THE PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALES STUDENTS AT A NEW UNIVERSITY IN SAUDI ARABIA TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA AS E-LEARNING TOOLS TO SUPPORT LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the perspectives of female's students at a new university in Saudi Arabia to use social media as e-learning tools to support their learning. It also aims to investigate their current usage of these tools and the benefits behind using these tools for learning. Another aim of this study is to examine the difficulties that females' students face when they use social media tools in their learning process. The study participants comprised 23 Saudi females' students at a new university and surveyed was used to collect data for this study. The results indicate that female students are using social media tools and their opinions largely coincide regarding the benefits of and barriers to social media usage. The study recommends that future research on the usage of social media tools for learning and teaching be extended to include a wider demographic base at the same or a different university to further explore the extent to which these tools used for learning. The study provides insights that may help decision-makers at the university to recognise the extent to which females use and integrate social media tools to facilitate the educational process.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social Media is one of the most prominent inventions of the twenty-first century. Many SM applications, such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and Wikipedia, have become an integral part of daily life. Internet and mobile devices have fostered the prevalence of social media use anytime and anywhere [5], [26], [23].

Ref. [9] define social media tools as " a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. It is a medium for social interaction as a super-set beyond social communication enabled by ubiquitously accessible and scalable communication techniques" (p. 63). These technologies include a variety of networked tools that emphasize the social aspects of the Internet as a channel for collaboration, interaction, and communication such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, Wikipedia, Twitter, and Skype.

"Social connections affect so many aspects of our lives that our argument that they can also be applied to education and learning should be no surprise" [10]. In 2013 there were more than 6 million active Facebook users in the KSA, where over 90 million videos were watched daily on YouTube (more than any other country worldwide)

as well as roughly 3 million Saudi Arabians were active Twitter users - almost half (47%) of all tweets in the Arab world were produced by Saudi Arabians [2]

Of course, educators understand there is a value in technology, and many have begun to harness these inventions for educational purposes. Studies have proven the benefits of integrating social media for facilitating teaching and learning in higher education ([16], [28], [19], [11], [27], [1], [5].

Moreover, social media can provide an opportunity for students to acquire the skills of communication, collaboration [28], critical thinking [7], creativity, and life-long learning [8]. Incorporating this technology into the learning process changes the way people learn, exchange knowledge, participate, collaborate with peers and teachers, and create innovative ideas.

Furthermore, social media tools can aid in developing skills [21], raise levels of satisfaction [25], and provide students with personal and emotional support and self-confidence [22], and improve academic performance through collaborative learning [3].

The incorporation of online social media has become the most promising tool for reinventing public education. Another major motivation for using social media in education is the familiarity that students already have with them, as they are already being used outside the classroom for a variety of social networking and communication purposes [24], [6].

Ref. [9] have argued for the usefulness of using social media tools for learning and the important role that these tools can play in classrooms. They concluded that "...the evidence presented reinforces the view that such networks have untapped potential, capable of making a significant contribution to the learning and teaching process" [9].

Nevertheless, there is still a hesitancy to incorporate different modes of social media. As [26] notes: "While educators may recognize the value of incorporating technology into the classroom, many may struggle to identify ways to use technology toward extending students' thinking, rather than as an add-on to a lesson" (p. 24).

Many studies referred to different challenges when social media apply in education. Ref. [6] conducted a study to examine the use of social media tools in Saudi Arabia. The results of the study indicated that female student's still face big challenges to use these tools for learning due to privacy and security concerns.

Likewise, [1] found that one factor that discourages using social media tools in teaching environments is the distractions they pose to students which prevent learners from not participating and focusing on the course content, thereby reducing true communication.

In an investigation carried out in the context of Saudi society, Ref. [7] found in their investigation to explore the views of 160 male students regarding the limitations of using social media tools for learning that "48% of the students mentioned lack of training, technical, and Internet problems as the major challenge to their successful learning via these tools".

Thus, this study aims to understand the perceptions of Saudi females' students regarding using social media as e-learning tools to support their learning and to explore benefits and barriers affecting the adoption of such tools at the new university in Saudi Arabia.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted at an emerging university in southern Saudi Arabia. An electronic survey was distributed in the Arabic Language to examine the perceptions of Saudi females' students regarding using social media as e-learning tools to support their learning and to explore benefits and barriers affecting the adoption of such tools at the new university in Saudi Arabia. 23 females participated in this study from the College of Education in the emerging university. The sample involves a wide range of females' students from different levels of study. A questionnaire was carried out during the 2020 summer semester. A questionnaire is a primary data collection tool which usually contains a predetermined set of questions that participants are asked to answer [12]. In this study, closed and open-ended questions were used in the questionnaire. Five-point Likert scale responses were used in most items to scale the extent to which participants agreed or disagreed with each statement.

According to [12], questionnaires are economical; they can be sent to a huge number of participants at a low cost. Moreover, the data are easier to gather, analyse, and interpret than the data collected from oral responses [17]. In order to eliminate bias, all participants respond to exactly the same questions, and honesty is encouraged by the anonymity of the process.

The questionnaire was collected from the sample through direct contact and online, using Google Forms, with the links sent by email. The data were anlysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science 21 version) to help clarify the descriptive data of the study.

3. RESULTS

As can be seen in Table 1, the study revealed that the rate of social media usage among females' students was very high (100%). All respondents in the survey indicated a degree of usage of social media. The greatest proportion of the sample was in the 19-20-year age groups (50%). Additionally, the vast majority of the sample participants had a social media account, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (95.2%). It is also apparent from the results that the social media tools that attracted the most usage among the student respondents were WhatsApp (44.9%), YouTube (29.9%), Wikipedia (6.32%), Twitter (6.32%), Facebook (6.32%), and Skype (6.32%).

Table 1: Participants' Demographic Information

	Frequency	Percentage
Use of social media		
Yes	23	100
No	0	0
Total	23	100%
Specialisation		
Sciences	16	85.8
Humanities	7	14.2
Total	23	100%
Age groups		
19 to 20	9	50
21 to 22	8	40.5
23 to 24	4	7.1
24 and above	2	2.4
Total	23	100%
Social media tools used		
WhatsApp	9	44.9
YouTube	6	29.9
Wikipedia	2	6.32
Facebook	2	6.32
Twitter	2	6.32
Skype	2	6.32
Total	23	100%

As shown in Table 2, almost the entire sample (95.2%) believed that social media was important. Most of the sample (88.1%) used social media tools to enhance their skills and developed their abilities in communication. Moreover, 90.5% of the sample believed that social media tools promote self-learning and their autonomy. Over half of the sample (89.9%) indicated that social media tools are effective for supporting students' learning processes and increase their knowledge. Furthermore, 91% of the sample believed that social media tools can extend the opportunity for students to communicate and interact beyond formal sessions.

Table 2: Perception of The Participants

Statements	Answers	Frequency	Percentage
I think that social media are important for learning	Yes	20	95.2
	No	3	4.8
	Total	23	100%
	Yes	18	88.1

social media tools enhance students' skills and developed their abilities in communication	No	5	11.9
	Total	23	100%
Social media tools promote students' self-learning and their autonomy	Yes	17	90.5
	No	6	9.5
	Total	23	100%
Social media tools are effective for supporting students' learning processes and increase their knowledge	Yes	16	89.9
	No	7	10.1
	Total	23	100%
social media tools can extend the opportunity for class members to communicate and interact beyond formal sessions	Yes	20	91
	No	3	9
	Total	23	100%

As can be seen in Table 3, the participants considered the major difficulties that limit their use of social media to be distraction (89.9%), privacy issues (40.1%), cyberbullying (38.1%), and lack of training and quality of the Internet and technology (89.9%).

Table 3: Disadvantages of Using Social Media Tools for Learning

Statements	Answers	Frequency	Percentage
I am concerned about privacy issues related to the use of social media tools	Yes	18	84
	No	5	16
	Total	23	100%
I feel concerned about the dangers of cyberbullying when using social media	Yes	16	78.9
	No	7	21.1
	Total	23	100%
Social media usage could distract students' focus away from academic learning	Yes	20	89.9
	No	3	10.1
	Total	23	100%
I feel concerned about the lack of training and quality of the Internet and technology	Yes	17	83
	No	6	17
	Total	23	100%

4. DISCUSSIONS

4.1. PERCEPTIONS OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA AS E-LEARNING TOOLS

The aim of this study was to examine the perceptions of females' students at a new university in Saudi Arabia regarding the perceptions of using social media as e-learning tools. The second part of the survey contained 8 statements. The females' students were asked to rate each statement to determine their perceptions regarding the perceptions of using social media as e-learning tools to support their learning.

Analysing quantitative data collected has shown that the vast majority of females' students participating in this research have positive perceptions towards using social media as e-learning tools in their interactions with their friends and tutors. Despite this consensus, not all females' students agree on using social media as learning tools. There were some who were completely opposed to using social media and indicated some concerns to integrate these tools in education.

The results from the questionnaire revealed that the females' students were familiar with social media tools, proving that those students were associated with the technology in their hands. Because of this familiarity, females' students started to enjoy the use of social media in education because they lived in it and dealt with it much of the time. Most of the females' students (18 out of 23 participants) stated that they preferred using social media tools and wished that all their tutors would use these tools in their classes.

In line with the findings of this study, Ref. [27] conducted a study in Malaysia to examine student perceptions of the use of social media as e-learning tools. Those results revealed that most of the people in that study sample had a positive perception of the use of social media tools in education.

Moreover, the result of this study indicated that all females' students have used at least one type of social media for learning such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Wikipedia, Twitter, Facebook, and Skype. Several studies conducted in other countries also report similar findings of teachers' attitudes toward social media tools in education [14], [10].

The results of the questionnaire data analysis revealed that (20 out of 23) of the females' students participants agreed that using social media as e-learning tools can extend the opportunity for class members to communicate and interact beyond formal sessions. Overall, the females' student participants considered that social media tools enhanced their skills and developed their abilities in communication, which were motivating factors for them in employing these tools in learning and teaching practices. It can be realised that the previous outcomes are compatible with the findings that emerged from the studies led by [26], [24], [28], [27], [8], [23], which illustrated that social media tools are places where students can communicate with scholars and educators to share their common interests and express their opinions.

The data from the females' students' questionnaire indicated that using social media as e-learning tools promotes students' self-learning and their autonomy. This indicates that Saudi students believe that using these tools for e-learning is a good learning experience because it encourages students to self-learn.

In accordance with the present results, previous studies have demonstrated that social media tools are a pedagogical and technological vehicle for supporting students' self-learning. These tools play substantial roles in the females' students' shifts from being a recipient of information to a collector, organiser, and designer of one's own learning experience (Haworth, 2016, [4].

The vast majority of the females' students (19 out of 23 participants) involved in this research considered that integrating social media as e-learning tools could expand collaboration among users and give them an opportunity to exchange their thoughts and experiences, ask questions to their instructors, send lectures, and receive students' answers. The females' participants stressed that by ignoring or misunderstanding the objectives of these tools and not using them, this may obstruct the enormous revolution that has taken place in technology. This result is consistent with those of studies conducted in other Saudi universities [20], [13], [4], which indicated that social media tools have positive impacts on students' academic achievements.

4.2. THE DIFFICULTIES RELATED TO THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS FOR LEARNING

In this study, many factors were found to hinder the use of social media as e-learning tools by females' students. These factors, or barriers, also impact their perceptions toward using these tools for educational uses. The barriers that were most identified by females' students as limiting their use of social media tools were distractions, privacy, cyber-bullying, lack of training, and quality of the Internet and technology.

The findings from this study revealed that (14 out of 23) of the females' students felt concerned about the dangers of cyberbullying, extortion, harassment and pornographic, and sexual materials during using social media tools, which can cause profound psychosocial outcomes such as damage to reputation, depression, anxiety, severe isolation, and even suicide. This result was consistent with other researchers who found that the dangers of cyber-bullying are a significant barrier that limits the use of technology in teaching and learning [15], [13], [18], [4].

Privacy was found also to be an important barrier that limits females' students' use of social media tools. The participants in this study reported that they felt concerned about privacy when using social media tools in the classrooms. They stated concerns about the privacy and security issues related to social media tools usage, especially in a closed society such as Saudi Arabia, where any influential action conducted by individuals, whether positive or negative, reflects not only on the individuals but also on their families. Therefore, the privacy issue is considered not only a personal matter for the user but also a social concern.

Moreover, the participants felt they should be made aware of the consequences of posting personal information by being offered workshops by the university to assist them to use those tools wisely. This result is consistent with the findings of the study by [6] that pointed out that privacy and security concerns continue to be the biggest challenges inhibiting the usage of social media tools, particularly among female students.

Distraction was found to be another important barrier that limits students' use of social media as e-learning tools. Analysis of the quantitative data revealed that three-quarters of female's student participants expressed a

concern that social media tools represented a distraction in the classrooms and could cause a lack of focus, thereby reducing true communication. These findings seem to be consistent with other studies [19], [11], [1], [5], which found that one factor that discourages using social media tools in teaching environments is the distractions they pose to students which prevent learners from focusing on the course content.

The lack of effective training and quality of the Internet and technology was found to be an important barrier limiting tutors and students in their use of social media tools. The result of the quantitative data analysis revealed the importance of providing training for females' students as not all of the students were comfortable with social media tools and still needed guidance on how to use these tools for learning.

Prior studies have noted that there are certain barriers to using new technologies that are strongly influenced by the lack of training and quality of the Internet and technology were considered by many students as a hindrance that could cause frustration and resistance among females' students [6], [8], [5].

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to examines the perceptions of Saudi females' students regarding using social media as e-learning tools to support their learning. It also examined the benefits of using social media tools for learning and the important role that these tools can play to facilitate the educational process. Moreover, it examined the barriers they could face during the use of social media tools in the education process. An electronic survey was used to collect results obtain from 23 females' students at a new university in Saudi Arabia. The finding of this study indicated that the females' students had very positive perceptions to use social media as tools for e-learning and reported that these tools are effective tools for building participation, interaction, collaboration, communication among females' students, and encourage critical and reflective thinking. However, the results indicated that the major barriers to using these tools in learning were a distraction, privacy, cyber-bullying, lack of training and quality of the Internet and technology.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author have declared that no competing interests exist.

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