The State of Social Media in Saudi Arabia’s Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Social media platforms are designed not only for entertainment but also for exchange of information, collaboration, teaching and learning. With this, Higher Education institutions in Saudi Arabia have started utilizing these platforms for the main reason that many students are embracing this new trend in technology. In this article, a discussion of this media in education in terms of its roles, used in different settings, and its policies and management in accordance with Saudi culture will be covered. Furthermore, the state of this media in Higher Education institutions among the country’s universities and colleges will be highlighted.

Keywords: Higher Education, Integration, Internet, Social Media, Social Network, Usage

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has been continuously adopted by many universities around the world. It increasingly became common to university departments, employees and students where it has been used mainly for communication and serve as a tool to establish positive impressions not only to individuals but also to Higher Education (HE) institutions. Through this media, these institutions can reach out the students, faculty and staff, parents and potential students through the provision of adequate online social services. These do not just give you information but serve as tools for interaction. Among the types of social media platforms are: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Blogging, YouTube, Flickr and Message Boards.

In Saudi Arabia (SA), statistics show that 47.5% of the Saudi populations are engaged in the internet. The percentage is an equivalent of 13.6 million users in the country (“Q1 2012,” 2012). According to “Digital Media in Saudi Arabia” (n.d.), 82% of these internet users utilize Facebook and 80% of Saudi Arabian YouTube browsers utilize social media tools. While based on “number of Twitter users in Saudi Arabia” (2012), the number of Twitter users in the country has increased to 3000% last June 2012. These figures indicated an effect

DOI: 10.4018/ijtem.2013010105
of technology on today’s generation. This is also the reason why universities in the country have started utilizing social media for teaching and learning purposes. As a matter of fact, Dr. Adbulmajeed Albanyan recommended in “King Saud University (KSU) Student Committee” (2012) Twitter should be utilized in teaching because of the today’s youth are cleaving to social networks, latest trends of gadgets and other forms of technology.

The continued adoption of social media in HE institutions is unstoppable. And this adoption has been used by the country to assist its citizens in order for them to learn, grow, and be more productive. This also leads to compete academically by providing its youths the quality of education they deserve.

The main objective of this chapter is to provide the readers the roles of social media in HE and its usage in different universities/college and even the policies and management formed by the Saudi government in using it. Also, the chapter will include the state of social media in the country’s top universities, the barriers that exist in some universities to integrate this kind of technology, and the solutions in order to overcome those barriers.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA IN HIGHER EDUCATION

2.1. Roles

Young Saudis are very much engaged in social media; thus HE institutions are continuously seeking opportunities to study the possibilities of this media integration in education and to tests its effectiveness to teach and learn the course. In consideration of education, social media can play the following roles:

• A medium for collaboration and sharing of ideas and opinions. This includes social network of which many HE institutions are embracing to update their staff and students. The network is being used to exchange ideas and opinions, sharing resources and in this manner, students can learn indepen-

dently and can learn with others through collaboration;

• A facilitator of learning. As a proof, Ver-vaart (2012) stated that social networks could facilitate learning by recognizing the importance of having continuous interaction between the educators and the students which will then have an impact upon the progress of the students in academics. According to Jalal and Zaidieh (2012), in the field of education, social networking sites offered students the opportunity to connect with other students, educators and alumni, both within and outside their current institution. They also stated three opportunities in using social networking in education, namely: (1) providing participation through such as virtual classroom, chat rooms and meeting by video; (2) offering repetition of information through their sites and giving the opportunity for learners to retrieve the information immediately or later and; (3) allowing access to courses available in their sites, allowing the learner to follow up online at any time it deems appropriate, and overcoming the limitations of space and time in the educational process;

• An act to reach out the students. Reaching the students is one of the useful ways to teach the students and at the same time understand them. If this is realized, teaching and learning the course would not be an issue, whether it be easy, moderate or difficult;

• An enhancement of the learning abilities of faculty and students. Sillius, Kailanto and Tervakari (2011) pointed out that social media enhanced learning systems, which encourage students to share their ideas, express their opinions, and build a small community. Through this, they can create a public or semi-public profile within the bounded system, tag contents, like and dislike items, comments on a status, send private messages to a particular user or group of users and send requests to other users to be friends within the system. Selwyn (2011) stated that social media
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