Chapter 5

Use of Web 2.0 Collaboration Technologies in Egyptian Public Universities: An Exploratory Study

Nahed Amin Azab
American University in Cairo, Egypt

Hisham M. Abdelsalam
Cairo University, Egypt

Sara Gamal
National Management Institute, Egypt

ABSTRACT

The second wave of the World Wide Web, referred to as Web 2.0, has affected every sector of the society including the public sector as well as the government, now often referred to as Government 2.0. Specifically, Government 2.0 can have a great impact on improving learning and research activities in public universities. Governments have recognized the role that Internet plays in education; they have made the use of ICT a substantial component in any government agenda. In addition, many governments have recognized the importance of incorporating Web 2.0 technologies in higher education. Being characterized by fostering an interactive and user generated content, Web 2.0 can usefully assist both students and faculty. Web 2.0 could contribute in overcoming budget constraints that constitutes a common problem among public universities especially in developing countries. This research argues that adopting Web 2.0 in public universities should start first by assisting faculty in their research and communication tasks through an easy and convenient way. This could reduce their resistance to change (which is considered one of the main barriers in adopting technologies) by being used to it and perceiving its value. Therefore, this chapter aims to investigate the use of Web 2.0 among academic staff in public universities. Such objective was reached through distributing a survey targeting a sample that represents faculty in some of the leading Egyptian public universities. Findings revealed a high use of
Web 2.0 by faculty members in collaboration and information sharing. In addition, the main barriers of use are due to a lack of awareness or perception of the value of such technologies. Moreover, it has been proved that the level of Web 2.0 adoption varies among academic disciplines, but does not depend on age or academic position.

INTRODUCTION

The main features of the second generation of the World Wide Web such as online communities, social networking and user-generated content production—referred as Web 2.0, are presenting a new dimension to the development of electronic government (e-government). Applying Web 2.0 concept in the public sector has been labeled as “Government 2.0.” Government 2.0 provides an opportunity for governments to redefine their position in the society specifically redefining their relationship with citizens (Anttiroiko, 2010).

As e-government covers three perspectives: e-service, e-democracy, and e-administration (Azab, 2009), government 2.0 can assist governments in solving problems in all these three e-government facets. Aiming to improve e-service and e-democracy, most governments in developed countries have included in their portals several links to Web 2.0 applications (such as, Facebook, Twitter, RSS, Podcasts, YouTube) to provide several channels for citizens to send their feedbacks and complaints on the services offered to them, and to encourage them to be involved in decision making. In the case of Egypt, a study undertaken by Abdelsalam and Gamal (2011) examining Web 2.0 applications in a number of Websites belonging to the Ministry of High education, Ministry of Education, and several public research centers revealed that Web 2.0 applications exist on a very narrow scale and are not used efficiently. The same situation is applied on the Websites of the major public universities in Egypt. As for e-administration (related to internal processes performed in public organizations), the main challenge is not due to technological reasons; it lies in the culture of government employees opposing integration of information and processes in public organizations (Ghuitas, 2009). Since the communication through several Web 2.0 tools is usually in an informal approach, using these tools by employees in the government could foster the culture of sharing among them. The authors suggest that incorporating Web 2.0 in e-government should start internally by employees to help them in achieving their tasks. This could be beneficial in two ways; first, to make employees familiar with these applications and to recognize their value, and second, to encourage open culture in government. Faculty in public universities could be the leaders in such adoption since they are the best candidates for learning new concepts. Also, since they are in direct contact with students, who are usually integrating social media in their daily lives, faculty could feel the value of Web 2.0 and would probably try to apply the same with their peers.

In addition to the general challenges in the public sector in developing countries, public universities suffer from further ones, and Egypt is no exception. A common problem is the lack of resources and facilities, which deprives a large sector in the society from acquiring a higher education; which makes the percentage of students enrolled in higher education institutes less than 5 per cent in developing countries compared to the world average of 16 per cent (Prakash, 2003). The limited resources in public universities constitutes a strong threat from private universities that were capable of attracting academic staff from public institutions, because they can provide better compensations and facilities to them. Thus, universities should look for new ways to reduce costs or to augment income to improve their infrastructure, increase the number of students, and to deliver a better teaching, learning, and research
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