Facebook: A potential educational tool in higher education

Randa Ali Almahsneh

Introduction:
Facebook is the most frequently visited social media networking site worldwide (Ryan & Xenos 2011). Mason and Rennie (2007: 199) reasoned, “shared community spaces and inter-group communications are a massive part of what excites young people and therefore should contribute to [their] persistence and motivation to learn”. Following this line of reasoning, higher education institutions have increasingly used Facebook as an alternative space wherein students can network online with peers and faculty. This offers students and instructors opportunities to communicate and engage with learning tasks through technology that they are already using to socialize (VanDoorn & Eklund, 2013). There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that Facebook enhances students’ learning outcomes, such as their ability to demonstrate understanding of the unit material, and construct knowledge for themselves (e.g. Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010; Yu, Tian, Vogel and Kwok, 2010). Facebook is broadly used among university students as a social media tool in Jordan. However, the field lacks studies that focus on its use for educational purposes.

Study Objectives:
This study aims to explore the use of Facebook for learning and instruction purposes among instructors and students at higher education in Jordan. Specifically, the current study intended to answer the following questions:
- What is the level of utilizing Facebook for teaching purposes among university professors?
- What is the level of utilizing Facebook for learning purposes among university students?
- Are there statistical differences in faculty members' use of Facebook for teaching purposes, due to their level of experience, their rank, their faculty (scientific/humanistic), and their gender?
- Are there statistical differences in students' use of Facebook for learning purposes, due to their gender, their year of study and their faculty (scientific/humanistic)?

Methods:
During the fall semester 2014/2015, a total of 300 students and 30 faculty members from the Hashemite University/Jordan were invited to participate in the study. All participants have active accounts on Facebook.

Two questionnaires were used for data collection; one for faculty members entitled 'Faculty members' use of Facebook for Instruction', and the other for students entitled "Students' Use of Facebook for Learning". Qualitative and quantitative methods were deployed to analyze the generated data. The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS.
Results and Conclusion:

The preliminary results of the study suggest that Facebook has the potential to serve as a powerful learning and instruction tool in addition to being a popular social networking tool. The results of the study provide valuable feedback for instructors and students who use Facebook for educational purposes. Further, it provides instructors who wish to integrate Facebook into their courses with helpful information about the best practices related to such technologies. Furthermore, the current study provides university authorities with a clear picture of the use of Facebook on campus, this will help them shape the rules and policies regarding integrating this technology.

Facebook is the most popular social networking site, and the potential of using it for instructional purposes has been highlighted. The current study aims to explore the use of Facebook for educational purposes in higher education institutions in Jordan. The study focuses on answering the following questions:

- What is the level of Facebook use among university faculty? What is the level of Facebook use among students?
- Is there a statistically significant difference in the use of Facebook for teaching among faculty members based on their experience, rank, and academic orientation (scientific / literary)?
- Is there a statistically significant difference in the use of Facebook for learning among students based on their gender, academic orientation (scientific / literary), and study level?

The study used two questionnaires: one for faculty members with a title of "Faculty Use of Facebook for Teaching" and another for students with a title of "Students Use of Facebook for Learning." SPSS was used to analyze the data, and both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to analyze the obtained data.