

A proposed model for adopting the policy of using social networking sites in Jordanian higher education institutions

نموذج مقترح لاعتماد سياسة استخدام مواقع الشبكات الاجتماعية في مؤسسات التعليم العالي الاردنية

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Abstract:

The objective of this study was to investigate the concept and current state of policies regarding the use of social networking sites in higher education institutions, with the aim of proposing a model for such policies, specifically addressing their use by students and faculty members. The study employed survey and analytical methods to gather data and analyze the prevailing practices.

The findings indicated that the concept of a usage policy is centered on the establishment of guidelines that regulate this usage and the nature of formal interactions with these platforms. However, such a policy is not yet clearly defined or implemented in a structured manner within the institutions.

Keywords: Social networking sites, usage policy, higher education

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الملخص:

هدفت الدراسة إلى تقصي مفهوم مواقع سياسة استخدام مواقع الشبكات الاجتماعية في مؤسسات التعليم العالي، مع اقتراح نموذج لسياسة استخدام تلك المواقع في هذه المؤسسات من قبل الطلبة وأعضاء هيئة التدريس فيها. استخدمت الدراسة أسلوب الاستقصاء والتحليل.

توصلت الدراسة إلى ان مفهوم سياسة الاستخدام يتمثل في اعتماد قواعد تنظم هذا الاستخدام وطبيعة التفاعل رسميا معه، وهو امر غير موجود الى الان بصوره واضحة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مواقع الشبكات الاجتماعية، سياسة الاستخدام، التعليم العالي.

1. Introduction

The developments in the field of educational technologies open new opportunities that have changed how educators and learners share experiences and knowledge on a framework of increased direct interaction. The technologies are characterized by their striking ability to engage individuals and groups in a very short time; hence, their use has grown very fast in all levels of education. This is mainly because they are easy to access and use, as well as very effective as a source of information. Second-generation web technologies have created multiple novel avenues of interaction between students and faculty members, with the help of social networking sites and applications. Social networking sites have attracted large-scale popularity worldwide, such as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook, among others (Aljasir et al., 2013, Jaeger et al., 2012).

The widespread use of social networking sites by students, faculty members, and administrative staff in higher education institutions has led to a significant challenge for these institutions. The challenge lies in balancing the advantages of these platforms, which enhance teaching and learning through the sharing of educational materials, the promotion of collaboration, and the development of communication skills, with the need to preserve the traditional authority that higher education institutions have long exercised in managing the educational process and establishing regulations within their established systems. However, the foundational philosophy of higher education is rooted in a particular knowledge paradigm that views teaching and learning as processes occurring within a context characterized by openness, widespread dissemination, and an absence of restrictions. This philosophy also embraces irregular and evolving relationships with emerging developments in knowledge (Siemens et al., 2011, Conole & Alevizou, 2010).

The integration of social networking sites in education necessitates that stakeholders in the educational process acquire a comprehensive understanding that extends beyond the basic skills of usage and interaction with these platforms. It also needs to include knowledge of policies related to their proper use so that users may be empowered yet protected. The policy for the use of social networking sites is a set of guidelines created by institutions—be they educational or otherwise—that determine how their members will use the social networking sites. In due course, the development of policies for the use of social networking sites has become

an integral part of the institutional frameworks that universities worldwide have adopted. These policies outline the rights and responsibilities of members in using these sites to create a safe and productive environment. Without such policies in place and with the dependency on personal judgment as a guide in regulating site use, individuals could be exposed to harm and reputational damage to the institution. While many institutions of higher learning in Europe and the United States have proactively developed guidelines on the use of social networking sites for students, faculty, and staff—a review of various European and American universities' websites would attest—most, if not all Arab universities, which include those in Jordan, have not adopted similar policies. Most of the time, their work has been restricted to policy formulation for the platforms themselves or creating general usage guidelines. Social media today represents one of the most prominent modern learning tools, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic and the general shift toward distance learning. However, adopting these tools has created a number of challenges, the most significant of which is the perceived privacy and security of users' private information. Furthermore, the perceptions of teachers and students regarding these tools have contributed to the disparity between the two sides. Furthermore, the infrastructure of Jordanian universities was not prepared for these shifts, and university professors have not received adequate training in using these technologies.

Furthermore, there is a substantial void in the body of local and Arab research that concentrates on the policies that regulate the use of social networking sites in higher education. A comprehensive evaluation suggests that there is a dearth of local or Arab studies that specifically address this issue. Most current research focuses on the impact of social networking sites on education (Abdul Razzaq, 2013), rather than examining the policies that regulate their usage. This gap indicates a deficiency in awareness or a restricted comprehension of the importance of social networking site usage policies in both general and higher education settings. This could result from the belief that using social platforms is a private activity that people do on their own, independent of educational institutions. This viewpoint needs to be reexamined, particularly in light of evidence indicating that 60% of Twitter users share content related to their careers. The purpose of this study is to investigate social networking site usage guidelines in higher education, with an emphasis on finding appropriate guidelines for instructors and students in these establishments.

2-The Concept of Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites are several online platforms that are designed for social contact or that focus on social interaction. These platforms contain a variety of connections, especially those that are related to higher education. Facebook, which is now one of the most influential social networking platforms, was first launched in 1999 at Harvard University. Initially restricted to students within the Harvard network, its usage swiftly broadened to include students at other prominent universities, including Princeton University. Students were encouraged to use global social networking sites, which higher education students, professors, and staff gradually adopted. Social networking sites are vital to daily life, especially for the generation introduced to them early (Davis et al., 2012). Social networking sites have altered student communication within and beyond educational institutions, fostering a heightened sense of connection to their academic surroundings. This transformation has led higher education institutions to investigate innovative methods for utilizing these platforms to engage students and improve their relationships with them. Faculty members must enhance their skills in utilizing these platforms to cultivate and expand academic networks that facilitate student success and achievement. The potential for real-time engagement between institutions and their students is notably important. Several colleges have introduced podcast files, video blogs, and alumni networks that are available to internet users worldwide. Platforms like WhatsApp have been employed in targeted distance learning courses to facilitate discussions between students and faculty. Furthermore, some faculty members have utilized Facebook to engage with their students outside the conventional educational framework (Davis et al., 2012; Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009; Schroeder & Greenbowe, 2009; Wilburn, 2008). While social networking sites are important for education, they also have some significant downsides, notably in terms of anonymity. This anonymity can lead to destructive actions such as harassment, threats, and the dissemination of false information about individuals or groups with no repercussions. Higher education institutions must adopt explicit policies that ensure proper usage of these platforms by students and faculty. Such rules should also establish methods for intervention when appropriate, assisting users while alleviating the adverse effects that may result from misuse. It is anticipated that the policy for using social networking sites in higher education will guide students and faculty members toward desired behaviors when interacting with these platforms, in

a manner similar to how academic integrity is upheld through institutional honor codes. These policies would promote ethical use of these sites, ensuring they align with the principles of academic integrity and contribute to a productive educational environment (Junco, 2011).

3-The Concept of Social Networking Site Usage Policy

Generally, the term "policy" refers to the principles that guide actions within any organization or institution, which should be followed when making decisions under specific circumstances, all within the framework of the objectives, goals, and administrative philosophies defined by senior management (Anderson, 2005).

The concept of a social networking site usage policy is closely aligned with the general understanding of policy. It refers to a set of rules formulated by an organization or institution, which are then distributed in printed form and published on its website, to regulate the content that employees are allowed to post on social networking sites. This policy also governs how employees interact with others, especially when they identify themselves as affiliated with the organization or institution in their personal profiles or on these platforms (Fenton & Keller, 2014).

The primary goal behind the development of a social networking site usage policy is to assist employees of an organization or institution, regardless of their position, in making informed and appropriate decisions when interacting with social networking platforms. Additionally, the policy aims to address situations that may arise from the publication of illegal, confidential, or inappropriate content online, such as criticizing colleagues or supervisors (Fenton & Keller, 2014).

A social networking site usage policy document typically includes the following elements (Eaton et al., 2012):

- **Philosophy of Social Networks:** A statement outlining the guiding principles and values regarding the use of social networks within the organization.
- **Definition of Social Networking Terms:** Clear definitions of key terms related to social networking, ensuring that employees understand the language and context.

- **Adherence to Work Responsibilities:** A commitment to maintaining professional boundaries and ensuring that online activities do not interfere with the employee's work obligations.
- **Accountability for Policy Violations:** A statement detailing the consequences an employee may face if they violate any aspect of the policy.
- **Permission to Reference the Organization:** A determination of whether employees are allowed to reference the organization or institution in their personal profiles on social networking sites.
- **Compliance with Organizational and National Policies:** A requirement for employees to adhere to both the organization's policies and the national legal frameworks they operate within, without overstepping or violating them.
- **Confidentiality Agreement:** A provision that emphasizes the importance of protecting the organization's confidential information, ensuring employees do not disclose it via social networking platforms.

There are several justifications that may prompt higher education institutions to establish a social networking site usage policy for their students and faculty members. The most significant of these include:

- **Lack of Relevant Curriculum in Higher Education Programs:** In most local and Arab universities—according to the researchers' observations—the undergraduate curriculum does not include courses or topics that address the concept of social networking site usage policy, nor does it cover related sensitive concepts such as privacy, intellectual property laws, confidentiality, responsibility, transparency, and others.
- **Insufficient Experience Among Faculty Members:** A number of faculty members may lack adequate experience in managing social networking sites and utilizing them in teaching a generation of students who have grown up with these platforms, making them a familiar part of their daily lives. This lack of familiarity may lead to confusion or uncertainty when addressing violations or misconduct by students, other faculty members, peers, or the institution itself (Kind et al., 2010).

- **Unawareness of the Long-Term Consequences of Online Actions:** Some students and faculty members may overlook the fact that their offenses, missteps, and mistakes—regardless of their motives—on the internet remain permanent. These actions cannot easily be retracted or deleted, and individuals may occasionally be reminded of them, either in jest or with malicious intent. Some offenses and violations through social networking sites can jeopardize students' professional futures, damage the reputation of faculty members and their institutions, or expose individuals to legal accountability (Woodiey & Silvestri, 2014).
- **Frequent Violations and Misuse on Social Networking Sites:** Social networking sites frequently witness violations by students and faculty members, which may affect the institutions to which they belong, as well as individuals within those institutions. Examples include the unauthorized sharing of lecture recordings, posting offensive comments about students or faculty members, or engaging in online harassment or threats due to personal disputes (Kind et al., 2010; McNeill, 2012).

4-Previous Studies

Despite the large number of American-origin blogs and websites that discuss the policy for using social networking sites, their elements, formulation, and importance, there are relatively few studies dedicated to this issue (McNeill, 2012). This research highlights the rarity—if not the complete absence—of local and Arab studies that have addressed the concept of social networking site usage policies in higher education institutions. All the available research on the subject was found to be of foreign origin.

Golian-Lui (2011) conducted a theoretical study aimed at identifying an effective strategy and policy for using social networks. The study discussed the steps involved in building a strategy and policy for social network usage within university campuses. One of the key points highlighted in this policy was that the document should clearly outline the consequences of policy violations by students, faculty members, or staff, and that the policy provisions should be flexible, enforceable, and aligned with other institutional policies.

McNeill (2012) carried out a study aimed at analyzing the social networking site usage policies available online at British higher education institutions. The study tried to find out if these rules came from worries among top university officials about how these sites were being used without any rules. The study group was made up of 14 usage policies that were analyzed using critical discourse analysis. The study found that in 10 colleges, the only way to get to the social networking site usage policies was through the human resources or marketing pages. This suggests that these departments had a big hand in making the policies. The reputation of these schools is mostly taken care of by these departments. Nine of the policies made it clear that the institution's image is important when its members use social networking sites. The other policies used words like "interest" or "integrity" instead. Along with that, the data showed that the policies talked about what could happen if members of the institution broke the rules.

Koz (2013) did research to find out what Facebook and other social networking site rules are meant to do and what their main points are at some US colleges. A sample of five usage policies from five colleges were used in the study, which used content analysis. The study discovered that the rules were too strict and were made without considering the benefits of social networking sites. The findings showed that these rules were mostly about figuring out risks and keeping the universities' image and marketing in check, rather than anything else.

Woodley & Silvestri (2014) carried out a study to determine whether or not it is necessary to have a policy that is effective for the use of social networking sites in academic environments. The study used a case study technique, which included three cases from Australia and Sweden: a personal blog written by a nursing student, a YouTube channel made by a group of medical students, and a Facebook account. The results of the investigation showed that these social media platforms did not meet the professional conduct norms that students in a number of medical specialties are supposed to follow. This has damaged the reputation of the higher education institutions that are linked with the accounts. The findings showed that students were either uninformed of or uninterested about the long-term ramifications of their misdeeds, which could put their future careers in jeopardy. The survey found that colleges and universities need to provide clear and specific regulations about how students can use social networking sites.

These studies underline the significance of developing comprehensive, clear, and effective social networking site usage policies in academic settings. While social media platforms offer great potential for enhancing academic engagement, they also present challenges related to professionalism, reputation management, and the legal implications of online behaviors.

5- Systematic procedures:

5.1-Research Question:

The current study aimed to answer the following question:

- How can a practical model of public policies for the use of social networking sites in Jordanian higher education institutions be formulated that serves all parties involved in the educational process and protects their rights, including the educational institutions themselves?.

5.2-Study Objective:

Although the adoption of the model in Jordanian universities has become a lived and practical reality, its legislative framework has not yet been fully developed. However, at the same time, it could serve as a model that can be benchmarked and adopted by other educational and academic institutions of all kinds. However, this should be done after the formulation and agreement on the specific legislative system and the effectiveness and success of the experiment have been proven. Therefore, the study aims to propose a model for the policy of using social networking sites in higher education institutions.

5.3-Study Significance:

The significance of the current study lies in the following points:

- **Scarcity of local and Arab studies:** There is a lack of local and Arab studies that have addressed the concept of social networking site usage policies in higher education institutions. The researchers found no local or Arab studies focusing on this issue, as far as they are aware.
- **Raising awareness:** There is a need to raise awareness about the concept of social networking site usage policies, especially in the processes of teaching and learning, to ensure their safe and

responsible use by students and faculty members in higher education institutions.

- **The evolution of social networking sites:** With the development of social networking sites and the increasing number of their users among students and faculty members in higher education institutions, challenges have emerged that these institutions must face and address. Among these challenges are those arising from the misuse of these sites, which may harm the institutions or other parties unjustly.

5.4-Study Terms:

The current study discusses a number of terms that will be defined operationally as follows:

- **Social Network Sites (SNS):** Refers to any website on the internet that allows users to create content and enables interactive communication. This includes several sites, most notably Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, along with a list of friends or followers with whom users exchange various forms of information.
- **Usage Policy of Social Network Sites:** Refers to a set of rules and guidelines established by higher education institutions to regulate the use of social networking sites by students and faculty members affiliated with the institution, as indicated on their personal profiles on these sites.

5.5-Study Methodology:

The current study followed the survey and analysis approach, through which it sought to investigate what has been discussed about the usage policy of social network sites in previous studies, some academic articles, and the available usage policies of social network sites on the websites of certain foreign universities. The study then analyzed and synthesized this information to derive a set of policies that could be beneficial and adopted by higher education institutions. The methodology also relied on investigating the reality of the experience of Jordanian universities with social networking sites in their practical and legislative dimensions through previous studies and Jordanian university documents related to planning and quality policies in these universities, knowing that the experience is still new and incomplete. Due to the scarcity of studies, we relied on what was

available and related to the subject of the study regarding policies for using social networking sites.

5.6-Study Procedures:

The study was conducted according to the following steps:

1. **Compilation of Studies on the Use of Social Network Sites:**
The study began by reviewing available studies that discussed the use of social network sites in general, such as the study by Golian-Lui (2011), and the study by Woodley & Silvestri (2014).
2. **Compilation of Articles on the Policy of Using Social Network Sites:**
The study also compiled various articles discussing the policy of using social network sites, including key articles such as Bond & Waggott (2011), Leclerc (2014), and Stuart & Berry (2012).
3. **Compilation of Available Policies on the Use of Social Network Sites from Universities:** The study reviewed available policy documents on the use of social network sites from the websites of several prominent universities, including Stanford University, Harvard University, and Oxford University.
4. **Extraction of Key Points for the Proposed Model:**
Based on the gathered information, the study synthesized the key points and elements to be included in the proposed model for the policy on the use of social network sites in higher education institutions. These elements were divided into two main sections:

- o **Part One - General Data:**

This part included:

- The title of the model
- The concept of social network sites
- The objectives of the social network site usage policy document
- The scope of the policy document
- The responsible parties for implementing the policy
- Review and updates

- The name and contact details of the office to contact for assistance

o **Part Two - Social Network Sites Usage Policy:**

This section covered all the rules that higher education institutions want their students and faculty members to adhere to when using social network sites.

5.7-Answer to the Research Question:

- In response to the research question, which asks: *How can a practical model of public policies for the use of social networking sites in Jordanian higher education institutions be formulated that serves all parties involved in the educational process and protects their rights, including the educational institutions themselves?*

It is worth noting that Jordanian higher education policies have regulated the form of distance education or e-learning, but to date, they have not formulated specific legislation for social networking sites as an approved model for education in terms of form, content, delivery mechanisms, and privacy. Based on the steps outlined in the study, the proposed final model for a social media policy in higher education institutions includes the following main components:

Part One - General Information:

- **Document Title:** Social Network Sites Usage Policy.
- **Definition of Social Network Sites:** Social network sites include any platform that allows its users to create public profiles, manage their data, form friendships with other users, view their profiles and personal information, and exchange ideas, opinions, and information with them. Examples include: Facebook, Twitter.
- **Objectives:** This document aims to familiarize university students and faculty members with:
 - o The concept of social network sites.
 - o The scope of the social network sites usage policy.
 - o The responsible entities for implementing the social network sites usage policy.

- o The support resources available for addressing any confusing questions or issues.
 - o Best practices that ensure safe and responsible use of social network sites by university students and faculty members.
- **Scope of the Social Network Sites Usage Policy:** This policy applies to all university students and faculty members.
- **All social network sites, including:** Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram.
- **Entities Responsible for Implementing the Social Network Sites Usage Policy:**
 - o The Information Technology Department at universities will be fully responsible for implementing, monitoring, reviewing, and updating this document.
 - o University students and faculty members are responsible for reading, understanding, and reporting any violations of this document by any other party.
- **Review and Update:** This document will be reviewed and updated every six months.

Part Two - Social Network Sites Usage Policy:

- **Introduction:** The university recognizes the value of social networks and the benefits they may bring in terms of sharing news and information, as well as promoting healthy academic dialogue. Therefore, it encourages its students and faculty members to engage in these platforms and collaborate creatively, both on and off-campus. To protect the university's reputation and their own, it expects them to adhere to the following practices:
- **Content Management:** Remember that social networks are a great way to stay connected with others, share experiences, and communicate. However, they also leave a permanent visible impression of you through what you write and the news and information you share. Bear in mind that what you post online remains for an indefinite period and may sometimes be difficult to erase or delete. Consider that offensive pictures or comments can be

seen by individuals outside of your friend group, including family members or current or potential future employers.

Do not allow your thoughts to be taken out of context. Choose the appropriate platform to express them. For instance, do not use Twitter if you cannot express your ideas concisely—try using your personal blog where you can write without limits.

Please note that any account or content posted—if you identify yourself as a student or faculty member—will be subject to the university's policy.

- Review the content before posting, ensuring that the information is accurate and free from linguistic and spelling errors.
- Make sure that what you add is valuable and distinguish between personal opinions and factual information.
- **Privacy:**
 - Use privacy settings to restrict the data you wish to share with others, especially those who are not your friends offline.
 - Respect others' privacy by not disclosing their personal information or sharing images of them without their permission.
- **Authenticity and Transparency:**
 - Clearly indicate on your account—if you choose to identify yourself as a student or faculty member—that the opinions expressed are your own and do not represent the views of the university.
 - Avoid using pseudonyms; using your real name adds authenticity and value to everything you post.
 - Treat others with respect, and this will ensure that they treat you with respect as well.
- **Intellectual Property Laws:**
 - Adhere to intellectual property laws and copyright regulations.
 - Avoid plagiarizing or appropriating others' ideas.

- Cite any information you reference.
- **Confidentiality Agreement:**
 - Avoid sharing any confidential information or documents related to the university that, if disclosed, could harm its reputation or the reputation of any of its members.
- **University News:**
 - Remember that your personal account is not the appropriate platform to share university news. If you have news or information you would like to post about the university, refer to the university's public relations department accounts on social media to copy the links or retweet them through your account.
- **Debate and Discussion:**
 - Avoid responding to any criticism directed at the university or its officials through social media. Leave the response to the appropriate university authorities.
 - Never engage in discussions when you are angry or upset. Delay your response until you have calmed down.
 - Avoid arguments or entering into discussions that serve no purpose and may harm others.

5.8-Study Results:

First, the study did not rely on actual statistical data due to its unavailability. The study was unable to access practical experiences or opinions from teachers or students, which calls for more in-depth research on the topic. The study proposed a model for a social networking policy in higher education institutions consisting of two parts:

- **Part One - General Information:** It includes:
 - o Model Title
 - o Concept of Social Network Sites
 - o Objectives of the Social Network Sites Usage Policy Document
 - o Scope of the Social Network Sites Usage Policy Document

- o Entities Responsible for Implementing the Policy Document
- o Review and Update Process
- o Name and contact details of the entity to consult for assistance.
- **Part Two - Social Network Sites Usage Policy:** It includes all the rules that higher education institutions expect their students, faculty members, and staff to follow when using social network sites, including:
 - o Content Management
 - o Privacy
 - o Authenticity and Transparency
 - o Intellectual Property Laws
 - o Confidentiality Agreement
 - o Sharing University News
 - o Debate and Discussion.

5.9- Commentary on Previous Studies:

The previous studies all align with the current study in their focus on the issue of social networking sites usage policies, as well as their attention to higher education institutions. They share a common goal with McNeill and Koz's studies in analyzing social networking site usage policies within certain higher education institutions, yet they differ in sample sizes and locations where each study was conducted. Previous studies also differ in the research methods employed to gather data. While McNeill's study utilized a critical discourse analysis approach, Koz's study used content analysis, and Woodley and Silvestri employed a case study approach. In contrast, the current study used a survey and analysis method. Furthermore, Linda Mary's study stands out as a theoretical study, whereas the current study distinguishes itself by proposing a social networking sites usage policy that could benefit local and Arab higher education institutions. The researchers of the current study have benefited from reviewing the previous studies, enriching the theoretical framework of their own research, and formulating the proposed policy guidelines.

5.10-Recommendations

In light of the findings of the study, the researchers recommend that:

- Higher education institutions should focus on developing a clear policy for the use of social network sites by students and faculty members.
- Academic departments within universities should include detailed topics on social network site usage policies in their curricula.
- Higher education institutions should work to raise awareness about the concept of social network site usage policies, especially in teaching and learning processes, to ensure safe and responsible usage by students and faculty. This can be achieved through short training courses, printed materials, or short documentary films.

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