ABSTRACT

Instant messaging (IM) technology has received extensive focus in the West while there is lack of knowledge of it in the Arab world. This study aims to shed light on factors affecting IM usage and user satisfaction in an Arab country (Kuwait). To achieve this objective, this study develops a theoretical model that is based on three well-known models. This model includes curiosity (from the theory of flow), compatibility (from the innovation diffusion theory), perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (from the technology acceptance model), and individual characteristics in the form of prior similar experience. The proposed model was tested using survey data from 609 students, with the results lending support for the proposed model. Importantly, results highlight the impact of social effect on curiosity as a new mediator of technology adoption and satisfaction. This study contributes to the literature on technology adoption in the Arab world and aids educational institutions and companies to understand the social and technical nature of users’ attitudes with regard to ICT adoption and satisfaction.

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INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has witnessed a high growth in the use of the Internet in the Middle East. This growth has been substantial in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and will likely continue to increase. For example, the Internet penetration rate has increased between 2000 and 2005 by 300% in Kuwait, 443% in Qatar, 257% in Bahrain, 201% in Oman, 207% in Saudi Arabia, and 310% in the UAE (Internet World Stats 2008).

Because of this trend, Li, Chau, and Lou (2005) call for studies to examine the value of several information and communication technologies (ICT) available for use. It is important to note, however, that although the Arab world has increased its Internet usage and connectivity (Loch, Straub, & Kamel, 2003); little is known on how these ICTs are used and the motivation behind their acceptance.

Among these ICTs, IM technology is one of the most widespread in the world.

We define IM as the ability to see if a chosen friend, co-worker, or associate is connected to the Internet and, if they are, to exchange real time messages with them. Two important components define IM capabilities: synchronicity and presence awareness. Synchronicity relates to the transaction speed of the technology while presence awareness lets someone knows whether his correspondent is online or not. IM is used instead of e-mail if an immediate response is desired, such as when clarifying questions need to be answered before the conversation can proceed or when a matter must be settled quickly.

Related IM Past Studies and Their Limits

With the widespread use of IM by individuals, a recent focus in the MIS field started to focus on why and how IM is used as well as what the consequences of its usage are.

Analysis of previous IM studies reveals three observations (see literature review in Rouibah, 2008, in appendix 1). First, since 2002, the number of studies on IM has increased. Second, despite an increased focus on IM, there has only been three studies (Chen, Yen, & Huang, 2004; Li et al., 2005; Rouibah, 2008) about IM in the leading, international IS journals (e.g., MIS Quarterly, and Journal of Global Information Management). Third, while past studies have focused on IM, both in the workplace and outside the workplace, there has been a lack of studies that focused solely on social usage in developing countries. With the increasing role of social influences on IM use, Shen & Gallivan (2006) suggested conducting further research in this perspective. Fourth, this study also notes that few studies focus on IM satisfaction as compared to current and intention-to-use IM. Fifth, while few studies have examined IM adoption in the workplace (Cameron & Webster, 2005), little is known about how IM is actually used outside the workplace and for social usage in an international context (except Rouibah 2008; Simon, 2006). There is also a lack of research that addresses IM consequence as observed by Shen and Gallivan (2006). Sixth, there has been an increase in research dedicated to IM, but these studies were not based on well known technology acceptance theories (e.g., Nicholson 2002), except De Vos, Hofte, and de Poot (2004), Lin, Chan, and Jin (2004), Wang, Hsu, and Fang (2005) Li et al. (2005), and Rouibah (2008). However, these studies did not investigate the relationship between IM usage and users’ satisfaction.

Moreover, with regard to IM usage in the Arab world, only two studies focused on IM (Rouibah 2008; Rouibah & Ould-Ali, 2005). Rouibah and Ould-Ali, (2005) described the factors that lead 211 Kuwaiti students to use IM and what were the consequences of their IM usage. Results of their study revealed that respondents use IM with people of the same gender (64%) and opposite gender (46%). As for motives of using IM, results revealed two main motives: for curiosity satisfaction (81%)}