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*Full Length Research Paper*

# Usage of Social Media Technologies by Saudi Instructors at King Abdul-Aziz University to Support Students' Learning

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**This paper is a report on the findings of a research investigating Saudi instructors' usage of social media to support their students learning as reported by the students. Descriptive statistics were used to examine whether the instructors use social media technologies to support the students' learning; and what social media technologies the instructors are using as reported by the students. The findings revealed that 59 % of the students reported they have taken classes where social media were used by the instructors, while 41% of the students reported that social media were never used by their instructors. As reported by the students, the most frequently used tool by the instructors for learning purposes was WhatsApp (M= 3.01, SD=1.58). The second frequently used tools were YouTube (M=2.15, SD=1.36), and Twitter (M=2.04, SD=1.37). However, the least frequently used tool by the instructors was Skype (M=1.31, SD=.79). As social media technologies are emerging daily and adopted by the net generation, investigating obstacles, factors, and attitudes of the instructors to adopt social media to support students' learning is crucial to help learners effectively utilize these tools to enhance their learning. Also, more studies are needed to examine how learning can be enhanced through the adoption of WhatsApp as one application of social media as it was the most used tool by the instructors in this current study.**

**Keywords:** Social media, Saudi instructors, students' learning, instructors' attitudes, WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Wikipedia, and Skype.

## INTRODCUTION

Social media technologies have significant effect on the field of higher education. According to Lenartz (2013), institutions and individuals have begun experimenting with novel approaches for the use of social media in a wide range of higher educational functions. Aydin (2012) argues that the rise in usage of social media in general and Facebook in particular makes it a tool that is being utilized in great numbers by college students. At King Abdul-Aziz University, Mrs. Hayat Alguraibi (by the researcher, 2013) reported that she designed with her

students who enrolled in social studies courses a Facebook page to post and exchange opinions, slogans, and posters that her students designed to convey ideas related to some social issues in Saudi society. Bonk (2008) argues that YouTube videos enable learners to share learning experiences through reflection on the subjects. In addition, YouTube videos endorse learners' participations since learners actively create, watch, share videos and exchange their reflections. However, there are more and more people who use YouTube as a tool to

learn, but there is not much empirical data to understand this phenomenon (Bonk, 2008; O'Reilly, 2005; Tan and Libo, 2009). Therefore, students' utilization of social media for academic and learning purposes still need further investigations in order to harness such technologies for educational goals and help those digital natives meet their needs. At Saudi universities, few studies investigated impacts of adopting social media technologies to support students' learning. Al-Khalifa (2008); Salem and Al-Ghamdi (2011); Al Madhouni (2011); and Al-Kathlan (2011) conducted studies in different Saudi universities to investigate the effects of adopting different social media technologies on students' academic achievements. The findings showed high satisfactions and better scores and academic achievements for students who use social media technologies in the learning environments. However, as online classes increase at Saudi universities and social media continue to emerge, it is important to understand how these technologies change Saudi culture of education and learning, and how Saudi students perceive that these emerging tools have altered their learning practices and culture. According to Oblinger and Oblinger (2005), it is important for educators to understand that the Net Generations are forerunners of change. Their early exposure to technology has had effects on their habits and expectations of learning and is changing the culture and norms of society. Thus, investigating which social media technologies Saudi instructors use to support students learning, and their students' expectation about which tools to be included in the learning environments is very imperative. Spanier (2000) concluded that rather than college faculty assuming what the students need and want from technology to enhance online learning, faculty should be aware of the technologies students perceive as beneficial in learning environments. Instructors who teach in these environments need to know how to use these tools effectively in order to enhance their teaching and help their students support their learning. "Faculty needs to have a greater perceptive of the Net Generation technology expertise and how student learning is connected with technology; this is a vital component for higher education", according to Lohnes and Kinzer (2007, p.7). However, instructors' attitudes toward the adoption of social media technologies to support student' learning is important factor that needs more research. According to Greenhow et al. (2010), Tan and Libo (2009), and Warschauer (2007), although well-designed research studies support the incorporation of social media into the teaching environments, few educators have blended online social media into their instructional planning. Thus, understanding instructors' attitudes and challenges that might affect their attitudes toward the adoption of social media to support students' learning will help utilize these tools effectively to enhance students' learning.

## THE STUDY

This study was conducted at one of Saudi Arabia universities, King Abdul-Aziz University, Jeddah. An electronic survey was distributed in Arabic Language to examine if Saudi instructors use social media to support students' learning and what tools of social media they are using as reported by the students. 526 students participated in this study (296 of the participants were female and 214 were male students). A descriptive statistics analyses (Mean) was used to analyze the results. Students were asked whether they have taken a class where social media were used by the instructors (Yes=1, No=2). Six most common tools of social media were used in the study, which are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Wikipedia, and Skype. A five-point Likert-type scale was used (Never use=1, Rarely=2, Sometimes=3, Often=4, Frequently=5) to examine which of the six social media tools are or have been used by the instructors to support students' learning as reported by the students.

## RESULTS

The findings of the study revealed that 59 % of the students reported they have taken classes where social media were used by the instructors, while 41% of the students reported that social media were never used by the instructors. Students also reported that the most frequently used tool by the instructors for learning was WhatsApp (M= 3.01, SD=1.58). The second frequently used tools were YouTube (M=2.15, SD=1.36), Twitter (M=2.04, SD=1.37), Wikipedia (M=1.83, SD= 1.23); and Facebook (M= 1.78, SD=1.19). However, the least frequently used tool by the instructors was Skype (M=1.31, SD=.79), as reported by the students.

## DISCUSION

The results of the current study showed that 59% of Saudi students at king Abdul-Aziz University reported that their instructors use social media to support their learning. In contrast, 41% of the participants reported that the instructors never use social media for learning. This result is consistent with the results of studies conducted in different Saudi universities by Al-khalifa (2008); Al-Kathlan (2011); Al Madhouni (2011); and Salem and Al-Ghamdi (2011) which indicated that social media have positive impact on students' academic achievements. Also, according to the interviews conducted by the researcher (2013) with the instructors at King Abdul-Aziz University, most of the instructors reported that they use social media technologies in their teaching to help the students support their formal and informal learning. In

Addition, as reported by the students, the results showed that the most frequently used tool by the instructors for learning was WhatsApp (M= 3.01, SD=1.58). In contrast, the least frequently used tool by the instructors was Skype (M=1.31, SD=.79). Blankenship (2011) states that, —Interactive, community-focused online tools—like Skype, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, blogs, wikis, and the educational software Blackboard—are becoming so dominant in the classroom that it's hard to imagine any professor or student making it through a week without them” (p.39). Therefore, studying factors, advantages, and challenges related to the instructors' adoption of social media tools to support students' learning needs further investigations in order to understand which social media tools are effective, have educational benefits, and contribute to the enhancement of students' academic achievements. One crucial investigation is exploring factors that made WhatsApp an effective tool to be used by Saudi instructors as an educational tool to support students' learning. On the other hand, what made Skype the least frequently used tool by the instructors in the learning environments is another important study that needs future investigation in order to understand factors and challenges to adopt Skype by instructors to support students' learning.

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