

Undergraduate Iraqi Students' Awareness of Social Mobile Media and Their Attitudes to Mobile Learning

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Abstract

In recent years advances in social networking and rapid developments in wireless internet technologies stimulated all of us to integrate and use them in our lives. Smart mobile technology industries are racing with each other to launch the newest model for their consumers. The biggest market beyond the dispute is teenagers and young generation. Of course, the adults cannot be ignored, either. The general aim to use the social network is for communication and sharing information. During the daytime students want to keep in touch with their peers. The most common electronic devices are smart mobile phones and the top rate for social networking website is Facebook.

This study aims to seek for and clarify the perceptions and the attitudes of undergraduate students in Northern Iraq, using electronic devices, in particular, smart mobile devices. What kinds of social media tools and platforms they are registered to? How often do they benefit from their accounts? What is their frequency to login to internet access and what part of the day do students use their mobile devices? What are students' general purposes to use social media? – these were the questions asked in the research. This article emphasizes the diversity according to gender, faculty, grade, universities, etc. In addition, it seeks for the distribution of social media accounts. An online survey, conducted among different university students to recognize the ratio between various institutions, came to a conclusion that undergraduate students in Northern Iraq are equipped with sufficient smart devices to get involved in mobile learning via using social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.

Keywords: Mobile learning, social mobile media, smart devices

Introduction

We are the witnesses of a rapid development and advancement not only in smart mobile technologies and tablet PCs, but also wireless internet technology, such as 3G or 4G. There is a great challenge among communication companies and GSM operators to enhance the newest and the latest innovations to their consumers and market. Therefore, these very astonishing alterations in cyber world technology are stimulating educators and policy makers to adopt those innovative tools in educational environment.

The new generation never forgets their pocket pets (mobile devices) during the day. Actually, we can see that there is a gap between the old and the new generation from this viewpoint. This new Google generation, called Digital Natives, Gen Y, Net Gen or Digital citizens, involves experts of new mobile devices (Zimmerman, 2012). They really demand the mobile learning to be used in the classroom and beyond. According to Prensky, this younger generation of students has "spent their entire lives surrounded by and using com

puters, video games, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age" (Prensky, 2001, p.1). These "Digital Natives have created their own communities of interest on Facebook and Twitter as well as chosen to be there virtually even during class time" (Akhras, 2012, p.87). However, according to some other studies, it has been shown that some of the digital natives are somehow reluctant to use social media tools in the educational process (Yagci, 2014).

Educational Values of Mobile Media

E-learning is very popular and has increased rapidly among educational institutions. It really facilitated the teaching and learning process. Distance education or online education became very popular thanks to various advancements in technologies. Liu and Han (2010) name mobile learning a new primary educational source helping learners with the

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instruments of smart devices and wireless technologies. It has been used as blended learning in class or individually was applied by students as e-learning. Nowadays it became a formal teaching-learning activity (Sun, Wang, & Peng, 2011). The definition of e-learning according to Begicevic and Divjak (2006) was a process of teaching using ICT (Information Communication Technologies) to get a high benefit in education. Also e-learning is defined as the delivery of knowledge to wide groups via internet technology through computer devices to enhance the learning process (Rosenberg, 2001). One can use e-learning not only on the campus, but also at home or at work place. However, E-learning has some limitations compared to Mobile learning.

The advancements both in wireless technology and portable smart devices has really motivated not only students, but also educational institutions to apply mobile learning. Smart devices allowed students to be flexible. Since the Facebook was launched in 2004, it has become the most popular social media platform all around the world. Mobile media in education have facilitated interaction and communication among lecturers and students. Lifelong learning have become possible via mobile media. Learning became 7/24 in our daily life.

Mobile media have five unique features for educational purposes. First, they are portable. Learners can carry them wherever they want. At present mobile devices are more affordable compared to old models. They are easy to carry because of long-life battery features and weight. They are pocket size and have sensitive touch screens. Second; with the diversity of social media applications they are more interactive. Portable ubiquitous mobile devices facilitate people to enhance interaction and communication anytime and anywhere (Shih, Chuang, & Hwang, 2010). Especially nowadays many social public environments such as transportation vehicles, restaurants, hotels, even car washers provide internet access for free. Users can easily reach information whenever and wherever they demand. Learners can find authentic materials through mobile applications (Chang & Hsu, 2011). Their connectivity is disputable. Learning occurs according to students' learning pace, which means individual and students centered learning.

Mobile media provide many successful approaches not only for present, but also for the future with the help of rapidly developing software tools on it. Mobile media are attractive for students because they provide a wide range of interaction in social life and fun communication. Students are really encouraged to collaborate via social media. Besides that learners can control the achievement of their learning goals. Repeating the content and the subject materials are limitless. Learners are highly exposed to target subject, such as languages via mobile media (Hwang & Zhuang, 2013).

Mobile media and m-learning develop interaction, encourage feedback among students and teachers. Students can tackle with their weakness using m-learning. There is always a contact between the teacher and the students which maintains learning process outside of the classroom. Students enhance learning environment beyond college settings.

Social Media Platforms and their usage around the world

Facebook is the most popular social media site after it

has been launched in 2004. According to a new questionnaire conducted in September 2014, it was found that Facebook also remains by far the most popular social media site among its opponents. Although its growth has slowed down, the number of user involvement with the platform has increased. Some other social media platforms like Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube and Pinterest have seen a meaningful expansion lately (Duggan et al, 2015). 70% of Facebook users login to it every day. 45% of them revisit the site twice a day. There is a huge increase in Instagram and Pinterest users. About half (49%) of users are engaged with Instagram. The percentage of multiple social media users among adults is 52%.

Facebook

The majority of the Facebook users among seniors go on to increase. Facebook is not only popular among young adults, but also very demanded among women. The median number of friends on Facebook is 155. However, when the users were asked about their actual friends, the median number decreased to 50 (which is also a big number). Facebook users also have a wide variety of friends on the network.

Twitter

Nowadays most people get information of social events across the world. They are sensible to political and social news via Twitter. They try to be involved in social community with on average 140 letters. It is certain that 140 characters are not sufficient to express your ideas or emotions, but people feel relieved after typing those sentences. Nowadays Twitter is very popular among the TV channels. They give hashtags to their audience to ask for their ideas. Generally, college educated adults use twitter more than others. Currently Twitter has 260 million active users who totally share and send about 500 million tweets every day.

Mobile Device Popularity

According to the latest statistics, mobile device consumption is increasing gradually. Every six months electronic device companies launch a new mobile device to market. The unbearable desire to possess the new-born smart devices forces customers, especially young ones, to queue in front of stores (Bosomworth, 2015).

- 64% of American adults own a smartphone.
- 90% of American adults own a cell phone
- 32% of American adults own an e-reader
- 42% of American adults own a tablet computer

Some smartphone owners, particularly younger adults, minorities and lower-income Americans depend on their smartphone for internet access. Of U.S. adults who own a smartphone, 29% of cell owners describe their cell phone as "something they can't imagine living without." As of May 2013, 63% of adult cell owners use their phones to go online. 34% of cell internet users go online, mostly using their phones, and not using some other device, such as a desktop or laptop computer. Mobile users pick up smartphones as they become more affordable, 3G and 4G networks advance.

Method

In this study the aim of the research was to investigate the general overview of undergraduate university students' general profile of mobile device usage and their attitudes to social networks. This survey was conducted in Northern part of Iraq which is called Kurdistan Regional Government. Several universities responded to the survey. Those are Ishik University, Salahaddin University, Cihan University and some other universities which were not named by the respondents in the survey.

Students' awareness of the mobile devices, the frequency of logging into internet and social network sites and the demography of the students were sought. The questionnaire was prepared and delivered through Google drive forms. Some of the charts and tables were used from Google Drive. The survey questions are in the Appendix A.

The questionnaire was prepared to evaluate the undergraduate students' readiness towards using social media in their learning process. The questions were selected and adopted by the author from a similar study which was conducted in U.S.A. (Gikas & Grant, 2013). The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed in SPSS.22 program. The Cronbach's Alpha was defined as $0.766 > \alpha \geq 0.699$ or acceptable ($0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$ is generally viewed as acceptable) (see table 1).

Table 1. Reliability of the Questionnaire

Item-Total Statistics				
Items	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q1	19.032	17.869	.620	.699
Q2	18.742	20.690	.485	.727
Q3	20.323	23.885	.219	.760
Q4	19.667	19.834	.485	.726
Q5	19.618	23.026	.193	.769
Q6	18.871	19.972	.566	.714
Q7	20.720	25.575	-.067	.776
Q8	19.059	16.661	.592	.708
Q9	18.849	19.047	.642	.700
Q1 - How many hours in a day do you use your electronic device(s)?				
Q2 - I generally use my electronic device intensively....				
Q3 - What is your general purpose to use electronic devices?				
Q4 - How much time do you spend on your social media account?				

Q5 - What is your general purpose to use your social media account?

Q6 - I generally use my social media account intensively....

Q7 - Do you have your own internet access?

Q8 - How many hours a day do you login your internet?

Q9 - I generally log into internet access intensively....

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.757	.713	9

The survey link was shared via social media, such as Facebook groups and mailing sites. The survey was online for nearly two weeks. The data were collected by means of Google forms. They were also analyzed in SPSS.22 data analyzing program.

The survey questions consisted of four parts. The first part was about demographic information. The second part sought for information about respondents' mobile and electronic devices. The next part was about social media tools and platforms. The last part of questions was about the Internet accessibility.

Participants

127 volunteer respondents from North Iraqi universities participated in the survey. 52% were female and 48% were males. The majority of the respondents (60.65) study were from Ishik University, 16 respondents - from Salahaddin University, 11 respondents - from Cihan University, and 23 respondents are from other universities in Erbil.

Table 2. Which educational institution do you study at?

	Number	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Cihan University	11	8.7	8.7	8.7
Ishik University	77	60.6	60.6	69.3
Other	23	18.1	18.1	87.4
Salahaddin University	16	12.6	12.6	100.0
Total	127	100.0	100.0	

In table three the diversity of the respondents can be seen according to their years of study. Freshmen are 20, sophomores are 41, juniors are 13, seniors are 15 and the others are preparatory school or graduated students.

Table 3. Which year student are you?

	Number	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1. Freshman	20	15.7	15.7	15.7
2. Sophomore	41	32.3	32.3	48.0
3. Junior	13	10.2	10.2	58.3
4. Senior	15	11.8	11.8	70.1
other	38	29.9	29.9	100.0
Total	127	100.0	100.0	

Findings

The responses dealing with mobile and electronic devices are shown in table (4). According to the results, 48 out of 127 respondents have a mobile (cellular) phone (35.8%), 107 of them have a smart mobile phone with Android or IOS operation system (79.9%), 36 of them own a Tablet Pc (26.9%) (e.g. iPad. Samsung Galaxy Tab etc.), 86 of them own a laptop / a notebook computer (64.2%), 26 of them own a desktop computer (19.4%) at home, and 9 of them have some other electronic devices (6.7%).

Table 4. Mobile Electronic Devices

Device	Number	Percent
Mobile (cellular) Phone	48	35.8%
Smart mobile phone	107	79.9%
Tablet PC (e.g. iPad. Samsung Galaxy Tab etc.	36	26.9%
Laptop / Notebook Computer	86	64.2%
Desktop Computer	26	19.4%
Other Devices	9	6.7%

The other issue in this study was the period of mobile device usage. 17 % of the respondents have been using their electronic devices between 1 and 3 years. The highest ratio - 70.9% of the respondents - for more than 3 years (see Table 5).*ctronic Devices*

Table 5. How long have you been using your electronic device?

	Number	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1 month	3	2.4	2.4	2.4
2-3 months	3	2.4	2.4	22.0
4-6 months	4	3.1	3.1	25.2
7-12 months	5	3.9	3.9	29.1
1-3 years	22	17.3	17.3	19.7
more than 3 years	90	70.9	70.9	100.0
Total	127	100.0	100.0	

39.4% of the respondents use their devices approximately 4-6 hours a day. The following highest ratio is 20.5% for those who use them for 7-12 hours. The third place belongs to 15.0% - for 2-3 hours (see table 6).

Table 6. How many hours a day do you use your electronic device(s)?

	Number	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-2 hours	23	18.1	18.1	18.1
2-3 hours	19	15.0	15.0	33.1
4-6 hours	50	39.4	39.4	72.4
7-12 hours	26	20.5	20.5	92.9
More than 12 hours	9	7.1	7.1	100.0
Total	127	100.0	100.0	

Table 7 is about which part of the day students intensively use their devices. As after the lectures they are free in the evenings, they easily get engaged with their devices. However, 41.9% of the respondent uses them during the day.

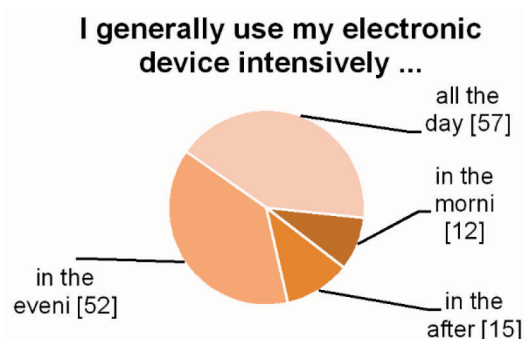


Figure 1. Part of the day students intensively use their devices

Table 7. *Intensiveness of mobile devices' application*

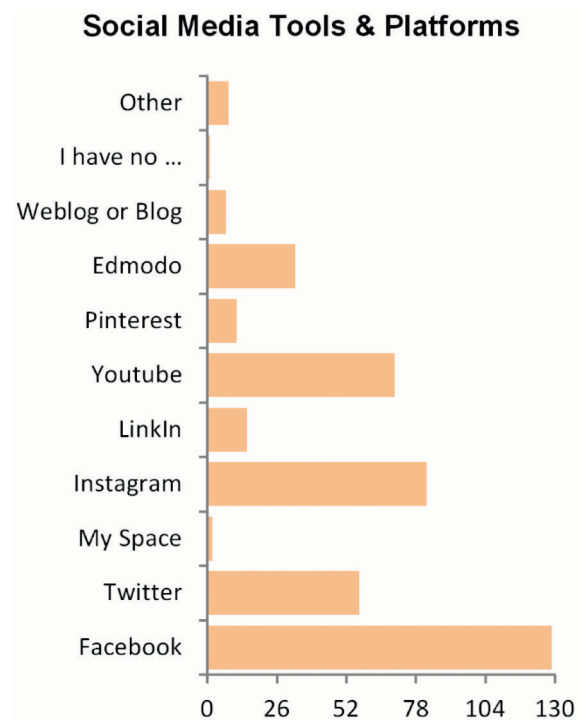
Part of Day	Respondents	Ratio
in the mornings	12	8,8%
in the afternoons	15	11,0%
in the evening	52	38,2%
all the day	57	41,9%

According to the answers to the eighth question, the general purpose for using mobile devices is 48.4% - for educational purposes, while 35.2% of the respondents claim that they need their devices for fun and entertainment.

According to table 8, the most popular network site is Facebook - 94.9% of the respondents have a user account. Also Instagram is another popular tool with a 60.3% percentage having an account.

45.3 % of the students login to their profiles 2-3 hours in a day. 28.9% percent of the students login for one hour during the day.

According to the answers to question 11, 33.6% of the students login to social media for communicating and chatting with friends. Just 25% of them use it for educational purposes. They intensively use their social accounts in the evenings (in the evenings 49.2%. all day 31.3%. in the mornings 10.2%).

**Figure 2.** *Social Media Tools and Platforms***Table 8.** *Popularity rating of social media tools and platforms*

Platform	Responses	Ratios
Facebook	129	94,9%
Twitter	57	41,9%
My Space	2	1,5%
Instagram	82	60,3%
Linkln	15	11,0%
Youtube	70	51,5%
Pinterest	11	8,1%
Edmodo	33	24,3%
Weblog or Blog	7	5,1%
I have no ...	1	0,7%
Other	8	5,9%

In the survey we asked if the respondents possess their own internet access. 87.5% of the students have their own internet suppliers. The percentage for those who has no ownership is 12.5%. However, almost everybody has internet, maybe at home or in their institutions.

41.4% of the respondents login to internet in the evenings. 37.5% claims that they use internet any time during the day. The percentage in the morning is 13.3%. They rarely login to internet in the afternoons (7.8%).

Table 9. *How many hours in a day do you login your internet?*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-2 hours	30	23.6	23.6	23.6
2-3 hours	25	19.7	19.7	43.3
4-6 hours	29	22.8	22.8	66.1
7-12	22	17.3	17.3	83.5
More than 12 hours	21	16.5	16.5	100.0
Total	127	100.0	100.0	

Discussion

In the course of the analysis for the usage of mobile devices, social networks and internet access we clarified the degree of readiness for implementing mobile learning in Iraqi Higher Educational institutions. The majority of the undergraduate students (76.4% who use the Internet for 2 or more hours a day – see table 8) actively apply the Internet, correspondingly, they have the necessary technical skills to use it for learning.

The results of research show us that the percentage of mobile device owners (mobile phones – 35.8%, smart phones -79.9%, tablet PCs – 26.9%, laptop computers – 64.2%) among the respondents is high enough (see table 3). Comparing the results obtained in this paper and the researches viewed above (Duggan et al., 2015; Bosomworth, 2015), we can make a conclusion that the percentage of smart phone users in Iraq (79%) is higher than American users (64%). On contrast, Tablet Pc owners' ratio (27%) is lower than in America (42%). Correspondingly, there is a great potential in this region to use mobile learning.

However, experience shows that neither students, nor the academic staff are aware of the whole potential that mobile devices offer for education (IADIS, 2014). Thus, they need to be properly informed about the effective use of the social networking platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Edmodo, Moodle, etc.

Limitations

There were some limitations in this study. It was not easy to access a sufficient number of respondents in a short time. In this kind of studies it is challenging to collect a great number of responses. The question types were simple, not to bore the students. Much more researches should be done in this area. Same kind of investigations must be done for faculty staff as well. This study will be a commencement for further researches in this field.

Conclusion

Respondents in this research have revealed the fact that social media tools via smart mobile devices can be used in education in Iraqi universities. They have access to the devices either at home or at university. They have the skills needed to use them.

On the other hand, only 48.4% use their mobile devices for educational purposes (answers to question 8) and even less, only 25% use social media for educational purposes (answers to question 11). Both teachers and students need to be better informed about the possibilities that mobile learning offers them.

We have a digital young generation that has grown up holding smart technologies. This is today's reality and educational policy makers and curriculum designers should consider how to embed mobile learning into learning environment. They should lead the relevant people into action. Application of mobile devices and internet usage via mobile devices should be encouraged and implemented in educational process.

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Appendix A**How Digital Native Are You?****A) Personal Information**

1. What is your gender?
 - Female
 - Male
2. Which educational institution do you study at?
 - Ishik University
 - Salahaddin University
 - Cihan University
 - Other
3. Which year student are you?
 - Freshman
 - Sophomore
 - Junior
 - Senior
 - other
4. I study at the faculty of... Please choose your faculty.
 - Education Faculty
 - Business and Management
 - Faculty of Law
 - Dentistry
 - Faculty of Engineering
 - Faculty of Science
 - Other

B) Mobile and Electronic Devices

5. I have these Electronic Devices
 - Mobile (cellular) Phone
 - Smart mobile phone
 - Tablet Pc (e.g. Ipad. Samsung Galaxy Tab etc.
 - Laptop. Notebook Computer
 - Desktop Computer
 - Other Devices
6. How long have you been using your electronic device?
 - 1 month
 - 2-3 months
 - 4-6 months
 - 7-12 months
 - 1-3 years
 - more than 3 years
7. How many hours in a day do you use your electronic device(s) ?
 - 1-2 hours
 - 2-3 hours
 - 4-6 hours
 - 7-12
 - More than 12 hours
8. I generally use my electronic device intensively....
 - in the mornings
 - in the afternoons
 - in the evenings
 - all the day

9. What is your general purpose of using electronic devices?
 - For education
 - For fun and entertainment
 - Other:

C) Social Media Tools & Platform

10. Please choose the social media tools if you have any account or profile.
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - My Space
 - Instagram
 - LinkedIn
 - Youtube
 - Pinterest
 - Edmodo
 - Weblog or Blog
 - I have no social media account
 - Other:
11. How much time do you spend on your social media account?
 - 1 hour
 - 2-3 hours
 - 4-6 hours
 - 7-12
 - More than 12 hours
12. What is your general purpose to use your social media account?
 - For education
 - For fun and entertainment
 - For chatting and communicating with friends
 - Other:
13. I generally use my social media account intensively....
 - in the mornings
 - in the afternoons
 - in the evenings
 - all the day

D) Internet Accessibility

14. Do you have your own internet access?
 - Yes
 - No
15. How many hours in a day do you login your internet?
 - 1-2 hours
 - 2-3 hours
 - 4-6 hours
 - 7-12
 - More than 12 hours
16. I generally log into internet access intensively....
 - in the mornings
 - in the afternoons
 - in the evenings
 - all the day