

Chapter 58

Investigating the Use of Web 2.0 Technologies and Their Presence in Saudi Government Agencies' Websites

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ABSTRACT

Government agencies in both developed and developing countries have started using social media to provide content and services. The aim of this study is to investigate the use of social media in Saudi government agencies. It adopts a quantitative approach. The study shows that Saudi government agencies are aware of social media and they use them for different purposes. The study argued that government agencies with less engagement with the public are less likely to use social media. Government agencies tend to publish the same content in different social media. Moreover, information dissemination and improving communication with the public were the main motivations for using social media. In terms of enablers, the study shows that awareness of the public about the importance of social media usage was an important issue. Regarding the challenges, lack of dedicated resources such as budget and specialized staff were the main challenges. The study contributes to the literature by addressing issues related to motivation, factors influenced the decision to adopt social media, enablers and barriers.

1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in general and the Internet in particular, is having a strong impact on business activities and operations (DeLone and McLean, 2003). In recent years, there has been an increased interest among government agencies and institutions in developed and developing countries to adopt and use social media (Web 2.0 technologies) in their daily work. Although there has been no agreement about what is meant by social media, several researchers have proposed different definitions from various perspectives. O'Reilly (2005) defines Web 2.0 technologies as a set

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of applications and tools that use internet standards and depend on user generated content and remixing data from multiple sources. Such applications emphasize the importance of users' participation, engagement, openness and the influence of individuals, groups and networks to deliver a rich user experience. McAfee (2006) coined the term SLATES, which refers to: Search, Link, Authoring, Tags, Extensions, and Signal, which describes the capabilities of social media usage in organizations. In the context of government, social media has been defined as "a group of technologies that allow public agencies to foster engagement with citizens and other organizations using the philosophy of Web 2.0." (Criado et al, 2013). Examples of such social media include: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, RSS, Blogs, Flickr and Digg.

The use of social media has become a phenomenon and is widespread in contemporary societies. Mergel et al (2009) have identified four main drivers in the emergence of Web 2.0 applications and their adoption by government and citizens, which are: technological, social, economic and legal. Concerning the technological drivers, the rapid diffusion of broadband, communication, improved technological devices, and high speed networks were important issues that allowed online users to generate, post, and upload content and information. Regarding the social drivers, there is an increased desire among users to express themselves and create content to share with their friends, contacts and other online users. In addition, contemporary online users are interested in the consumption of content that is interactive and collaborative, which emphasizes the importance of social engagement. With respect to the economic drivers, most of the products and services that are provided via social media are either free of charge or relatively cheap, which is an important issue for online users. Finally, the legal drivers emphasize the importance in the development of the software industry of open source initiatives which are supported by copyright law where licenses dictate a sharing culture rather than proprietary protection (Mergel et al, 2009).

During the last few years, the use of social media at a global level has been growing rapidly and social media networks and user generated content applications have been attracting the attention of online users and organisations who are embracing these applications and tools. For example, recent statistics show that Facebook has 1 billion registered accounts, LinkedIn 347 million, Twitter 316 million and Instagram 300 million accounts (We Are Social, 2015).

The situation in the Arab world is no different from the global landscape. It is estimated that there are around 82 million Arab users who use social media, with 22% penetration rates regionally. In addition, research shows that the usage of social media has been equally strong and rapidly growing, with 81 million Facebook users, 6 million on Twitter and 8 million users on LinkedIn (The Arab Social Media Report, 2014).

After the successful adoption of social media applications by Internet users, and in response to the social media phenomenon, organisations realised that such applications could be utilised at an organisational level. As a result, many governments in developed and developing countries have started deploying these applications (Mergel et al, 2009; Kavanaugh et al, 2012; Yi et al, 2013; Parveen et al, 2015) and during the last few years, social media have been accepted as information and communication tools by many governments worldwide (Mergel, 2013).

The idea behind using social media in government websites is a transitional move from that of e-government, with its focus on efficiency and bringing services, to one of integration and involvement of citizens in government initiatives (Abdelsalam et al, 2013) and can be seen as an attempt to utilize the Web 2.0 benefits and to keep up with recent development and trends (Sivarajah and Irani, 2012). In order for governments to meet the increasing expectations of citizens, they are can no longer do so by

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