Social Media Policy Implications in Saudi Higher Education Institutions- a Research Plan

Faowzia. Alharthy, Yuanqiong. Wang
Department of Computer and Information Sciences
Towson University
Towson, MD, United States

Abstract - This paper presents a research study on social media policies covering the concerns of how social media integration could be improved through policy implementation. The overarching objective of the study is to investigate and clarify the factors that affect the Saudi HEIs’ social media adoption and formulation of effective policies and examine factors affecting their actual use of social networking sites (SNSs) for educational purposes through the theory of technology accept model (TAM). This study will be done through the use of an online survey, interview, and analysis of the current status of social media policies at institutions of Saudi higher education.

Keywords: social media, policy, higher education, technology acceptance model.

1 Introduction

Social media integration in an educational setting offers many advantages to higher education institutions (HEIs). However, researchers have concerns about social media integration in higher education due to associated challenges and possible negative outcomes [1]. The lack of policy and unplanned social media integration can raise the challenges for respective institutions [2]. To minimize the possible negative outcomes of social media integration, educational institutions have started developing social media policies that develop the awareness of productive social media usage among potential users [1]. A number of HEIs have developed social media policies with rules and guidelines that could address the unique challenges faced by that institution instead of relying on the general internal policies formulated by the government [3]. The current research has identified that only a few Saudi higher educational institutions have developed clear social media policies. A majority of HEIs do not have any formal social media policy. For the HEIs that do not, it is necessary that they create one to protect their students and faculty from problems that may arise if they do not. Legally, HEIs have to protect their students and faculty from any risk. By increasing ethical awareness and reducing security risks, the actual usage of social media in academic settings will be increased, and the social media integration will be improved through policy implementation. To get a better understanding of what the possible factors responsible for the lack of social media policies are in Saudi HEIs, this study will be conducted to assess which factors affect the HEIs’ intentions to formulate social media policies and their motivation to use the SNSs as an advanced teaching and learning tool.

2 Research methodology

This section will outline the research design and will provide a discussion about the reason for selecting these methods in this study. The researcher intends to employ a mixed-method research design where primary data will be collected by adopting the survey and focus-group approach, and secondary data will be obtained from the URLs of the HEIs.

First, the researcher will collect the URLs of 77 institutions’ official websites and the URLs of social media policies of institutions, if any exist. Second, the survey will collect the quantitative data from randomly selected students and faculty. The focus group discussion will be conducted by involving the policymakers and administrators. The insights from the responses given by students and faculty will be used in part to refine the questions posed to the focus group. Additionally, the mixed methods approach will enable the researcher to quantify the impact of different factors of the faculty and students’ intention to use SNSs for educational purposes, and qualitatively analyze the policymakers’ and administrators’ intentions to formulate effective policies: further details of research design, data collection, data analysis and sampling are given below.

2.1 Research design

TAM is one of the models that many studies have adopted to understand the individuals’ behavioral intentions, to explore the factors influencing acceptance of new technologies and to explain E-learning acceptance or rejection [4]. The study intends to adopt the TAM to conduct the empirical research and understand which factors affect the Saudi HEIs’ social media adoption and formulation of effective policies. The study will adopt the theoretical framework as theoretical guidance [4]. However, this research will make some modifications to adjust to specific research context. The researcher has adopted two external factors, ethical awareness and security awareness to enhance the model effectiveness [5]. Figure 1 below shows the adapted theoretical framework:

2.2 Data collection

According to a Saudi Arabia Ministry of Education (2017), there are 77 Saudi universities and colleges (27
public and 53 private). The researcher will collect the URLs of all Saudi universities and colleges. The second stage is to find and record the status of policy existence, and the keywords used for searching will be: [media guideline, media policies, networking policies, networking handbook, networking guidelines, media handbook].

During the second stage, the researcher will employ an online questionnaire to collect data from students and faculty. This online questionnaire will be designed for students and faculty members in order to extract important insights concerning their attitude towards using social media. The overall questionnaire contains 46 closed-ended questions grouped under nine constructs according to the TAM [23 for faculty and 23 for students]. The questions and their corresponding constructs will be adapted from previous studies [4] [5] and modified according to the context of this study. The questionnaire also included additional demographic information for descriptive purposes, such as gender, education degree information, and family income for student. For faculty, gender, ethnicity, subject taught and the number of years of teaching experience will be collected.

After completing the survey research, the researcher will contact administrators and policymakers to participate in a focus-group discussion. The interview guideline will contain eight research questions that will be answered by policymakers and administrators regarding their view for formulating and implementing social media policies.

2.3 Sampling methods

The target respondents for this research will be students, faculty, administrators and policy makers in Saudi Arabia. The researcher will employ the random sampling technique to collect the quantitative insights, whereas purposive sampling strategy will be used to choose the focus-group participants. The quantitative sample size will consist of 100 survey responses of students and 50 faculty. The researcher will contact HEIs’ administration to gain the consent and access to the target respondents via email. Also, seven respondents will be chosen non randomly to participate in the focus-group discussion. Random sampling will be used to determine which HEIs will participate.

2.4 Data analysis

As mentioned above, the researcher intends to employ the mixed method approach to conduct the research. Thus, separate data analysis techniques will be used for analyzing quantitative and qualitative data. The researcher will analyze the quantitative data to understand the perceptions and behavioral intentions of faculty and students. The study will employ SPSS to analyze the quantitative data. Descriptive analysis, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression statistical tests will be conducted to extract important insights.

Cronbach’s alpha will be used to evaluate the reliability and consistency and at least a score of 0.7 will be required. The second step will involve analyzing important demographic insights using descriptive analysis. During the third step, the researcher will do Pearson’s Correlation analysis. This test shows the association between the study variables (perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, subjective norm, perceived playfulness, behavioral intentions and actual use of social media). Moreover, it indicates the nature and strength of association between the hypothesis that one variable is associated with another variable and that could be a positive correlation or negative correlation. However, Pearson Correlation cannot assess the statistical significance of the overall independent variables. So, multiple linear regression will be used to quantify the impact of all independent variables on dependent variables. After completing the quantitative analysis, the researcher will start the qualitative data analysis process. Manual thematic analysis approach will be used to analyze the qualitative insights extracted from the focus group. The focus group guideline will include all open-ended questions and guideline. At first stage of qualitative data analysis, The researcher will transcribe the data by using the qualitative research software NVivo. The data will be analyzed with the steps listed below:

1-The researcher manually read all transcripts and will allocate the codes to important points shared by respondents, such as “resource availability” and “management support.”

2-The codes will be identified, sorted and integrated into different categories. At this step, each category will represent a group of codes that share some relevance to each other. For example, “policies lack elements” category may include two codes, “resource availability” and “management support.”

3-During this step, categories will be identified and determined which are the most relevant and connected to each other.

After completing the analysis process, the researcher will compare and analyze the important insights represented in the form of different themes.

3 Conclusions

The results from this study will assist Saudi HEIs to formulate effective social media policies that could address the negative outcomes associated with SNSs usage. The findings will also be helpful in adopting social media for enhancing teaching and learning methodologies. In addition, the findings will be useful to address the key areas of concern and improve SNSs users’ privacy and security inside and outside of higher education.

4 References