**Abstract**

The study examines closed Facebook groups organized by women and appeals explicitly to Israeli women. This study will map the activities of group members in these groups, identifying relationships between these patterns and the participants’ characteristics of women who were part of these communities. The current study will also try to shed light on the role women’s groups had in women’s lives. 526 Israeli women, all if which are members in at least one of these groups, answered a questionnaire. Findings show that closed women’s Facebook groups have considerable potential to satisfy their members' needs, compensate for deficiencies in their lives, and provide them with alternatives to their dysfunctional situations.

*Keywords:* Closed Facebook groups, Engagement, Perceived gratifications, Women, Self-disclosure, Loneliness

**Engagement as a mediator of loneliness and self-disclosure effect on perceived gratifications: A case study of closed Facebook groups of Israeli women**

At the outset of the third decade of the 21st century, social media have profoundly affected the lives of hundreds of millions worldwide. Social media play's significant role serves as a widely accepted starting point for the abundance of research in the field. As Smock et al. (2011) demonstrated, it may be wiser to examine certain social media features such as Facebook rather than the entire social media sphere. One of the most interesting phenomena in this specific arena is the proliferation of closed groups. In Israel, women's closed groups are especially dominate among local Facebook groups. Some of these groups have tens of thousands of members, and a few have even 100-150 thousand or more. This study seeks to focus on the roles these groups play in their members lives, in order to shed light on this phenomenon.

***Theoretical Background***

*Social Media*

The term “virtual community” was coined back in the 1990s when Web 2.0 was unimaginable. Rheingold (1993) described it as a social group only on the internet. Rheingold asserted, however, that the virtual community can only be formed when enough people actively take part in public discussions and express enough emotion in them to weave a web of interpersonal relationships. He emphasized the need for long-term interaction between people who share emotional attachment. Wellman (1998) argued that online communities were “online social networks,” avoiding the term “virtual”. He suggested that online social networks are not different from offline communities: they enable an exchange of information, socialization, a sense of belonging and social identity.

As we moved into the Web 2.0 era, characterized mainly by the growing presence of interactive, social networking sites (SNSs; boyd, 2011; Couldry, 2012; Jensen, 2010), this new phenomenon attracted most of the scholarly attention in the field of digital communities and other social interactions. Boyd and Ellison (2007) offered a general definition of SNSs: online platforms that allow people to create a public or semipublic profile, share this profile with others, and form relationships based on it. According to Riegner (2007), a social network is a space created to connect people via web-based tools such as email, chats, and blogs. This participation aims to connect with people who share similar interests, such as hobbies, networking, or business-related topics. Similarly, according to Pallis et al. (2011), SNS is a site where individuals meet to form relationships. Each user in the online arena creates a list of other users with whom they are connected. Using various tools, each brings them together to build a community, interact, contribute, share knowledge, and participate in various activities.

Actively participating in an SNS usually entails “performing” (Goffman, 1959) in front of an unfamiliar audience. There is a flourish of studies that strive to understand what Litt (2012, 331) calls the “imagined audience” in the context of social media, defining it as ‘the mental conceptualization of the people with whom we are communicating.” Litt and Hargittai (2016) distinguished between an abstract and an imagined target audience. They assumed that most people have multiple imagined audiences that may vary from one post to another. The abstract imagined audience would be the user’s default when they wish to experience self-expression, while the target imagined audience would be employed when they wish to draw the attention of a specific group of people. Most scholars in this field analyze users of specific social media and their perceptions of potential audiences (see, e.g., Marwick & boyd, 2010, on Twitter; Brake, 2012, on blogs; Jung & Rader, 2016, on Facebook). However, to the best of our knowledge, research on imagined audiences within the realm of closed women’s Facebook groups is scant.

*Women in the Digital Sphere*

Women tend to self-disclose more than men (Dindia & Allen, 1992; Parker & Parrott, 1995), to express and share their feelings and empathize with one another (Ridley, 1993). Similar traits were found when comparing social media user behaviors (McAndrew & Jeong, 2012; Rose et al., 2012). In their review of studies since 2008, Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz (2014) found common acceptance of the gendered behavior of Facebook users. A comprehensive study showed that women use the internet primarily to make and maintain interpersonal relationships and as a source of knowledge (Weiser, 2000). In contrast, men use the internet primarily for entertainment and pleasure. Other studies found that women were more likely than were men to use the internet primarily for social interactions (Amichai-Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000, 2003). McAndrew and Jeong (2012) found that women engaged in more activities, spent more time on Facebook, and had more Facebook friends than men.

The blurring line between the virtual and the real world was reinforced by Taddicken (2013), who suggests that women are more self-regulatory than men concerning protecting their privacy and risk-averse regarding their privacy. Still, other studies have not found any significant gender differences in patterns of SNS use (Kim & Chock, 2017; Tang et al., 2016).

*Closed Facebook Groups*

More than fifteen years since its launch, Facebook is considered the world's largest social network. One of Facebook's most popular features is the option to open online groups and invite others to join. Anyone opening such a group must choose one of the following privacy settings: public, closed, or secret. These categories involve multiple distinctions regarding participation and exposure to content, and Facebook frequently revises these. The company updates its users, but it is not certain that all users notice subtle privacy clauses. There has been widespread criticism of these frequent changes as affecting users’ ability to control their privacy (see, e.g., D’Arcy & Young, 2012).

A public group is open to all Facebook users without limitations on participation or posting messages. A closed group enables members only to participate, while it exists accessible to all Facebook users. Finally, a secret group is brought to the attention of select users privately. Only they have access to its contents. The group’s existence is unknown to anyone but them.

The literature on women's closed Facebook groups tend to focus on groups that are dedicated to maternal issues (e.g. Gleeson et al., 2021; Johnson, 2014; Grimes et al., 2014). Other examples are Younas et al's. study (2020) about closed women's groups in Pakistan, where women seek peer support in a conservative, patriarchal society, and Pruchniewska's research (2019) about Facebook professional-oriented closed women's groups. The current study has examined members of women's groups that are dedicated to multiple issues, and not merely one.

Miron and Ravid (2015) examined Facebook groups' privacy settings in Israel, considering the issue in educational rather than legal-ethical terms. Among the multitude of virtual communities operating in Israeli cyberspace, a prominent number of closed Facebook groups are founded and operated by women. Some have tens of thousands of members, with a broad scope of activities. Others are designed for members who know each other daily (for example, based on a shared living environment). Still, others have members that do not know each other outside of the group. Although it is indeed a growing phenomenon in the Israeli digital landscape, no study has yet examined it in this context.

*Engagement*

With the emergence of social media, scholars and practitioners focus on engagement with and within social media platforms (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013). Being engaged ‘is to be involved, occupied, and interested in something’ (Higgins, 2006, p. 442). Engagement has been conceptualized as a cognitive-behavioural and affective construct (Jacques, Preece, & Carey, 1995).Mollen and Wilson (2010) define online engagement as “a cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website” (p.923). Porter, Donthu, MacElroy, and Wydra (2011) define engagement as behaviour that reflects online-community members' willingness to participate and cooperate with other members***.***

Users contribute to the social media content by contributing to comments and following posts. By contributing to these posts, they facilitate the interaction and engagement of the user community. In this context, engagement refers to the frequency of activities in which closed Facebook groups participate (see, e.g., Shu-Chuan Chu, 2011). Participants of the current study indicated the extent to which they performed each activity: reading, sharing, and commenting on posts or uploading original posts***.*** van Doorn et al. (2010) show social media engagement behaviors originating from motivational influences, consistent with the uses and gratifications theory discussed later. User engagement is related to user satisfaction and is often viewed as a positive human-computer interaction (Quesenbery, 2003).

*Perceived Gratifications*

Uses and gratifications, one of the most long-established media theories, is still considered one of the most influential theoretical approaches in media studies (Katz et al. 1974; Rubin, 2002; Ruggerio, 2000). Classic uses and gratifications studies typically employ five generic clusters of social and psychological needs that media can fulfill: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and diversion (Katz et al., 1973; Katz et al., 1974). Ruggerio (2000) argues that many studies provide several alternative clusters. However, most of the studies still utilize the ones originally recommended by Katz et al. (1973).

Uses and gratifications probe potential audiences' primary needs fulfilled by new media (Lin, 2002; Rafaeli & Ariel, 2008; Ruggerio, 2000; Stafford et al., 2004). It has been employed to study numerous types of media, including VCRs (Lin, 1993), the internet (Song et al., 2004), MP3 players (Ferguson et al., 2007), YouTube (Haridakis & Hanson, 2009), and smartphones (Joo & Sang, 2013; Sanz-Blas et al. 2013; Ariel et al., 2017; Malka et al., 2018).

From the uses and gratifications perspective, the audience is considered active and goal-oriented in its media consumption (Rubin, 2002). Audiences or users of various media are mediated, and they depend on the selection and usages that various media offer. Boyd (2011) claims that social network users see these as spaces where they may initiate and maintain social relationships with friends and acquaintances, flirt with friends of friends, and form romantic relationships. Alternatively, they may establish business relationships or discuss sociopolitical issues. The users’ motivation is to share information with those interested (and those who are not), especially to see and be seen. Young and Radar (2016) also discuss the social benefits of sharing information on SNSs, such as increasing social capital and enhancing perceived social support.

Taddicken (2013) used the term "perceived social relevance" to refer to the relative importance of various SNSs to users' lives. The current study will apply the concept of perceived gratifications to describe the subjective ways in which online groups are perceived or experienced by their users in the context of fulfilled gratifications.

*Self-Disclosure*

Self-disclosure serves several purposes, such as increasing mutual understanding and building trust between partners in a relationship (Laurenceau et al., 1998). Besides, disclosure enables a person to recognize and integrate meaning into processes and experiences they have undergone (Frattaroli, 2006). Turn-taking or reciprocity in disclosure is common in interactions (Dindia, 2000; Rubin et al., 1980). Reciprocity arouses a sense of social commitment to respond with a similar level of intimacy to the others’ disclosures (Rotenberg & Chase, 1992). Reciprocity in self-disclosure is vital during the early stages of a relationship (Won-Doornink, 1979). One means of achieving *intimacy* in interpersonal relationships is self-disclosure. It has been found that sharing personal information is essential for creating intimacy through dialogue between partners in romantic relationships (Greene et al., 2006).

Ever since social networks have become part of our lives, scholars have been studying online self-disclosure. Online platforms provide a place where people are more willing to open up and be intimately exposed than without computer mediation (Suler, 2004). The nature of SNS encourages self-disclosure (Mazer et al., 2007; Walsh et al., 2020). For example, the Facebook status update box asking, ‘What’s on your mind?’ invites participants to share information. Social networks provide a user-friendly platform that easily enables sharing photographs, status updates, and other information (Schumaker & van der Heide, 2011).

Lay and Young (2014) examined self-disclosure patterns on social network sites, especially microblogging platforms. They found that popularity and interpersonal needs significantly affect self-disclosure. It was also found that people report a greater degree of self-disclosure online than in offline relationships (Chan & Cheng, 2004). Alongside the lack of nonverbal cues, most social networking activities' asynchronous nature affects people’s intimate disclosure level (Suler, 1996; Walther, 2004). One of the most attractive social network features is that users can share updates about their status, feelings, thoughts, and actions with friends and strangers (Jones et al., 2008; Valenzuela et al., 2009). On the other hand, public disclosure of personal information can be problematic in identity theft, stalking, and harassment (Gross & Acquisti, 2005; Nosko et al., 2010). Regarding the challenges of disclosing information online, Taddicken (2013, 250) argued that: "Self-disclosed information on the Internet is therefore persistent, replicable, scalable, searchable and shareable."

 Studies have shown that participants are cautious concerning their privacy and know of these dangers (Al-Saggaf, 2011; Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Jones et al., 2008; Young, 2009); therefore, intimate self-disclosure in cyberspace is quite common (Jones et al., 2008; Taddicken, 2013; Valenzuela et al., 2009) due to users' inability to refrain from sharing personal information (Edwards & Brown, 2009). The anonymity of online social networks enables lonely people to share intimate information (Bonetti et al., 2010).

Based on the abovementioned literature, we hypothesize as follows:

H1: A positive correlation will be found between self-disclosure and perceived gratifications. The greater the degree of self-disclosure, the more positive perceived gratifications will be.

H2: Group engagement will mediate the correlation between self-disclosure and perceived gratifications: self-disclosure will contribute to group engagement, contributing to perceived gratifications.

*Loneliness*

Existent findings regarding the connection between solitude and the online environment are inconclusive and, at times, contradictory (Nowland et al., 2017). Some studies show that people who use the internet frequently report higher levels of loneliness (Kalpidou et al., 2011). Similarly, a positive correlation was found between loneliness and frequent use of Facebook (Lou et al., 2012). In contrast, other studies demonstrate that SNSs reduce loneliness by providing socializing opportunities and controlling interactions (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009; Vergeer & Pelzer, 2009). It was also found that the greater the number of members in a person’s social network, the less lonely they feel (Skues et al., 2012).

Research on online loneliness offers two competing perspectives on these conflicting findings (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007): *The displacement hypothesis* posits that users take advantage of the medium to replace offline with online relationships. Conversely, *the stimulation hypothesis* posits that the internet succeeds in reducing loneliness because it expands the possibilities for creating new relationships online.

Deters and Matthias (2013) found that posting Facebook status updates significantly impacts users' sense of loneliness. Regardless of the amount and nature of the comments they received, the more frequently users posted these updates, the less lonely they felt. In a meta-analysis of thousands of papers on Facebook use and loneliness, Song et al. (2014) found a positive correlation between Facebook use and loneliness. Specifically, that lonely people use Facebook, rather than Facebook causing its users to feel lonely.

DiTommaso and Spinner (1993) and DiTommaso et al. (2004) proposed the social-emotional loneliness scale – a multidimensional scale for measuring loneliness for adults used to assess loneliness in the present study.

Based on the abovementioned literature, we hypothesize as follows:

H3: A positive correlation will be found between social-emotional loneliness and perceived gratifications: the higher the level of social-emotional loneliness, the higher the perceived gratifications will be. A positive correlation will be found between perceived group gratifications and the two subscales of social-emotional loneliness: (H3a) social loneliness and (H3b) family loneliness.

H4: Group engagement will mediate the correlation between social-emotional loneliness and perceived gratifications. Thus, social-emotional loneliness will contribute to group engagement, contributing to a more positive perceived group gratification. This mediation will be found between perceived gratifications and the two subscales of social-emotional loneliness: social loneliness (H4a) and family loneliness (H4b).

**Methodology**

***Participants***

The respondents first answered a screening question to confirm that they had used at least one closed Facebook group for women. The final sample was 526 Israeli women aged 18 and over, with a mean age of 39.2 (SD = 13.2). Most respondents were married (61%) and secular (55%). Most had high-school education (60%).

***Instruments***

The research questions were examined through a structured questionnaire that included 70 closed questions. Sociodemographic data were provided for each respondent. The questionnaire included the following variables.

*Independent Variables*

*Self-disclosure* was measured using the Self-Disclosure Index (SDI; Miller et al., 1983), a 10-item scale measuring self-disclosure on a range of personal issues. Using a Likert scale ranging from 0 (not discussing the issue at all) to 4 (fully and completely discussing the issue), participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with each of the statements (e.g., “Things I have done which I am proud of”; “What is important to me in life”). The internal reliability of the scale was high (α = .915).

*Social-emotional loneliness* was measured using SELSA-S (DiTommaso et al., 2004), a 15-item multidimensional scale for measuring loneliness, which is the short version of the Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1993). We extracted two relevant subscales/dimensions of SELSA: social and family loneliness. Using a 7-point scale, participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with the statements (e.g., “My family cares about me”; “I can depend on my friends for help”). The internal reliability of the general social-emotional loneliness scale was α = .881. The social and family loneliness subscales' reliabilities were α =.81 and α = .85, respectively.

*Dependent variable: Perceived gratifications*

Perceived gratifications were measured using an 18-item scale to assess the degree of gratifications an online group has in one’s life. Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with the items using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with each statement (e.g., "I am willing to write about any topic in the group"; "The group is a source of comfort and support"). The internal reliability of the perceived gratifications index was high (α = .84).

*Mediating variable*: *Engagement*

Engagement was measured using a 4-item index assessing the frequency of activities users engaged in within the closed groups. Participants indicated the extent to which they performed each of the following activities: reading, sharing, commenting on posts, or uploading original posts. The scale ranged from 1 (never) to 6 (every hour). The internal reliability of the engagement index was high (α = .73). Descriptive statistics of the research variables are presented in Table 1.

***Procedure*.**

The sample of respondents was obtained from an online Midgam Project Web Panel, a company that specializes in providing infrastructure services for internet research. The company uses the stratified sampling method based on data published by the Central Bureau of Statistics (Central Bureau of Statistics Israel, 2019), and determines quotas by age and gender. Participants signed up and were paid for their participation ($1.2).

[Here Table 1]

**Results**

***Preliminary Results***

An examination of participants' usage and activity patterns in women’s groups reveals that 90% of women use Facebook at least once a day. In comparison, 78% use it several times a day. A full 75% of the respondents reported that they were members of closed women’s groups; the average group membership was 4.9 (SD=5.37).

Eighty percent of the women reported that they read posts at least once a day, and 54% reported reading posts several times a day;15% commented on posts at least once a day, 3% wrote posts at least once a day, and 7% shared links at least once a day. Most (74%) of the women reported that they either do not know any other group members beyond online activities or know only a few. Finally, for more than half the women, the main motivation to join these groups is “seeking help and advice from other women,” while for the rest, the main motivation is either “having fun” or “relief from boredom.”

***Hypothesis Testing***

A Pearson correlation was calculated to examine the correlation between self-disclosure and perceived gratifications (H1). As shown in Table 2, a significant positive correlation between self-disclosure and perceived gratifications (*r* = .274, *p* < .001) was found. Thus, the greater the self-disclosure, the more positive the perceived gratifications.

To examine the mediating role of group engagement in the relationship between self-disclosure and perceived gratifications (H2), we used Hayes’s (2018) PROCESS bootstrapping command with 5,000 iterations (Model 4). The analysis treated self-disclosure as a predictor variable, group engagement as the mediator, and perceived gratifications as the dependent variable. Results show that the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of self-disclosure on perceived gratifications through group engagement did not include 0 (95% CI [-.007, -.012] with 5,000 resamples). Moreover, results showed that the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of self-disclosure on perceived gratifications through group engagement did not include 0 (95% CI [.067, .180] with 5,000 resamples, *F* (2,289) = 36.93, *p* < .001, Rsq=20.36%). In other words, the model indicates a significant indirect effect for self-disclosure on perceived gratifications through group engagement (see Figure 1).

 [Here Figure 1]

 To examine the correlation between social-emotional loneliness and perceived gratifications (H3), we calculated Pearson correlations. As shown in Table 2, no significant correlation between social-emotional loneliness and perceived gratifications (*r* = -.070, *p* > .005) was found. Additionally, no significant correlations were found between perceived gratifications and social loneliness (H3a) (*r* = -.051, *p* > .005) or family loneliness (H3b) (*r* = -.065, *p* > .005).

 [Here Table 2]

To examine the role that group engagement plays in mediating the relationship between social-emotional loneliness and perceived gratifications (H4), we used Hayes' (2018) PROCESS bootstrapping command with 5,000 iterations (Model 4). The analysis treated social-emotional loneliness as a predictor variable, group engagement as the mediator, and perceived gratifications as the dependent variable. Results indicate that the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of social-emotional loneliness on perceived gratifications through group engagement did include 0 (95% CI [-.1225, .043] with 5,000 resamples). Moreover, the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of social-emotional loneliness on perceived gratifications through group engagement did include 0 (95% CI [.070, .029] with 5,000 resamples). In other words, the model did not indicate an indirect effect for social-emotional loneliness on perceived gratifications through group engagement (see Figure 2).

 The same results were found using social loneliness as a predictor (H4a). In contrast to this trend, results showed that the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of family loneliness on perceived gratifications through group engagement (H4b) did not include 0 (95% CI [-.205, -.046] with 5,000 resamples). In addition, results showed that the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of family loneliness on perceived gratifications through group engagement did not include 0 (95% CI [-.084, -.017] with 5,000 resamples; *F* (2,289) = 55.60, *p* < .001, Rsq = 27.79%). In other words, the model did indicate an indirect effect on family loneliness on perceived gratifications through group engagement (see Figure 2).

 [Here Figure 2]

**Discussion**

This study examines the role that closed multi-participant Facebook groups have on the lives of group members. By analyzing data from questionnaires distributed among Israeli women, we sought to learn about members' characteristics in close groups for women, their activity patterns in these groups, and their perceptions.

Based on our model, the findings indicate that the higher the extent to which members exhibit openness and willingness to share, the higher the group significance in their lives. However, we may not be able to establish a direct causal influence. Put differently, closed women’s groups on Facebook are a significant arena of activity for women who tend to benefit from exposing various aspects of their personal lives. However, it was found that the relationship between these two variables is mediated by group engagement. This has a positive effect on the group's perception as a significant factor in their lives. Women who respond regularly, write posts, and share content with group members reap more significant benefits than do members with a more passive presence, limited to reading posts and sporadic reactions. These findings are consistent with what Taddicken (2013) calls “The reciprocity of self-disclosure” (p. 251); that is, online gestures of self-disclosure will lead to similar responses and will deepen intimacy.

The study also offers findings on the relationship between social-emotional loneliness and attribution of these women’s groups' significance in members’ lives, although not comprehensively compared to each variable. Contrary to the study's hypotheses, no positive correlation was found between the level of the surveyed women’s social-emotional loneliness and the degree of importance they attributed to groups in their lives in terms of social isolation. In other words, women’s groups are not an adequate substitute for the real-life social contexts in which women experience loneliness. Changes in group engagement did not affect the relationship between the two variables.

In contrast, a positive correlation was found between family loneliness (a sense of loneliness in the family context) and assessing the group’s place in the participants' lives. The more isolated the women were in this respect, the higher the group’s gratifications were in their lives. Additionally, it was found that the group engagement mediates the relationship between the two variables. In other words, to achieve the most significant benefits from these groups, participants who experience feelings of family loneliness must participate actively. The more active and involved women are in the groups, the higher their perceived gratifications of the groups in their lives. This increases the group’s potential to serve as an alternative, supportive framework for a failing family system.

The study's findings indicate that closed women’s Facebook groups have considerable potential to satisfy needs and functions, fill substantial gaps in members’ lives, and provide them with alternatives to dysfunctional areas in their lives. At the same time, these groups are not a panacea. Thus, in terms of loneliness in general and in social contexts, Facebook groups are not perceived as providing a valid substitute.

Oldenburg (1989) proposed the concept of “third place.” He claimed that in the modern world, people’s time is invested mainly in the home (first place) and at work (second place). The third-place consists of all the other sites where people can escape from the first and second places and gather for social activities – such as parks, cafés, street corners, and pubs. These places foster a sense of community, provide support, and promote equality among members. It is highly reasonable to consider online social networks being as a “third place.” Furthermore, online communities blend into the other two places since the internet allows people to enter the third place even when they are at work or home.

The contribution of closed groups to the lives of women suffering from family loneliness might be found in the broader social context. The women’s groups' activity may meet some social needs. However, there is no real substitute for offline engagement, face-to-face social encounters, and communal recreation activities. The sense of support, solidarity, and belonging that participation in the women’s Facebook groups offers to their members and the fact that the group is a source of advice and assistance in decision-making processes can explain their central role for women who experience family loneliness. The main functions associated with family connections are adequately met by the closed group, particularly for women whose level of activity and participation is high.

This research shows the high significance attributed to membership in women’s groups by members from different backgrounds and radically different personality characteristics and needs. The findings were similar for women who tend to be open – those who seek common areas of activity to satisfy their needs – and women who say they experience social and emotional loneliness. While these contradictory characteristics may coexist (social openness may mask loneliness, for example), it is reasonable to assume that they represent different types of women in most instances.

The internet's rapid cultural changes and social network sites have prompted new social dilemmas and contradictions (Curran et al., 2012; DiMaggio et al., 2001). Basic concepts explored for years in psychology, sociology, and cultural studies, such as privacy, disclosure, membership, collaboration, and intimacy, take on new meanings online (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2013; Dalessandro, 2018; Joinson & Paine, 2007). Although in many situations, online activity seems to imitate and reflect what is happening in the offline world, thereby blurring the boundaries between the two, the present study indicates that in some situations, online activity is used to meet needs that may not be fulfilled in the offline realm.

***Limitations***

Several research limitations should be pointed out. The current study focused on large Facebook women’s groups in Israel. Thus, its findings may not necessarily apply to the inner dynamic of other types of women’s groups—smaller, more specific, or associated with a different culture. Future studies should examine a more varied set of closed women’s groups on Facebook. The complex nature of the findings concerning different kinds of loneliness and the role that closed Facebook groups may play in members' lives call for further examination of the phenomenon. Particular attention should be devoted to additional aspects of the interaction between the online and offline spaces by examining patterns of activity in closed Facebook groups and the users’ characteristics and perceptions of the groups.

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