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## Social Media Communication and University Placement in Arab World

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### **Abstract:**

*The explosion of social media communication over the past 15 years has brought about numerous changes in every type of activity. The use of the new system of communication has altered the nature of competition, accelerating the flow of information, of new products and of services in all the world. This has encouraged managers of a lot of firms to re-examine the way of communication to recruit workers. In this context also the University's main goal is changed. It becomes necessary to encourage graduates to enter the job market, guaranteeing their placement also with the support of innovative communication tools. This paper examines the development of social media communication as a source of competitive advantage for placement in University of Arab world.*

### **1. Introduction**

In recent years, Internet and social media have been remarkable social, economic and cultural events of the century, opening up new and fascinating scenarios that have altered the character of social life, both on an interpersonal and on community level. These changes, that initially referred to interaction patterns and social connections among young people, now are spreading among an increasing number of users. This is the era of the "any-time" and of the "any-space"; it is the time when the power of Internet has rapidly and drastically changed the communicative ways imposing more sophisticated knowledge processes.

The diffusion of new social communication has represented for Arab countries an epocal shift. At the time, it is too early to say if this shift will manage to impose also a cultural change in organizations and in their managerial choices.

In effect the history of the social media diffusion in Arab world is very particular. Used as instruments to coordinate mass protests, communicating real-time images and up-to-date information, or as processes of contagion across the Arab region, social media (as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook) have managed to bypass state controlled national media, propelling images and ideas of resistance and mass defiance across the Middle East and North Africa, and they have had a capillary diffusion in restricted times and in many regions. Today, also, Universities in the Arab region are undergoing a period of rapid transition, with more than a decade of expansion in enrollment, including more female students. Since 2002, the number of institutions in the region has more than doubled, but this transition requires the adoption of strategies aimed at continuous change. In order to be "competitive", they need to evaluate and highlight new variables that allow them to respond to the global social and cultural evolution. Today, the students have got a "digital identity", they spend their free time online on the social networks, they have energy, enthusiasm and know-how, they speak a computer language, they love virtual interaction. In this scenario, the University's main goal, apart from training, becomes that of encouraging its graduates to enter the job market, guaranteeing their placement also with the support of innovative communication tools.

Students, today, place a lot of importance on on-line job search, notification of job posting and communication through electronic means. Therefore, the choice of a specific type of communication could have obvious social implications as, the more the relationship is developed in a country where there isn't a stable political situation, the more important it will be for the enterprise to speed up the message and thus obtain a quick response. In this global picture, the Arab Universities have to face a great challenge, which is not only economical but mainly cultural where social media become the tool for an innovative communication which encourages connection between students and firms in local and in global market. For this reason, it's interesting to analyze the role of social media in local Universities with approach in which students are active participants in their own placement and they develop a model more collaborative and human that challenges dogmas of communication deeply held inside academic organizations to create a "new value". The paper aims at providing an analysis of the phenomenon of social communication in Arab universities through the analysis of the percentage of presence and survival of these social networks and the use of this instrument. The purpose of this study is to investigate the different underlying needs and preferences that drive students towards job search and to understand if Arab University use the same instrument. This study can be useful for managers of universities and firms to understand that whether the presence of Universities on social media by students and firms is perceived as positive or not.

### **2. Conceptual Framework**

This paper intends to bring out the fact that today Universities and Career Services must start using social media to communicate and also move towards organizational and cultural change. Considering that "the key to success is the intelligent use of the relationship

with the customer" (Normann, 2000), this paper investigates the perception of the social media use (using Facebook) by students and in particular, it explores social media users' awareness of the perceived benefits and if these will outweigh the observed risks.

We apply a method based on the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) developed by Venkatesh et al. (2003). They integrated eight existing models: Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980), the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM, Davis, 1989), the Motivational Model (MM), the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB, Ajzen, 1991), a model combining the Technology Acceptance Model and the Theory of Planned Behavior (C-TAM-TPB), the model of PC utilization, the Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT, Rogers, 1995), and the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). This theory is established on four theoretical constructs: Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, and Facilitating Conditions. In addition to these variables the theory considers Gender, Age, Experience, and Voluntariness of use as moderating factors (Figure n. 1).

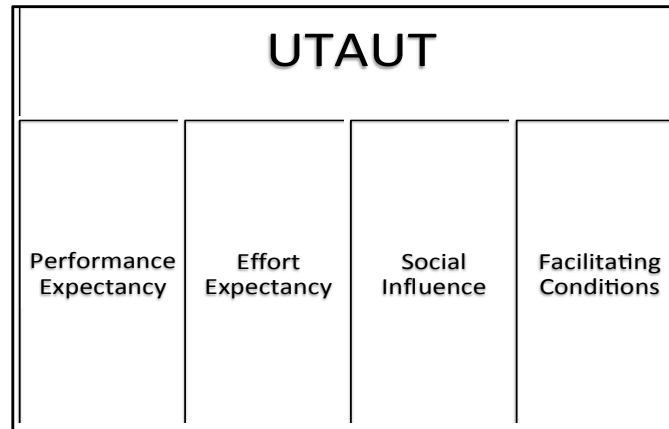


Figure 1: Theoretical model

The first construct is Performance expectancy that considers the degree to which an individual believes that the new system will help him to attain gains in job performance. It includes five key (Technology Acceptance Models Match Performance Expectancy):

1. Perceived Usefulness (derived from Technology Acceptance Model - The probability that an individual, who uses a specific system will increase his job performance.
2. Extrinsic Motivation (derived from Motivational Model) - The perception that users will want to perform an activity because it is perceived to be instrumental in achieving valued outcomes that are distinct from the activity itself.
3. Job-Fit (derived from Model of PC Utilization) (MPCU) - The extent to which an individual believes that using [a technology] can implement the performance of job.
4. Relative advantage (derived from Innovation Diffusion Theory) - The degree to which an innovation is perceived as being better than other.
5. Outcome Expectations (derived from Social Cognitive Theory) - the perception of the consequences of using computer.

The second construct is Effort Expectancy. The degree of ease associated with the use of the I.T. There are three key variables:

1. Perceived Ease of Use (derived from Technology Acceptance Model) - The degree of required effort.
2. Complexity (derived from Innovation Diffusion Theory and Model of PC Utilization) - The perception of the difficulty to understand the use.
3. Ease of use (derived from Innovation Diffusion Theory) - the degree of perception of difficulty in the use.

The third construct is Social Influence. The degree to which an individual perceives that important others believe he or she should use the new system. There are three key variables:

1. Subjective Norm (derived from Theory of Reasoned Action, Technology Acceptance Model, Theory of Planned Behavior, Decomposed Theory of Planned Behavior, Combined TAM and TPB) - The person's perception that most people who are important to him think he should or should not perform the behavior.
2. Social Factors (derived from Model of PC Utilization) - The individual's internalization of the reference group's subjective culture.
3. Image (derived from Innovation Diffusion Theory) - The degree to which use of an innovation is perceived to enhance one's image or status.

The fourth construct is Facilitating Conditions. The degree to which an individual believes that an organizational and technical infrastructure exists to support use of the system. There are three key variables:

1. Perceived Behavioral Control (derived from Theory of Planned Behavior, Decomposed Theory of Planned Behavior, Combined TAM and TPB) - individual perception of the presence or absence of requisite resources and opportunities and Includes Self-efficacy, resource facilitating conditions, and technology facilitating conditions.
2. Facilitating Conditions (derived from Model of PC Utilization) - observers agree make an act easy to accomplish.
3. Compatibility (derived from Innovation Diffusion Theory) - The degree to which an innovation is perceived as being coherent with the existing values, needs, and past experiences.

3. Research Results

3.1. Search Sample Surveys

Building up the sample surveys of this study has been somewhat laborious. The research has been developed directly on the Internet: the presence of Arab Universities on the web was matched to Hofstede’s cultural dimensions. The Arabic analyzed countries include: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Sudan, Tunisia, Algeria, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Palestina, Somalia, And Sudan.

In order to facilitate the accurate and consistent acquisition of information, four steps have been followed:

- Identifying Arab athenaeums which have an institutional profile on Facebook. This phase required a 5-month study with the aim of evaluating the communicative systems used by Universities.
- Sending the first mail. The first contact took place with Arab firms through an email where the purpose of the research was explained. Of these 60 % were not interested in the research and 20 % did not use Facebook. Only 20% of the rest part have reflected the features of the sample.
- Students contact. In five month, each student was contacted via Facebook. Of these 61 % were not interested in the research.
- Sending the questionnaire. A questionnaire to evaluate the perception of Facebook’s use in Universities was sent.

Starting off from the panel of the University monitored an WIKIPEDIA, a dataset has been created that comprises all Arabic Universities, distinguishing them according to their geographic area, the presence of an institutional website and whether they are present or not on social networks (we have used data of “ranking web of Universities”). The sample survey has been subdivided into geographic areas and class identity areas. After having created the first database, a subsequent analysis took place to identify the presence and activity of University on Facebook (Figure n. 2).

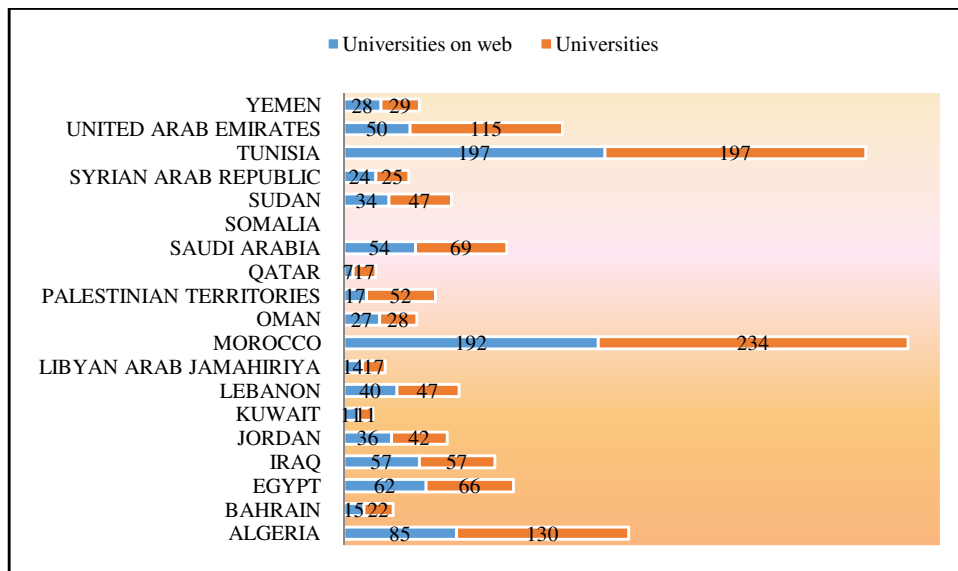


Figure 2: Universities

The analysis put in evidence that in Arab world there is a large diffusion of social media, in general, and of Facebook, in particular, in University. This trend is quite different from European University and it could due to the necessity to communicate with world in these countries where there are particular political situations.

The second part of the research was developed distributing a questionnaire among Arab students and firms. The questionnaire was initially tested on a limited number of users, in order to understand at which point the questions were correct and the presentation form was accepted. Subsequently, the entire sample survey was posted on the Salento University website. For all the research was developed directly on the Internet.

Once a final database was created, sample surveys with questionnaires of this study were built. In particular, 100 students and 50 enterprises were contacted, but the sample at last was composed of 39 students and 10 firms, with a partial representation of regions. The sample is very small but it could be useful to define a potential trend. It’s necessary to consider that, in a lot of Arab countries, there is war and people are very reserved. So this can be a good starting point for a future research. In fact, only Kuwait, Lebanon, Jordan and United Arab Emirates were represented (Figure n.3), countries in which there is an apparent serenity in political context. Sample is composed by students among 18-24 years; and managers among 35-54 years.

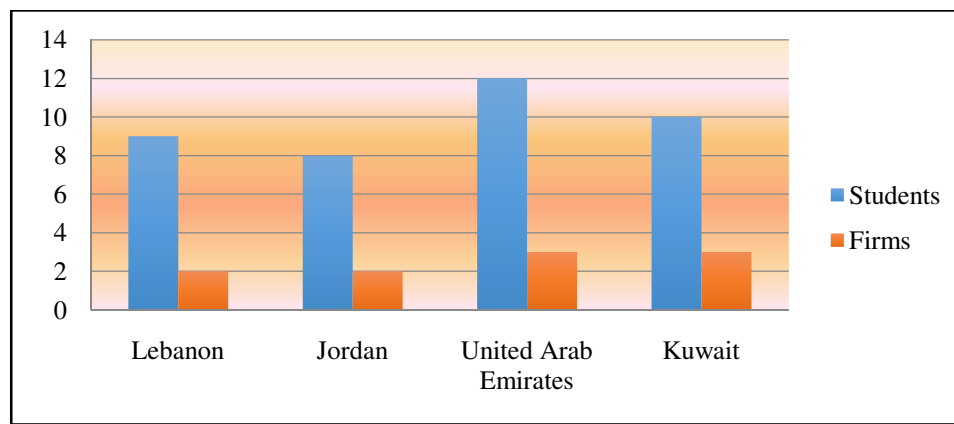


Figure 3: Sample

The data on opportunities and risks of the social media's use in Universities has been obtained by comparing the analysis of the students and firm' observations.

We have used 17 items divided in four constructs that reflect the theoretical prospective (UTAUT) that we have discussed in the first part.

It has used a Likert scale, in which there are 5 elements: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree 1=Strongly Disagree. To report on a Likert scale, we have sum the values of each selected option and we have created a score for each respondent. This score has been used to represent and evaluating a respondents' opinions. The scores have been used to create a chart of the distribution of opinion across all population. At the end we have cross tabulate the score mean with contributing factors.

#### 4. Research Results

These data were combined with the following 17 items identified to which interviewees were given a rating from 1 to 5

CATEGORIES	ITEMS	Ustudents				Ufirms			
		Lebanon	Jordan	United Arab Emirates	Kuwait	Lebanon	Jordan	United Arab Emirates	Kuwait
Performance expectancy	Transfer of information fast and quickly	3,5	3,6	3,1	2,8	2,3	2,6	2,1	1,8
	Support to recruitment process (notify of deadlines and of place)	3,3	3,9	3,9	3,2	2,3	2,8	2,6	2,1
	Sharing of CV	3,5	3,7	3,4	3,2	4	3	3,3	3,6
Effort Expectancy	Information on firm	3,9	3,6	3,2	3,7	3,2	3,5	3,6	3,8
	Improves quality of recruitment	3,8	3,1	2,7	2,9	2,8	2,1	1,5	1,4
	Results in few days	3,9	4,5	4,2	4,2	3	2,6	3,1	3
	Removes human errors in recruitment process	3,6	2,9	3,1	2,4	3	2,2	3,1	2,4
	Use of simple language to explain the hiring process and the professional figure to be selected	3,1	3,7	4	2,5	3	2,5	2,7	2,4
Social Influence	Improve diffusion of information	3,7	3,3	3,3	3,5	4,3	4	4,1	4,2
	Follow some friend's personal placement experience	3,7	3,1	3,2	3,5	1,3	1,2	1,6	1,1
	Comment about recruitment process experiences	3,1	3,4	3,5	3,8	2	1,7	1,3	1,4
Facilitating Condition	Reviews on line of firms	2,4	2,2	2	2,6	3	3,2	3,2	3,3
	Video or photos of recruitment processes	3,6	2,9	3,4	3	2,5	2,1	1,9	1,6
	Video or photos of firms	3,4	3,3	3,1	3,3	3,2	3,6	3,4	3,3
	Coordination with student	3,7	3,4	2,9	2,9	2,3	2,1	2,1	2,2
	Ask an appointment	4	4,5	4,2	4,3	3	2,5	2,7	2,4
	Ensures consistency between job search and job	3,5	2,8	3,1	2,8	1,9	1,8	1,6	2

Table 1: Analyzed Categories

Subsequently, for students, items such as “Information on firm”, “Improves quality of recruitment”, “Results in few days”, “Ask an appointment” are extremely important, as well as “Comment about recruitment process experiences” “Video or photos of recruitment processes” are an Important way to understand the recruitment process.

There is a substantial homogeneity in the answers regarding the geographical distribution of students.

Also, for firm’s items such as “Sharing of CV”, “Improves diffusion of information (job opportunities)” are extremely important, as well as “Information on firm”, but there is a different trend for items “Comment about recruitment process experiences” and “Follow some friend’s personal placement experience”. They fear that job seekers might have a distorted view of the recruitment process.

## 5. Conclusion

Universities occupy a central role in the ways we live our lives.

Building modern Universities, able to exploit new forms of communication which strongly facilitate contact between people of countries and cultures different, it can transform in social equality, in environmental sustainability, in capacity to maximize human potential and, at macro levels, it turns attention to organizational identity, culture, reputation, legitimacy and character.

The increasing popularity of the Internet has resulted in a profound change in the patterns of interaction and communication between individuals and organizations (Universities) also in Arab countries. But it's necessary to highlight that although in the last years Internet penetration and social media penetration has greatly increased to make knowledge sharing a voluntary action, it has to create the right conditions, instilling in individual workers the desire to share knowledge. The real problem is that many people prefer to share knowledge only if they see a benefit.

For this reason we have analyzed the perception of the use of Facebook in Universities and in particular in the recruitment process. Social recruitment is, today, one of the major challenges that are required to HRM if they wish to remain competitive in the new environment.

There is a strict relationship between competitive advantage and recruitment strategy. Our study shows that in the universities of four countries the perception of the utility of UCS on Facebook is positive. For this reason, the assumptions of traditional job placement of an individual can trap Universities into ways of thinking and action that are not in their best interest.

Our study shows that in the universities of four countries the perception of the utility of UCS on Facebook is positive. For this reason, the assumptions of traditional job placement of an individual can trap Universities into ways of thinking and action that are not in their best interest. In such circumstances, it is important to develop alternative forms that reflect upon the complexity of the market. Such changes oblige governance to define new techniques and strategies that concern the process of recruitment, maintaining a set of own meanings of the individual's culture. In Social interaction individual brings a typical cultural background of the reality that is lived daily by assigning different meanings to the interaction. In complex contexts, such as in the Arab world, interaction takes place by using information proper to the culture in which it is inserted (Mantovani, Riva, 2001). The choice of social media as tool for communication could contrast with the values, traditions and uses of local culture of a country changing, for example, the relationships between two users: instead of respecting the status relative to each other (high power distance), it treats everyone as a “friend” (low power distance). So, in the last years, numerous researchers have applied the analysis of cultural dimensions to the studies of Internet-related communication (Rosen et. al, 2010; Marcus and Gould, 2000; Lee, 2000; Zahir, Dobingand and Hunter, 2002; Brown et al, 2006; Srite and Karahanna, 2006), but few studies contain specific and explicit reference to each cultural dimension and to social media. In a previous study (Gravili, 2015) we have demonstrated that there is a relationship between Hofstede's cultural dimensions and social media penetration. In particular Individualism and Indulgence are positively correlated to social communication’ use, while Masculinity is negatively related to the use of social media communication (Figure n.4). So, considering that, in Hofstede research:

Lebanon			Jordan			United Arab Emirates			Kuwait		
Indivi- dualism	Mascu- linity	Indulgen- ce	Indivi- dualism	Mascu- linity	Indulgen- ce	Indivi- dualism	Mascu- linity	Indulgen- ce	Indivi- dualism	Mascu- linity	Indulgen- ce
40	65	25	30	45	43	25	50	-	25	40	-

Table 2: Hofstede’s cultural dimension of the sample.

It’s evident that although not sharing a physical space share a mental (or digital) one, students like to give information on their recruitment processes, to cooperate, to interact, to share and to act through a continuous sharing of information. All participants would like found answers to their specific informational needs in a less conventional way than in the real world, using simple language and within limited time. In all four countries social media penetration (smp) varies in a range between 48% and 51% (Figure n. 5), so there is a positive perception of Fb' use and in fact, in these countries, social media as well represent an innovative channel to develop collaborative dynamics within organizations.

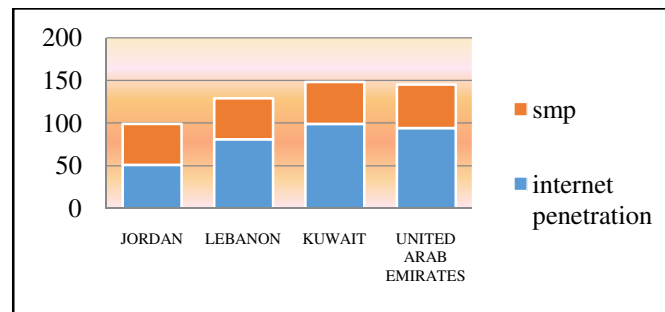


Figure 4: Internet and social media penetration in the sample

Competitive organizations must now develop the ability to attract individuals who can stimulate innovation behavior or who know how to acquire the techniques and principles of creativity. Consequently, the knowledge-oriented organizations should always select subjects that are quickly adapted to the change.

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