Saudi Arabian Students' Attitudes to and Perceptions of Social Networking for Educational Purposes

by

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Social Networking sites

Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter have opened up new opportunities for human communication, interaction and collaboration

Under the platform of Web 2.0, they offer users the facility of self-creating content and sharing it in common interest groupings

Social Networking Sites

Numerous sectors have co-opted these tools, including business, government and healthcare.

Social networking sites are also ideally suited to the ends of higher education: forming groups and networks, sharing ideas and materials, collaborative projects

Widely used by "digital natives" (Prensky 2001)

Social Networking in Higher Education

Informal Usage: contacting peers, discussing learning experiences, moral/academic support

Formal Usage: incorporated into coursework for interaction between students and instructors, contribution, discussion and clarification of ideas, sharing resources, making announcements, self-reflection/publication

Social Networking in Higher Education

Social networking tools are increasingly being adopted as a teaching and learning affordance in universities in mainstream Western educational contexts but little is known about how they are used and perceived in non-mainstream geo-cultural regions

The Context of Saudi Arabia

This study is part of a broader enquiry into how social networking might be harnessed for teaching and learning purposes at universities in Saudi Arabia

The larger study seeks to explore what might constitute key critical success factors for implementing social networking in higher education in Saudi Arabia given its socio-cultural particularities

Objective of Paper

In what ways do Saudi Arabian students use social networking in learning activities?

What are students' attitudes to and perceptions of social networking for educational purposes?

Little published research on this topic and inconclusive evidence of whether and how social networking is used at universities in Saudi Arabia

Focus Groups

Focus Group ID	Duration	University	Male	Female	Total
Student-FG1	40 min	University A	8	-	8
Student-FG2	38 min	University B	5	3	8
Student-FG3	30 min	University C	5	4	9
Student-FG4	30 min	University D	6	4	10
Percentage			69%	31%	

Figure 1. Participants demographical information

4 universities – 2 government and 2 private

Focus Group Outcome

1
- Saudi Arabian students are actively using social networking sites

2
- Students are using social networking sites for learning purposes

3
- Limitations

Focus Group Outcome

Saudi Arabian students are actively using social networking sites:

- Mainly Facebook and Twitter

- Social and entertainment purposes

- Work purposes

- Learning purposes

Discussion

Learning Purposes

- Mainly self-directed and informal activities:

- Finding information

- Working from home

- Forming groups

- Sharing resources e.g links

- Questions and answers

- New knowledge from video clips

- Contact with lecturers

Discussion

- Enthusiasm for and desire to use social networking for educational reasons

but

- Limited formal inclusion of social networking sites as a planned pedagogical aid in university coursework
- Limited knowledge of range of social networking sites and usages

Initial Framework

- Findings of this focus group will be incorporated to refine the initial framework.

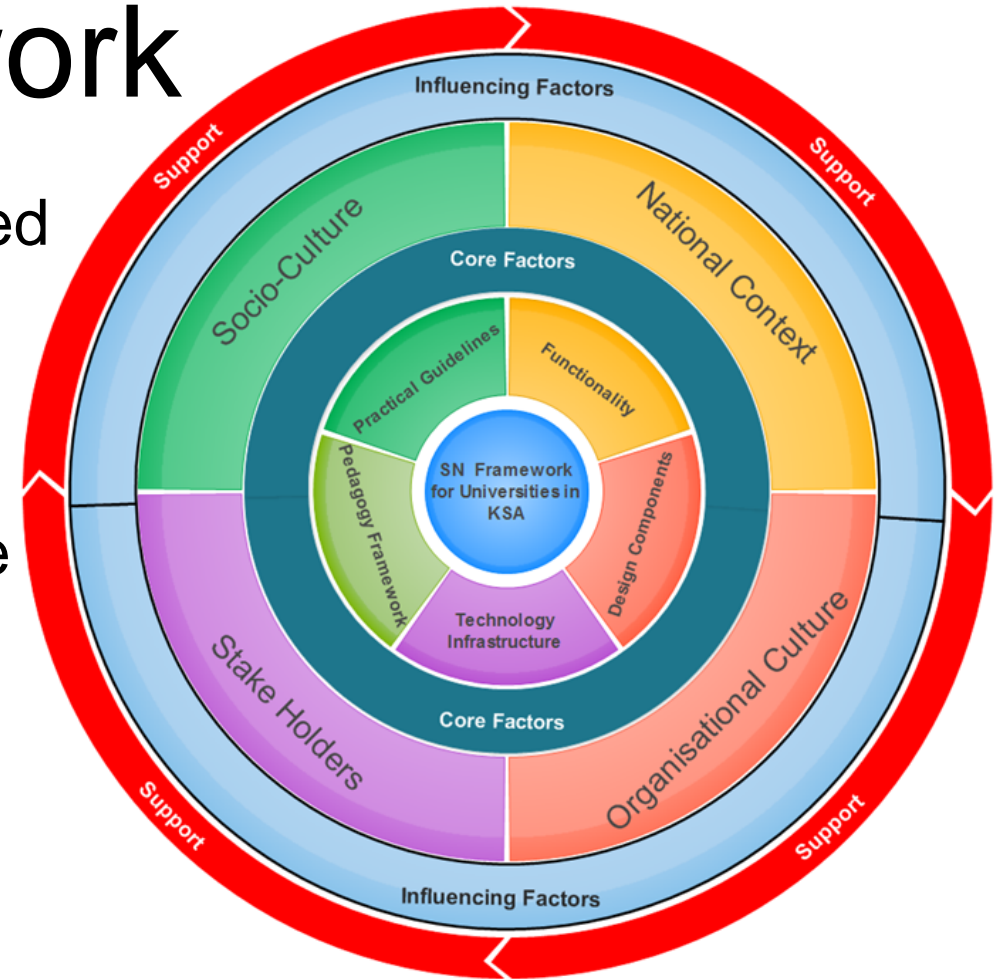- Adopted changes will be published in future research.

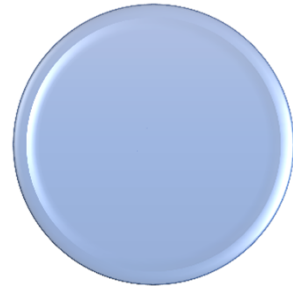*Figure 2: Social Networking Framework for Universities in Saudi Arabia*

Conclusion

- While there remain some barriers to uptake of social networking in the higher education sector, Saudi Arabia is ideally positioned to take advantage of the benefits of these applications

- High student acceptance

- Can look to world-wide best practice in this area

Thank you for listening

Feel free to email any of your feedback or question

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