The Use of Social Media Among Public Relations Students in the UAE

Hamza Saad Mohamed, El-Minia University, Minia, Egypt and Zayed University, Dubai, UAE

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine public relations (PR) students' use of social media in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). A total of 200 undergraduate public relations' students participated in the study. This research is an attempt to shade some light on the patterns of social media uses and purposes of uses by public relations students in the UAE. It also explores public relations students' attitude towards social media. The study uses quantitative approaches for research methodology. Results indicated that students use social media for friendship and entertainment purposes than educational purposes. Additionally, WhatsApp is the most used social media application, while Facebook came in low level among public relations students.

Keywords: Facebook, Public Relations, Social Media, United Arab Emirates, WhatsApp

INTRODUCTION

Despite many revered media and public relations scholars (Camilia et al. 2013; Ezumah, 2013; Junco,2012;White,Sallot, Porter & Alzuru, 2004) have conducted various extensive studies on the use and diffusion of the social media as a public relations medium, little research (Luttrell, R., 2012), has been conducted to assess public relations students use and perception of social media. Research about social media has grown enormously over the last few years. Some of the most important areas of social media research include online adults use social network sites, with Facebook as the most popular, followed by LinkedIn, Twitter and Instgram. Many media scholars (e.g., Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Junco,2012; Diga & Kelleher, 2009; Kent, 2008 ;) suggested that social media tools have dramatically changed the media environment. The increasing availability of the Internet and smart devices has enhanced the accessibility and attractiveness of social media (Kellerman, 2010; Redfern, Ingles, Neubeck, Johnston, & Semsarian, 2013).The number of adults around the world using social network sites (SNS) such as MySpace, LinkedIn, and Twitter has increased every year (Ross et al., 2009; Pew reports, 2011). For example, approximately two-thirds of the world's Internet population visit a social network or blogging site, resulting in ten percent of all time spent on the Internet. In 2015, Face book had over 1.450 billion active monthly users, WhatsApp had over 700 million active monthly users, and Instagram and Skype

each had 300 million active monthly users worldwide the time spent on these sites is growing at more than three times the rate of overall Internet growth (http://www.statista.com/statistics).

Historically, the term "social network" has been used by social scientists to explain how persons interact with others and set up relationships in social groups. According to Boyd and Ellison (2007) social networking sites can be defined as "Web based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi- public profile within a bounded system (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd and Ellison, 2007, pp.78-100). A review of the literature on social networking reveals that participation in social networks is connected with a multitude of benefits, even among populations that vary in age, gender, and other related variables. Making new friends, communicating, and connecting to other people are one of the prime reasons for using social networks. Moreover, writing emails, contributing to different chat rooms or participating in some conversation forums have been a part of students 'everyday life (Margaryan and Littlejohn 2011). In addition to personal interaction and entertainment value, social media has become a part of students' everyday life (Margaryan and Littlejohn 2011). Giordano, (2011) suggested that the use of social media by university students has grown to such an extent that it has been asserted the question is no longer whether students are using the social media, but how often and in what capability. Adabzadeh, (2013) pointed out that through websites and services that support and facilitate participation; social media allows them to work together and build a community. Junco, et al., (2011) confirmed that social media are particularly relevant for university members who seek ways through which students may become active learners. Over that past few years, social media is used extensively by young people, especially, undergraduate students (Alwagait, et al., 2014). Hence, several recent studies (e.g., Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Diga & Kelleher, 2009; Kent, 2008) focused on a variety of academic interests including social media usage, perceptions and the factors influencing the adoption of social media by university students. Early studies (e.g. Brenner, 1997; Greenfield, 1999; Young, 1999) concentrated on describing Internet habits and the problems associated with heavy use. Also, some researchers (Acquisti, A., & Cross, R. 2006) were primarily focused on issues such as user's privacy and social networks' development. In the light of the steady development of Internet studies, researchers instead of focusing attention on the internet addiction, they started to focus on the social and psychological costs and benefits of using the Internet (Kraut, Patterson, et al., 1998;). Since university students are heavy internet users, numerous studies have identified a relationship between the use of Internet and student engagement in higher education. For example, the usage of social media has received significant attention and its usage has been studied from many different perspectives. Many researchers (e.g. Margaryan, A., and littlejohn, A. 2011) identified problematic Internet use among university students. Other important studies (e.g. Chen & Peng, 2008; Cotton, 2008.) have investigated potential relationships between university students' online behavior and psychosocial well-being. Some researchers have studied the relationship between the social media usage among undergraduate students and their academic performance). In his study, *Facebook and other Internet Use and the Academic Performance of College Students,* Shannon (2011) examined the undergraduates' use of the Internet and Facebook as well as whether usage patterns, and perceptions about academic effects of use, relate to time spent studying and/or academic performance. The findings affirmed that spending more time on the internet for academic purposes, waiting longer to check Face book when studying or doing schoolwork, and spending less time on the internet for fun, are all significant predictors for spending more time on academics. Mazer et al. (2007) have studied the influence of professors who are using Facebook profile for cooperation with students. The findings confirmed that students who cooperate with their professors in this way have grater motivation for learning

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