

Social Media in Practice: The Challenges of Using Facebook in Higher Education

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Abstract

Facebook, as a medium of social network, has been used by people worldwide in their daily life. The aim of this study was to investigate the difficulties students faced at the higher education level when using Facebook, from the students' perspective. Facebook, as one of the social media tools, can be used to enhance students' learning. This study was conducted at one of the higher educational institution in Jordan, Al Al-Bayt University. Participants of the study were 49 higher education students who enrolled in Computer Educational course. The study also investigated the challenges of using Facebook as a learning tool that may relate to the students' duration of years of study, past experience with Facebook and their majoring field. A survey instrument was created by the researcher. It has 15 items that address issues that the students might encounter in using social media such as Facebook. Instructor ought to create a Facebook site to be utilised for the class purposes. All students have created their respective Facebook site for the same reason. At the end of the semester, the survey instrument was administered to collect information about the study and finally the outcome showed that students faced some difficulties due to security issues, lack of sufficient time for learning and managing activities and slow internet connection. It revealed that the students' duration of years of study, past experience with Facebook and their majoring field have no influence on the difficulties faced by the students when using the Facebook application.

Keywords: computer assists learning, educational technology, difficulties in using Facebook, Facebook learning tool, challenge with Facebook.

Introduction

Social media is a ‘computer-mediated tool that allows people to create, share or exchange information, ideas, pictures and videos in virtual communities and networks’. It is considered as ‘a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0’ (Wikipedia). According to the Facebook Statistics Stats and Facts for 2011, ‘With over 500 million users, Facebook is now used by one in every 13 people on earth, with over 250 million of them (over 50%) who log in every day. The average user still has about 130 friends, but that is expected to expand in 2011’ (Digitalbuz-blog, 2011). College students or students who are planning to start their education in a university can use Facebook for many purposes such as to choose a proper school, register for classes, choose their majoring fields, buy textbooks, find class schedule and plan, find class tools and materials, and communicate with other students and teachers (Staff Writers, 2009a,b).

Approximately eight million students of college and high school, in the United States of America (USA), used Facebook sites to post their personal information or to communicate with other classmates and their instructors as well. By these ways, students can stay in touch with their friends and family (Lashinsky, 2005). Facebook users can post their status to let friends know what they have in mind or express their feelings. They can post videos and photos that are related to a specific topic. They can also join groups and check class calendar. It can be used for math teaching by creating a math group for the students in the same class. They can write on the wall, solve math problems, and get feedback from the teacher. The group admin can control the group by rotating class duty and control what was being posted on the site wall (Mathews, 2015). Facebook has five default tabs that enable the user to add extra applications: 1) News Feed, 2) Status Updates, 3) Friends Photos and Album, 4) Posted Items and 5) Live Feed. It also has four other tabs to add or update: 1) Profile page, 2) Wall, 3) Info, and 4) Photos (display pictures that you post) and Videos (Mahalo.com, n.d.).

Facebook Applications: Motivation and Challenge

The goal of education is to improve students learning, and this will increase their knowledge and improve their skills. In order to achieve this

goal, students need to be motivated to learn, which will increase their participation in the learning process (Brophy, 1987). The key for success and improvement of students' academic achievement could be reached by motivating them to learn and stay engaged (Gray and Daymond, 2010). Computer applications, such as educational games, that can be posted on student's site, or can be found on the internet have a positive effect on students' motivation for learning. This is considered as a part of an active learning process that makes it more enjoyable (Al-Mashaqbeh, 2014). Facebook is a tool that has been used in the online learning process. Students used the discussion and messaging form to communicate on Facebook with other students and instructors. Teachers use this tool as a method to motivate students learning process (Mazer, Murphy and Simonds, 2007).

There are many other processes that teachers can utilise to motivate their students and improve participation on Facebook: 1) having good interactions between teacher and student, 2) organise a class discussion, 3) involve students with their instructors in community issues, 4) do extra activities on Facebook and 5) facilitate student's academic work and experience by the instructor (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). In terms of personal information to be revealed in the class social communication tools, it should be guided by the class instructor. The instructor should decide what personal information he needs to upload to create a comfortable class environment. On the other side, the instructor needs to control the amount of information needed by students to keep a positive communication, and this will motivate students to learn (McBride and Wahl, 2005).

Large class size, unskilled teachers and traditional way of training practiced by the teacher are the main source of the problems faced in the integration of technology in education (Brown, Lewis and Harclerod, 1973). A research was conducted to find the challenges that are associated with the use of social media and technology in schools. It was found that there were many challenges such as the range of stakeholder opinions, technical challenges, changing the culture of any school and privacy issues (European Schoolnet, 2012). Facebook, as a social media tool, has become an important source of information for people. Some privacy issues were a major concern for the Facebook users. Sharing information on Facebook about someone's identity is very personal and this information might be at

risk of being abused by identity thieves (Whelan 2005). Uploading private information on Facebook is considered as an important issue for the users of the site for educational purposes. The amount and the type of personal details to be posted on the class Facebook site should be influenced by a few of criteria such as culture, motivation, individual personalities, background and gender (Petronio, 2002).

Most students preferred Facebook, as an online social network, to get information about their friends. They can also follow the activities done by their friends on the site. This is considered to be of a concern for educators to get students to accept Facebook as a learning tool (Cheung, Chiu and Lee, 2011). Some instructors use the same plan of study for many years and they don't want to incorporate computer applications into their teaching plans. On the other side, school administrators, who believed in technology as an important part of the teaching setting, forced their instructors to incorporate technology applications into their plan. In order to speed up the process of moving toward the application of technology, we need to focus on having a proper training program in order to expose them to the benefits of applying it. Instructors stated that social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, which have been used as a learning tool for high school students and graduate students, may put students in danger of losing focus and more distractions in the classroom (Harven, 2013).

A study was conducted to examine the impact of posting teacher's personal information on Facebook on boosting student's motivation to learning. The finding of the study indicated that having more teacher's personal information on the class Facebook group will lead to improve student's motivation, more effective learning and more comfortable classroom climate (Mazer, Murphy and Simonds, 2007). A study was conducted to investigate the use of Facebook site in the language classroom for undergraduate student. The result showed that students in the language class have a positive attitude towards the use of Facebook applications as a support tool for teaching language, but it can't be the substitution for the traditional classroom teaching. On the other side, some difficulties might appear, for example, the instructor may find himself in the middle of misunderstanding for small issues among students (Eren, 2012).

Students who used e-learning system such as the blackboard software might faced some difficulties: 1) the evaluation method for their homework was not clear and 2) the communication with their teacher was not enough (Al-Mashaqbeh, 2009). Integrating web tools to support traditional teaching is a concern with having several e-learning websites and softwares that support the curriculum, but many instructors have limited use of it. Students in e-learning setting did not have self-motivation to improve their skills and to complete homework online (Mazer, Murphy and Simonds, 2007).

The Study

Importance of the Study

Millions of students worldwide are using the Web 2.0 tools such as Facebook. It is considered as a new era for higher education. There was not enough research that examines the challenges of using the social networking application (such as Facebook) by higher education students. This study investigated the difficulties faced by the higher education students in using Facebook applications, as one of the social media tools, to enhance and motivate learning.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges faced by the higher education students in using Facebook, as one of the social media tools, to enhance their learning. Participants were required to practice using News Feed, Status Updates, Photos, Posted Items and Live Feed. In addition, they were required to view comments or materials that were posted by the instructor and classmates and they have to respond to other users' posts. There were varieties of Facebook functions that became an optional use by the participants, such as the Wall and Info. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the most and least item related to challenges encountered in the use of the Facebook course site?
2. Is there a significant difference in the challenges encountered in the use of the Facebook course site concerning with the year of study, past experience with Facebook and majoring field?

Limitation of the Study

This quantitative study used the survey instrument to collect information from the participants. The researcher chose only one course, at the undergraduate level, to implement the use of Facebook applications as a teaching tool. The research focused on students' opinions toward difficulties encountered in the use of Facebook applications as learning tool.

Methodology

Sample

This study was carried out at the Al Al-Bayt University, Jordan with 46 participants enrolled in 'Computer in Education' course in the academic year of 2014–2015. This elementary course is a prerequisite for all students majoring in education and is considered as the graduation requirement. It is an elective course for students majoring in other field.

Research Instruments

Class instructor and students' Facebook sites

The class instructor created a Facebook site to be used by the participants during the experiment period, which was different from his own personal Facebook site. Each student has an option to use their personal Facebook site or to create a new site for the experiment.

Survey instrument and validity of the instrument

A survey instrument was purely original, which created by the researcher to collect information about the difficulties students encountered when using Facebook as a learning tool. The designed survey contained a 5-point Likert-type questionnaire that ranges from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. It has 15 items that intend to gather information about difficulties or issues that students might encounter when using the social media such as Facebook. It focused on issues such as: 1) students' experience and needs 2) time and 3) technical.

To ensure the validity of the research instrument and the suitability of the survey items (number of items, items related to the research topic and format), it was sent to five faculty members in different area of specialisations (educational technology, curriculum and instruction, computer science and psychology). They were asked to evaluate the questionnaire instrument and write their recommendations that could help improve the instrument. The researcher made the needed modifications, if any, taking into consideration the reviewers' comments. To ensure the reliability of the research instrument (the survey), the results of the study were correlated using 'Cronbach Alpha formula' and the score was 0.88 which indicates a good reliability.

Procedure

The study spanned for a period of one semester. The instructor used the class Facebook site besides the traditional teaching method. During the course period, the instructor added the students as friends on the Facebook and started communication with them when class ended. Instructor posted his daily status included photos, video, web address or comments that are related to the topic of the class of that day and asked the students to give their opinions. Students were asked to post materials that support daily issues of the class and they need to respond to each issues posted by others. They were also allowed to set a closed group for private conversations on the Facebook. Students were required to submit their assignments through the site and were allowed to make personal conversation with the instructor. At the end of the semester, the survey instruments were administered to collect information on their experience with the Facebook as a learning tool. It focused mainly on the difficulties and obstacles in using the new method for learning and teaching. The data were then analysed using descriptive and ANOVA methods.

Results and Discussion

The result for the first research question, 'What are the most and least item related to the challenges encountered in the use of Facebook course site?' were shown in Table 1. It revealed the descriptive analysis for the 15 items of the survey instrument that used to describe participant opinions on the Facebook difficulties. It indicates that the overall mean score for the instrument items was 2.71.

Table 1 The descriptive analysis of the 15 items

Item		Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I do not feel that my information on the Facebook was secured	3.06	1.298
2	There is no catalog to assist students on how to use the Facebook	2.84	1.297
3	Students were not responding well to the Facebook activities	2.57	1.258
4	The lack of having the full curriculum in electronic form	2.96	1.258
5	Not having the necessary skills to use the computer and Internet applications	2.29	1.173
6	I believe that the use of e-learning will not improve learning and I prefer using the traditional learning method.	2.51	1.192
7	Lack of time for learning and managing activities through the Facebook	3.04	1.322
8	Lack of confidence in using the Facebook	2.41	1.223
9	The idea of using the Facebook for learning is not accepted by the community	2.84	1.328
10	The internet connection was slow outside and within the university	2.98	1.331
11	Not having needed skills to use Facebook applications for education purposes	2.43	1.275
12	Lack of modern electronic devices and insufficient virtual laboratories	2.65	1.217
13	Not having enough time to follow others post or responses in the Facebook	2.55	1.209
14	Teachers not responding on time with our questions and comments	2.86	1.275
15	There were inappropriate comments, pictures, or video posted on the site	2.71	1.414
	Total	2.71	.861

As shown in Table 1, based on the highest mean value, the most challenges students encountered in the use of Facebook applications was item 1, ‘I do not feel that my information on the Facebook was secured’, with a mean value of 3.06. It was followed by item 7, ‘Lack of time for

learning and managing activities through the Facebook', with a mean value of 3.04. Item 10, 'The internet connection was slow outside and within the university campus', was in the third position with a mean value of 2.98.

On the other hand, it revealed that item 5, 'Not having the necessary skills to use the computer and Internet applications' occupies the last rank with a mean value of 2.29. It indicated that participants possessed the needed computer skills to use Facebook applications. Omwenga (2001) stated that it is the class instructor's responsibility to implement the technology in a curriculum, even if they complained about the lack of technology resources. They need to use whatever resources available to them to improve their teaching skills and techniques. Govani and Pashley (2005) stated that the students' main concern about the use of Facebook for learning new topics are the privacy and security issues. Christopher et al. (2012) examined the use of Facebook in learning and they found that it is an excellent way to integrate technology into learning in higher education but it faces some challenges. One of the challenges was the time limitation to maintain the momentum of communication and responses to students' requests and enquiries. Al-Mashaqbeh (2012) stated that teachers need to use computer applications and to improve their computer skills, and for that, they need more time and support from their schools' administrations, and hence it will improve learning. Raja Maznah and Ng (2010) stated that social networking tools provide a good learning environment to support class activities and engage students in their learning process, but it should be framed with a proper plan to become an effective teaching tool. Whelan (2005) said that one of the problems arises in the use of Facebook in education is the security of information on the site and how safe the students could feel when their personal information is included on the site.

The means and standard deviations of the second research question, 'Is there a significant difference in the challenges encountered in the use of the Facebook course site concerning with the year of study, past experience with Facebook and majoring field?', according to the three independent variables: 1) students' year of study, 2) students' experience with computer and 3) students' majoring field were calculated as presented in Table 2. It shows a slight variance in the means of the challenges faced in the use of Facebook applications according to independent variables.

Table 2 Means and standard deviations according to independent variables (year of study, experience and majoring field)

		Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Year	1+2	2.69	.869	22
	3+4	2.74	.870	24
Experience	Yes	2.63	.753	22
	No	2.78	.955	24
Major	Science	2.40	.824	16
	Humanities	2.87	.848	30
	Total	2.71	.861	46

As shown in Table 3, it revealed that there were no statistically significant differences ($\alpha=0.05$) in the challenges faced in the use of Facebook applications due to the students' majoring field, experience with computer and year of study. It indicated that students have the same concern about the use of Facebook applications, despite their year of study, experience with Facebook or majoring field. Using Facebook applications by the class instructor and students for learning and teaching process is a new way in education and all faced the same challenges despite their majoring field, experience and year of study.

Table 3 Tests of between-subjects effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance
Year	0.436	1	0.436	0.600	0.443
Experience	0.159	1	0.159	0.219	0.642
Majoring field	2.441	1	2.441	3.360	0.073
Error	32.691	45	0.726		
Corrected Total	35.557	48			

Conclusion

The main aim of this study is to investigate the challenges faced by the higher education students in the use of Facebook, as one of the social media tools, to enhance their learning. The finding of this study indicated that the main challenges faced in the use of Facebook applications as a learning tool are the security concern, insufficient time for managing activities and lack of internet connection.

In order to use Facebook applications in a suitable way and to improve students' learning, there are recommendations such as: (1) to teach students on how to choose Facebook applications and options to secure their personal information; (2) to set a daily specific time (office hour online) for instructor to response to students' questions and communicate with them and (3) to allow students to communicate with each other, within and after class hours, by using their own personal computer to solve the internet connection problems. In the light of the results of this study, previous studies on the use of Facebook in education, and the researcher's observations during the study period, the researcher designed a plan to overcome these difficulties as shown in Figure 1.

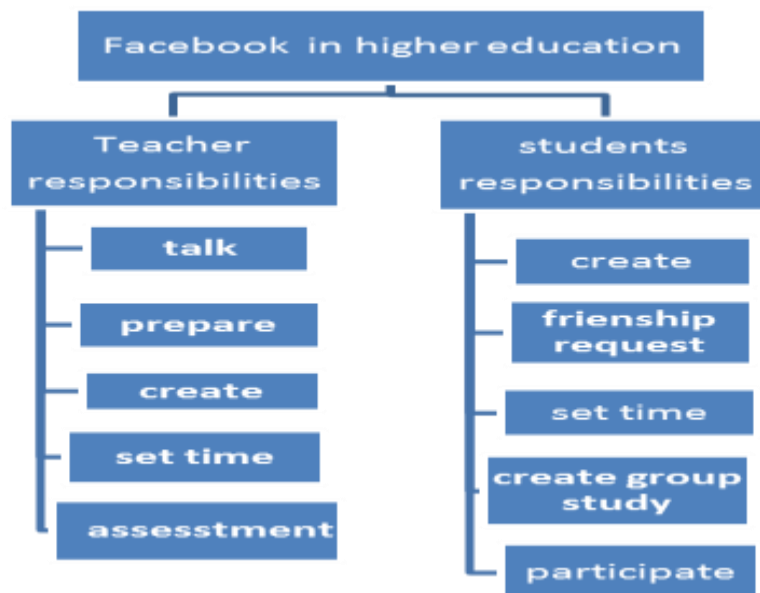


Figure 1 A suggested plan to overcome Facebook difficulties

As shown in Figure 1, a plan was developed by the researcher for instructors and students to follow in order to overcome these difficulties faced in the use of Facebook as a higher education teaching tool. Instructors and students need to perform their responsibilities to improve the use of social media in higher education setting.

Instructors' responsibilities:

1. Explain to students about the applications that can be found in the Facebook and the importance of using it as a learning tool
2. Prepare curriculum in electronic form (e-book, presentation, exams, extra materials and softwares)
3. Create a Facebook site for the class purposes or Facebook groups
4. Set a time frame to regularly check the Facebook site and respond to students and mentor of the site
5. Have a plan to assist the students' work by 'assessment method'

Students' responsibilities:

1. Create own Facebook site
2. Send friendship request to other students from the same class
3. Set a time in class to do some daily activities in Facebook (eg. posting and responding to others)
4. Interact privately with the instructor on personal issue on Facebook
5. Open a discussion about issues related to the class topics
6. Ask for technical help if needed

The result of this study indicated that security, insufficient time for managing activities and problems with internet connection were the most concern that hindered students from using Facebook in higher education setting. The researcher believed that the issue they concerned most is the security, which indicated that student would hesitate to send messages or files on Facebook. The researcher also believed that if students are aware of the benefits of using social media and they know that files and information can be easily uploaded, they would feel more comfortable and less concern about security issues on Facebook.

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