*Full Length Research Paper*

# Gender differences in terms of the experiences that Saudi Students have with social media technologies

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**This paper is a report on the findings of a study investigating gender differences between Saudi male and female students in terms of the level of the experience they have with six tools of social media. Descriptive statistics were used to examine whether there is a difference between the two groups in the experience they have with social media tools. Findings of the study showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups in their experience with Facebook, with t(508)= -4.49, p<.05; with YouTube, with t(508)=-1.99, p<.05; and with WhatsApp, with t(508)= 2.25, p<.05. Male appeared to have more experiences with Facebook (M=3.71) and YouTube (M=4.10), while female have more experience with WhatsApp (M=4.66) than male students do. In contrast, the findings revealed that there is no significant difference between the two groups in their experience with Twitter, Wikipedia, or Skype. As few studies have been conducted to study gender differences in the usage of social media technologies, especially in a conservative society such as Saudi Arabia, more investigations are needed in order to help the instructors understand these differences to effectively enable students use these tools to support their learning.**

**Keywords**: Social media, gender differences, experiences, Saudi students, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Wikipedia.

## INTRODUCTION

Many studies have focused on gender differences and their impact on the Internet usage and web-based applications. Gender differences are related to the usage of the Internet and attitude toward using the Internet as well (Jackson et al., 2001). However, there is a relationship between people's usage and adoption of social media technologies and gender. Gender appears to be one of the important factors in using educational technology and determining the choice in social networks. When using the Internet for learning purposes, the gender difference is still observable among the two genders. Wang et al. (2009) revealed that in mobile learning settings there was a gender difference on the integration of mobile learning among general users.

Several studies have revealed that males are more competent and have more experiences in using the computer and the Internet than females (Durndell and Thomson, 1997). Kayaoglu (2012) also concluded that males have more positive attitudes towards technological aids and computer use whereas females do not feel as confident as males. Also, Shashaani (1994) concluded that male students have more experiences with computers and more positive attitudes than female students. Li et al. (2001); Sherman et al. (2000); Jackson et al. (2001); and Joiner et al. (2005) revealed that females might have much higher anxiety, less competence, and a less positive attitude toward using the Internet and its applications than males.

In contrast, other studies conclude d that female have different experiences with web-based technologies. Herring (2009) concluded that females posted more frequently and posted longer messages in an online forum. These findings, as Lenartz (2013) argued, are different from the previous findings which showed that men were found to talk more in public settings using traditional methods of communication. However, other studies concluded that there was no significant difference between genders' usage of the Internet for communication. Also, Selwyn (2007) revealed that gender differences remain a strong concern for the participation in electronic learning among college students. Selwyn found that male students' participation could be inhibited by the "feminine qualities" of e-learning environments such as using the online chat room and emailing.

As social media technologies are online and web-based applications, it is very important to investigate gender differences in terms of the experiences that male and female have with these emerging tools and factors affecting such experiences among the two groups. Studies have concluded that there are gender differences when people intend to use web 2.0 technologies. In their study, Huang et al. (2013) concluded that there were significant differences between the two genders on six web 2.0 applications (blogs, wikis, social networking tools, online video sharing tools, online games, and immersive virtual environments). The study revealed that overall females felt more anxious when using web 2.0 applications than males. However, such a difference was not found on social networking tools and online video sharing tools. Huang et al. stated that, "Even though students already use a variety of web 2.0 applications on a daily basis, females may not utilize them efficiently for gaining new knowledge or developing new skills. If so, females could lose many formal and informal learning opportunities made available by Web 2.0 applications" (p.57).

The impact of social media on gender roles needs more investigations in order to better understand gender differences in online learning using social media technologies. According to Mossberger et al. (2003), in the increasing usage and access to the Internet, where the Net Generation exposes early to the computer and the Internet applications and services, gender differences might be diminished and the gender digital divide would be minimized.

**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 there is a difference between Saudi male and female students in their experience with social media

tools. 526 participants participated in this study (296 of the participants were female and 214 were male students). Descriptive statistics analyses (t test and Mean) were used to analyze the results. Six web 2.0 tools were used including: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Wikipedia, and Skype. A five-point Likert-type scale was used (1=No Experience; 2= Poor; 3= Average; 4= Somewhat Good; 5= Very Good) to examine the students' experience with the six tools of social media.

**FINDINGS**

The finding of the study showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups in their experience with Facebook, with t (508)= -4.49, p<.05; male appear to have more experience with Facebook (M=3.71) than female students (M=3.19). Additionally, there is a significant difference between male and female students in their experience with YouTube, with t (508)=-1.99, p<.05; male students (M=4.10) have more experience with YouTube than female students (M=3.91). Also, there is a significant difference between male and female students in their experience with WhatsApp, with t (508)= 2.25, p<.05; female students (M=4.66) appeared to have more experience with WhatsApp than male students (M=.49).
However, findings revealed that there is no significant difference between the two groups in their experience with Twitter (Male (M=3.63), Female (M=3.66); Wikipedia (Male (M=3.37), Female (M=3.22); or Skype (Male (M=3.03), Female (M=2.85).

**CONCLUSIONS**

Results of the current study showed that there is gender difference between Saudi male and female students in their experiences with Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp. Male appeared to have more experiences with Facebook and YouTube, while female students have more experience with WhatsApp. As most of the previous studies concluded that male are more competent and have more experiences with technologies than female (Durndell and Thomson, 1997; Kayaoglu, 2012; Shashaani, 1994), the current study revealed that female have more experience with WhatsApp as one of the web2.0 technologies. Investigating in depth why Saudi female students have more experience with WhatsApp than male students is very crucial. Understanding factors and challenges that affect the attitudes and the experiences of Saudi male and female students when using social media is important in order to overcome possible difficulties. Also, investigating gender differences in the usage of social media technologies to support learning is important to diminish such gap and enable the learners to effectively use these tools.

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