Assessment of Students’ Familiarity, Adoption, and Use of Social Media in Bahrain

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ABSTRACT

Social media is used in many higher education institutions for educational purposes in numerous new and innovative ways. However, in Bahrain the number of higher education students who are aware of and use social media is not clear. It was therefore necessary to conduct an empirical study that would investigate the students’ use of social media in higher education in Bahrain. Moreover, the actual adoption of social media in everyday learning situations still remain underexplored, especially in higher education settings. This paper describes a study conducted to investigate the influence of social media use by student in Bahrain. The aims of this study are to assess students’ level of familiarity, engagement and frequency of use with social media. The data was collected using two questionnaires. The findings indicate that social media has introduce a new culture of learning among students. In addition, social media applications which are on the increase in usage by students for activities that include studying, access of education content, social communication.

KEYWORDS

Bahrain, E-Learning 2.0, Networked Learning, Social Media, Web 2.0

INTRODUCTION

Social media tools are used in many higher education institutions for educational purposes in numerous new and innovative ways (Conole & Alevizou, 2010). In order to investigate and gain additional insight into this situation, we carefully studied the experiences of students on Web Media degree at Bahrain Polytechnic. Several studies in other countries have found that social media are commonly used in higher education by students (Davis, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar, & Gonzalez Canche, 2012). However, in Bahrain the number of higher education students who are aware of, and use social media is not clear. It was therefore imperative to conduct an empirical study that would investigate the students’ use of social media in higher education in Bahrain. The aims of this study are to assess students’ level of familiarity, engagement and frequency of use with social media. Based on the above stated aims, the following three research questions were formulated:

1. What is the students’ level degree of familiarity in the use of social media?
2. What is the students’ level degree of engagement in the use of social media?
3. What is the students’ level degree of frequency in the use of social media?
In this study, the primary data were collected from a survey. The participants in this study were a cohort of Web Media students in Bahrain Polytechnic. The survey aimed in finding comparable numbers, evaluate the students’ level of familiarity, engagement and frequency of use of social media and gain additional insights. The three identified objectives of the study had a common denominator a cohort of Web Media students at Bahrain Polytechnic. The first objective of the survey was aimed toward the level of familiarity with social media. The second objective was to investigate the level of engagement with social media. Finally, the third objective was to identify the context of use if social media. This research provides insights to educators seeking to integrate social media in undergraduate programs’ curriculum, for increased inclusion of new technologies in higher education. Finally, we outline the potential implications and recommendations of this study for future implementations.

Background

The rapid growth of social media tools over recent years is a consequence of the integration of technology in the daily lives of millions of people around the world. Moreover, the phenomenon of social media is investigated by researchers around the world who wish to study the positive and negative aspects of using social media tools in various settings (Abu-Shanab & Frehat, 2015; Conole & Alevizou, 2010; Davis, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar & Gonzalez-Canche, 2012; Paliktzoglou, Stylianou, & Suhonen, 2014; Paliktzoglou & Suhonen, 2014, 2015; Tomai, Rosa, Mebane, D’Acunti, Benedetti, & Francescato, 2010). The fundamental nature of social media supports new and different ways of how humans communicate, using computers and other mobile devices. It offers to users the option to communicate privately or in a more public way, by posting comments for public viewing. However, the central idea behind social media is not new. In the late 1990s several sites, had basic functions similar to today’s social media. From the very beginning of the internet, the interaction and communication of users using interfaces such as chats, forums, message boards and blogs was introduced (Albion, 2008).

Social media offer new and multiple ways of using computers or mobile devices and support users gaining access to knowledge through different resources. In general, social media is an umbrella which covers a big range of online technologies (platforms and applications) that promote communication, collaboration, interaction and sharing data among the users. Boyd and Ellison (2010), define social media as social networking websites “that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (p.17). The purpose of the user following social media is mainly to interact with peers and others that on the social media various technologies. This involves the creation, sharing and distribution of ranges different information from news, reflections, opinions, research among others.

The integration of technology in the daily lives of millions of people around the world resulted to the rapid growth of social media tools over recent years. As such social media attracted researchers to study both positive and negative aspect of using social media tools in various settings. Social media tools offer new and multiple ways of communication using computers and other mobile devices. Users can communicate privately or in a more public way such as a comment posted for public viewing. However the fundamental idea behind social media is not new, since several sites with functions of today’s social media tools appeared in the late 1990s. From the very beginning of internet, communicating with others through interfaces such as chat rooms, Internet forums, message boards, web communities and blogs were introduced (Albion, 2008; Edrees, 2013)). Similar to other communications tools, social media tools have rules, conventions and practices which users have to adhere to in order to be accepted as legitimate users in these online communities. As argued by
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