-Rodriguez, 2017). At last, as Engeln (2017, p. 121) factually notes on the mind and behavior-altering authority of social media, we "cannot pretend that what we see in the media doesn't shape our thoughts and behaviors" and that "We are *all* affected by these images. Their influence is insidious, and there is no magic force field to keep it out."

On a light, yet, important note, social media platforms are not just for sexualizing girls, but, also, for objectifying women. Again, this fact is solidified in a plenty of studies. It suffices, here, to bring forth the body image conundrum caused by social media for both young girls and grown women, which is that while young girls "are expected to appear older, more mature, and

sexy", grown women "are expected to appear youthful and hairless" (Catherine, 2021, p. 34). One last remark to be reiterated is that this sexualization and objectification ideology perpetuated by social media is not its own offspring, but rather of conventional mass media. Social media has just offered this ideology the typical, ubiquitous, effectual, and irresistible medium.

Reverting to this study, Tunisian teachers believe that social media vastly contributes to disseminating western culture and lifestyle among Tunisian teens and youth. Many studies, particularly in Africa and East Asia, are congruent with this view. To start with Arab African countries, Radwan (2017) strongly argues that the values of individualism and separateness that is permeating Egyptian family are of western origin and not local, and Dekhil and Sarnou (2021) state that the vulgar and sexually suggestive behaviors of Algerian youth are basically a mimicry of western girls and are alien to the local culture. In Nigeria, Chima and Oneyma (2019) and Mukhtar O. and Ganiyat K. (2022) vocally express their condemnation of the western values of indecency, promiscuity, and immoral sexual behaviors that are spreading in Nigerian society via social media. In Namibia and Ethiopia the same appraisal of the role of social media in propagating western values is noted by Peters (2013) and Melaku and Kirubakaran (2021), respectively. The same impact of western culture on local national culture is reported in China by Ge (2023). In his study, Ge (2023) focuses on the Chinese Z generation and how social media "catalyzes the exchange of moral values between the East and the West and re-establishes Chinese society" (p. 749). At the end, he surmises that "the traditional moral system of Chinese society is obsolete when foreign values diffuse among the Z generation through social media" (p. 753). Likewise, Bhatti et al. (2016) contend that social media has exacerbated the proliferation of western values among Pakistani youths, particularly college students.

This power that social media has for effectuating cultural shifts affirms that it is an ideological tool. Describing social media as an ideological tool is by no means something innovative or a breakthrough. Any "software is a functional analogue to ideology" (Chun, 2004, p. 43). The same applies to algorithms that run social media apps, as they are "programs that size us up, evaluate what we want, and provide a customized experience" (Lazer, 2015, p. 1090). More operatively, as Beer (2017) accentuates, social media algorithms are "taking on some constitutive or performative role in ordering that world on our behalf" since they have "outcomes in mind, outcomes influenced by commercial or other interests and agendas" (p. 4). The conclusive question now is to what ideology does social media lend itself as a tool? Flisfeder (2017), in his seminal book *Algorithmic Desire: toward a new structuralist theory of social media*, contends that it is the neoliberal capitalism ideology. He explains that on the surface it is social media that "is running our lives and is making us antisocial" (p. 56), while the truth is that "capitalism is running our lives, not social media; capitalism is making us anti-social" (p. 56-57). He further elaborates by stating that "what the neoliberal subject produces is not the self as subject, but the self as object…the Self as object-commodity" (Flisfeder, 2017. 159). An integral aspect of this commodification of the self is the sexualization of girls and the objectification of women taking place by default and design on social media. This body image hallmark of social media, as mentioned earlier, is a continuation of a process initially inaugurated by conventional media in the west before expanding to find its ways in non-western cultures.

In direct connection to the social and moral authority of social media, Tunisian teachers think of fashion, entertainment, and football influencers as the true owners of authority on social media. Non-surprisingly, they are totally correct. A report by Raman and Nair (2023) in the Fast Company Middle East media brand illustrates, based on the number of followers, that the top ten influencers are: Basil Alhadi, a musician and fashion star; Huda Kattan, a make-up artist and beauty blogger; Jessica Kahawaty, a Lebanese-Australian model; Joelle Mardinian, a lifestyle and beauty content creator; Mariam George, a model and an entrepreneur; Njoud Al Shammari, a make-up vlogger; Noor Stars, a beauty vlogger; Raha Moharrak, a travel blogger; Salama Mohamad; a lifestyle and fashion content creator; and Zaynab El-helw, a fashion and interior design content creator (Here are The Top Influential Creators in the Middle East You Need to Know, 2024). Similar outlook is given by a report published in Forbes Middle East (2024) on the top ten female influencers in the Middle East. All of them are fashion, beauty, and entertainment influencers. As for Tunisian influencers per se, the landscape is the same. Promoty, an influencer market platform, shows that the top 20 influencers in Tunisia are singers, beauty content creators, and actors and comedians. The list includes: Hedi Zaim, a comedy chat show host; Bassem Hamraoui, a comedian and actor; Dorra Jarraya, an Instagram model; FaycelLahdiri, a comedian and actor; Azizos, a singer; Ahmed Landolsi, an actor; Fatma, an Instagram model; Tarek Baalouch, a comedian and actor; and Eya Cherni, a TikTok model (Influencers in Tunisia- Top 20 on Instgram and Tiktok, 2024). Those are the proprietors of social and moral authority in Tunisia. They are the ones who dictate and manipulate the parameters of what is socially and morally acceptable. In short, those influencers are the creators of Tunisian pop culture and its gatekeepers. That is the status quo in most countries, Eastern or Western, in this age of social media mania.

Another crucial finding of this study worth discussing is related to the age or sex group targeted by social media. Tunisian Teachers estimate that social media targets both male and fame teens and youth, with more fixation on girls. This estimation is to the point and is supported by numerous studies in various contexts. Engeln (2017), Llovet, Diaz-Bustamante and Karan (2017), Radwan (2017), Van Oosten et al. (2017), Feltman (2018), Chima and Oneyma (2019), Zuo and Wang (2019), Kennedy (2020), , Catherine (2021), Van Oosten (2021), Dekhil and Sarnou (2021), Guo (2021), Paasonen et, al. (2021), Mykhtar O. and Ganiyat K. (2022), Stuwe et al. (2022), Yang (2022), Ge (2023), Lorenz (2023), and several other researchers share the consensus that social media platforms are platforms for the young, in the general, and the young and sexy, in particular. As to why this age or sex group in particular, it can be simply argued that since most social media users are young girls and boys (Distribution of internet users worldwide as of February 2024, by age group, 2024) it is normal for it to target them. A deeper investigation, however, reveals that the addictive design of social media apps (Alter, 2017; Cheik, 2022) has a financial incentive behind it (Mujica et al., 2022). When "users spend more time on the platforms, more advertisements are shown, and more revenue is generated" (Mujikaet al., 2022, p.12). This in knows as the attention economy: making profits from users` attention (Fuchs, 2015). Having said that, it follows that being the age group that is mostly on social media makes young people the best market for generating profit online. Young people, can, also, be targeted and manipulated by social media algorithms for ideological and political

incentives and agendas. The best example for such manipulation is the documentary *The Great Hack* (2019) by Amer and Noujaim (2019). In it, Brittany Kaiser, a former business development director for the big data company Cambridge Analytica, exposes how the company used certain algorithms and exploited facebook users` data to manipulate the 2016 presidential election in the favor of Donald Trump. In brief, there is enough evidence to suggest that young people are being targeted by social media for economic and political agendas or reasons. Flisfeder`s (2021) argument that social media is insidiously and basically run by neoliberal capitalism and that it aim at propagating its values has already been addressed in this discussion section, and it is a very interesting and plausible argument.

Finally, the finding that only five out of 87 teachers did participate before in a survey or a study about the impacts of social media in the Tunisian society is seriously telling. First, on academic and scientific research level, this very scarce number of teachers ever participating in a study about social media may reflect the lack of scientific interest in such a crucial issue. Social media itself and its various bearings on mental health, society and culture are one of the most active and dynamic research fields in social sciences and humanities. The suspected absence of this interest in Tunisian academic landscape, as far as this study concludes, is shocking and unfathomable. Second, on the country and policy-making level, the implications are more serious. Simply put, Tunisian teachers not being approached by the Ministry of Education about the impact of social media on teens and students indicates the official disregard of this issue and of students` education and mental health even. What is left to state, here, is that this study aspires to send a distress call to be urgently heeded by both researchers and government officials to further investigate the impacts of social media on teens and students, particularly, and the Tunisian society, in general.

10. Conclusion

This study investigates Tunisian teacher`s attitudes toward social media and how they perceive its influence on Tunisian teens and youth in various aspects. Its findings provide significant insights into the impacts social media has on Tunisian society. From the onset, the study concludes that social media has a strong negative impact on Tunisian teenagers and youth, controlling their thoughts, their taste of fashion, and their lifestyle. This finding further solidifies the fact that social media is an ideological tool for shaping reality and thoughts and perceptions of reality. A finding and a fact agreed upon in numerous studies reported in this paper. More interestingly and alarmingly, this studies concludes, form the point of view of Tunisian teachers, that social media has gained a moral and social authority that has become the determinant of what is morally and socially acceptable in society. This authority which is represented and manifested on social media by fashion and entertainment influencers plays a role in altering and reshaping social relationships and in propagating western values and practices that are in many ways at odds with the local Tunisian culture. The proliferation of those western values, Tunisian teacher believe, is in direct connection to the moral decadence that they have been witnessing at schools and in the Tunisian society. Recurrent instances of moral decadence include the sexualization of young girls, naturalization with homosexuality, dismantling family authority and

the mushrooming of materialism and vanity. Such findings are congruent with the findings of multiple studies on the impact of social media on youth; namely, studies in non-western cultures. Thus, ample support is provided to the assumption that there is a correlation between social media and moral decadence. All the above boils down to one fact: that social media, as Flisfeder (2021) asserts, is an ideological tool for the neoliberalism capitalism western antisocial values and practices. Or from a more radical perspective, that of the Russian philosopher Gudin, it can be argued that social media ideology is a continuity to the "*creation of the Grand Parody*, the kingdom of the Antichrist. And the United States is the centre of its expansion" and that by spreading the American 'universal' values social media is actually part of "a new form of ideological aggression against the multiplicity of cultures and traditions still existing in the rest of the world" (Gudin, 2012, p. 203).

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استبيان حول تأثير وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي

اسم المشارك:.......................... اللقب:.................... المهنة:....................

الجنس: ذكر ☐ أنثى ☐   العمر: دون الأربعين ☐ فوق الأربعين ☐

أسئلة الإستبيان

1: هل تظن أن للهواتف الذكية و وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي تأثير سلبي على المراهقين و الشباب؟

ليس لها تأثيرسلبي   لها تأثيرسلبي ضعيف   لها تأثيرسلبي متوسط   لها تأثيرسلبي قوي

2: هل ترى أن وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي تؤثر على أفكار و نمط حياة المراهقين و الشباب؟ ☐

لا تؤثر   تؤثر بشكل قليل   تؤثربشكل متوسط   تؤثر بشكل كبير

3: كيف تُقدر هذا التأثير؟

إيجابي ☐   سلبي نوعا ما ☐   سلبي جدا ☐

4: هل تظن أن لوسائل التواصل الإجتماعي تأثير على الحياة/ العلاقات الإجتماعية للمراهقين و الشباب, في علاقتهم ببعض, بالعائلة و الأصدقاء؟

ليس لها تأثير   لها تأثير إيجابي   لها تأثير سلبي   لها تأثير سلبي كبير

5:هل ترى أن لوسائل التواصل الإجتماعي تأثير على الموضة (الأزياء, اللباس) لدى المراهقين و الشباب, الفتيات منهم خاصة؟ و كيف تُقدر هذا التأثير؟

لا تأثير لها   لها تأثير إيجابي   لها تأثير سلبي   لها تأثير سلبي جدا

6: هل تظن أن وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي تتحكم في ذوق المراهقين و الشباب فيما يخص الموضة و اللباس؟ ☐

لا تتحكم   تتحكم بشكل قليل   تتحكم بشكل كبير

7: هل تظن أن وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي تلعب دورا في إعادة هيكلة/ تغيير العلاقات الإجتماعية؟

لا   نعم و هو دور بسيط   نعم و هو دور كبير

8: هل تظن أنه قد أصبح لوسائل التواصل الإجتماعي سلطة اجتماعية/ أخلاقية في تحديد ماهو مقبول اجتماعيا وأخلاقيا؟

ليس لها سلطة ☐   لها سلطة بسيطة/ ضعيفة ☐   لها سلطة قوية/ فعالة ☐

9: هل ترى أن هذه السلطة إيجابية أو سلبية؟

إيجابية   إيجابية و سلبية   سلبية   سلبية و خطرة جدا

10: حسب رأيك, من هم أصحاب السلطة فعلا على وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي من حيث التأثير ؟

المُستعمل العادي   المُؤثرات و المُؤثرون من نجوم الموضة, الفن, الكرة..

المُؤثرات و المُؤثرون من الكتاب و المُثقفين و العُلماء   المُؤثرات و المُؤثرون من الدعاة (رجال الدين)

☐   ☐   ☐

11: هل تعتقد أن وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي قد ساهمت و لازالت تُساهم في هيمنة الثقافة و نمط الحياة الغربية في مُجتمعاتنا؟

☐   ☐   ☐

لا   نعم و بشكل ضعيف   نعم و بشكل قوي

12: من هي الفئة المستهدفة أكثر وللأكثر تأثرا بوسائل التواصل الإجتماعي؟

المراهقات و الشابات   المراهقون و الشباب   الإثنان على حد سواء

13: هل تظن أن وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي هي أحد أسباب التدهور الأخلاقي؟

لا   نعم هي أحد الأسباب   نعم هي السبب الأهم و الأكبر

☐   ☐

☐   ☐

☐   ☐   ☐

14: هل بإمكانك إعطاء مثال/ أمثلة لتدهور أخلاقي تسببت فيه وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي؟

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15: هل تعتقد أن الهُوّة بين الأجيال صارت أعمق و أكثر تعقيدا من قبل بسبب وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي؟
نعم ☐   لا ☐

16: هل هذه أول مرّة تُشارك فيها في استبيان حول تأثير وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي؟
نعم ☐   لا ☐

17: هل من اراء أُخرى لك أو توضيحات حول وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي و تأثيرها؟ هل من فئة عمرية أو جنسية تراها المُستهدفة أكثر؟ لماذا؟ و هل من حل حسب رأيك للحد من التأثير السلبي لوسائل التواصل الإجتماعي ؟

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