The Adoption and Usage of Smartphone Media Technologies as A Source of News by Egyptian University Students

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the adoption and use of smartphones as a source of news by Egyptian university students. The study was applied on a random sample of 400 university students, whom already have smartphones. This study was guided by the uses and gratification theory to explore the use of smartphones among university students as a news resource. The study used quantitative research methodology in the form of a survey. Information was collected using a self-administrated questionnaire between March 2018 and April 2018. Findings showed that although Egypt is not one of the oil-rich countries, most of the university students are heavy smartphone users and the vast majority (87.5%) of them are accessing news via their smartphones. More importantly, the findings revealed that university students mainly used smartphones to get general information (47.5%), Egypt’s news (37.5%), entertainment (29.25%) and follow world’s news (27.75%). Finally, findings showed that (70%) of students use their smartphones to follow current affairs, while 67.5% said that smartphones helpe them to communicate with their friends.

KEYWORDS

Egypt, Smartphone, Social Media News Sources, Uses and Gratifications

INTRODUCTION

The growing popularity of mobile phones worldwide has gained attention and became a significant topic of interest among scholars from disciplines including communication, sociology, natural sciences, and political sciences. According to Yelton (2012) mobile phone is a worldwide phenomenon that crosses socioeconomic boundaries and is used for instantaneous communication and Internet access. Oscar (2014), wrote the role of mobile devices among current news media institutions around the world has become increasingly noticeable, and there is further evidence that the uptake of accessing local, national and international news via mobile devices certainly has increased over the last few years in the Arab World. Oghogho (2015) indicated that the growth of the mobile phone has been driven by the communication needs of people around the world, with the resultant transformation in human communication and interactive relations in society. In Egypt, mobile phones are widely used, and young people have emerged as among the most excited adopter of this new technology. It has been observed that young Egyptians spend more time on social media that on any other activity in their life. In 2018, the number of smartphone users in Egypt reached 26 million, and could reach almost 29 million by 2019, an increase of 3.15%, according to a report by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (The Egyptian Ministry of Communication and Information Technology 2018). Likewise, Essam, (2016) confirmed that the importance of smartphone usage was clearly

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expressed, particularly in Egypt, in what is called “The Arab Spring”, where such devices were described as the most important ways of communication by numerous groups inside and outside Egypt (p.72). In the same direction, Duffy (2013) concluded that the smartphone covered the Arab spring in a way traditional media simply couldn’t. It is not surprising, then, that Egypt offers a good case-study of what is happening with smartphones in one of the most populous countries in the Arab World, Africa and the Middle East, with a 2018 estimated population of 100 million based on the latest United Nations estimates. This widespread use of smartphone in Egypt offers a range of new research opportunities in the field of social media. Hence, the current study aims to investigate the perception and usage behavior of smartphones by university students in Egypt and the usage of smartphones as a news resource and the gratification they experience. This study was guided by the uses and gratification theory.

LITERATURE RELATED TO MOBILE PHONE USE

Universal use of smartphones among groups of communities, such as university students has reshaped and revolutionized the way young adults and various groups communicate. According to Katz and Aakhus (2002) “the spread of mobile phones is affecting people’s lives and relationships and affects how people communicate and interact when face to face or, rather and increasingly, face-to-face-to-mobile-phone-face, since people are ever more likely to include the mobile phone as a participant in what would otherwise be a face-to-face dyad” (P: 31). This extensive diffusion of mobile technologies has drawn the attention of media scholars and researchers with different interests, using different approaches, methods, and theories to study numerous aspects related to mobile phones to investigate and better understand users’ adoption and use of this new communication technology (Aldhaban, 2016). In their article, exploring the relationship between urbanized Malaysian youth and their mobile phones, Balakrishnan and Raj (2012), categorized the reasons to use mobile phones by university students into four phases. According to Balakrishnan and Raj (2012), “four main categories were identified, namely, reasons to use mobile phones, pattern of mobile phone usage (Balakrishnan & Raj, 2012; Brown et al., 2011; Essam, 2017; Mehrotra & Nguyen, 2012) purchasing factors (Balakrishnan & Raj, 2012; Tsai, 2012) and behaviour related issues (Alanazi, 2014; Aldhaban, 2016; Keengwe, & Bhargava, 2014). Although many studies provided valuable insight on user behavior in general, noticeably less is known about how users use smartphones as a news resource. Thus, the current study aims to investigate the uses of smartphones as a news resource amongst Egyptian university students. Several researchers (e.g., Akeriwa, Penzhorn, & Holmner, 2015; Kafyuullio, 2014; Keengwe, & Bhargava, 2014) have focused on defining mobile learning while others have focused on the outcome of using these mobile devices for online learning). Most of studies have looked at mobile phone usage amongst university students for different purposes (Alanazi, 2014; Aldhaban, 2016; Balakrishnan & Raj, 2012; Grellhesl & Punyanunt-Carter, 2012; Lee, 2004; Leung, 2007; North, Johnston & Ophoff, 2014; Tindell & Bohlander, 2011; Park, 2005). In the next part the researcher tries to shed some light on the literature related to the use of mobile phones by university students in the developing countries. It should be noted that the wealth of mobile phones research is quite nascent, and its application is still limited in the developing countries. The following studies are some examples of research that have been conducted on the adoption of mobile phones by university students, specifically, the different uses of mobile phones and the potential attained gratifications.

In Saudi Arbi, Alanazi (2014) investigated the uses and perceptions of smartphones as a news resource by Saudi Arabian students studying in the United States. The results showed that smartphones are the most utilized news source (83.5%) among different news sources such as traditional media and new devices such as laptops, desktops, and other portable platforms. Moreover, many of the respondents (90.3%) confirmed that the availability of accessing many different news sources attracts them to use smartphones to get news. A study conducted by Aldhaban (2016), found that many smartphone users in Saudi Arabia are influenced mostly by the expected performance of their smartphones and the
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