Twitter Uses and Gratifications of High School Students

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Abstract

Because of its growing popularity among young adults and its real time nature, Twitter was the social network chosen for this research. Twitter is a social networking site that allows users to produce 140 character bursts of information that are called tweets. Twitter was developed in 2006 to be an outlet for individuals to say what they were doing in the allotted amount of characters (Maxwell, 2012). Twitter gave users the ability to share moments of their lives as they were happening (Williams, 2009). The advantage of being able to send updates in real time led Twitter to be a source of valuable information during natural disasters. Eight percent of Internet users are Twitter users (Smith, 2010). The social networking site is popular among young adults, which makes the high school student population appropriate participants for this study. The study was conducted on 360 of high school students in Kuwait. The data obtained by the survey was analyzed and commented upon using the SPSS program. As the results show, majority of the participants use Twitter on their smart phone for 3-4 hours per day, and use it to meet new people, to follow the local news, and to discuss and exchange of views. Also the results stated that the majority of the students use twitter as a source of information, and never use it as a source of news because the doubt its' credibility.

Keywords: Twitter; Uses; Gratifications; Social networking; Students

Introduction

Twitter has been launched in October 2006. It is a free real-time short messaging service that enables users to send and read messages (tweets) through the Twitter website, short message service (SMS), mobile application, and various desktop applications. One important characteristic of Twitter is that it limits users to send updates in only 140-character. Despite the critics of the 140-character medium, there is an explosive growth and adoption of Twitter. For example, Barack Obama used Twitter during his 2008 presidential campaign to spread his messages to the American public. Some organizations have had great success in using Twitter to inform their customers of discounts and news related to their products. Many social media marketers and researchers believe that Twitter has a lot of business values. In particular, marketers can easily use Twitter to find out what people are saying in real-time and what people are talking about their products (electronic word-of-mouth). Twitter, an online social networking and micro-blog service, is a relatively new phenomenon. Academic research on Twitter usage is still very limited, and most existing studies tended to focus on the initial usage. In recent years, there are a significant number of new online social network sites.

The ability to retain and lock members in competitive situations has become the most important concern for most online social network sites. In order to achieve long-term success and gain long-term benefits in a competitive environment, it is particularly important to conduct a study on the post-adoption of Twitter so as to understand the factors influencing continuance intention to use Twitter. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the reasons that drive high school students to use Twitter and the benefits they achieve from using this social network site.

Twitter Uses and Education

Web 2.0 technologies are widely used by all Internet users [1-4]. It is accepted that Web 2.0 users have an active role on the Internet. Nowadays, the users from all over the world are able

to communicate co-operatively share information and take attraction to their shares [5]. Via Web2.0, users can share not only news but also photos, videos and many other personal moments [6]. These web sites motivate theirs users to create groups, support each other and increase their shares. In 2007, a new blogging concept arose, so called microblogging. According to Refs. [7,8] microblogs can be considered as weblogs, however, they have a stronger social network structure.

Twitter is a multiplatform Web 2.0, part social networking - part microblogging tool, freely accessibly on the Web [9]. However there are many of other popular Web 2.0 microblogging tools, Twitter is one of the most popular of these microblogging tools [9,10]. Communication can be managed in form of short messages around 140 characters [11]. Social network structure of Twitter allows its users to follow each other and communicate via short messages. Drapeau and Thompson stated that Twitter has a potential to be used as a professional and social networking since individuals who have similar interests can meet on Twitter [12]. One of the most important aspects is that the communication occurs in real time. Also [13] and [14] suggest that the exchange of information is immediate between peers, and users can share information and ideas immediately via using Twitter on mobile devices [15].

Like many 21st-century youth, students of Kuwaiti high schools use social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, and Instagram which have become the lived environments where young people display information and ideas, establish camaraderie or feuds, and share conversations and perspectives from the imaginative to the mundane. These sites are increasingly becoming the (cyber) spaces that serve and reflect youth constructing, articulating, and participating in the formation of their social realities for and with other individuals. In essence, young people using social networking sites are involved in fundamental acts of teaching and learning [16].

When Twitter's technical structure and characteristics are considered, it is clear that Twitter's use in education will be inevitable in future days. In the age of technology we are currently in, it is important to support education environment via new technologies. From this point of view, investigating Twitter usage of students is essential for future. So that this research investigates the uses of twitter of high school students and the gratifications.

Theoretical Framework (Uses and Gratifications)

The uses and gratifications theory developed by Elihu Katz provides the foundation for the recent research. This theory focuses on the actions of the audience in regards to its media use [17].

The uses and gratifications (U&G) framework is a media use paradigm from mass communications research that guides the assessment of user motivations of media usage and access. The main purpose of this paradigm is to explain the reasons that people choose a specific medium over alternative communication media and to elucidate the psychological needs that people use a particular medium.

This paradigm assumes that users are goal-directed in their behavior and are aware of their needs. The framework has been applied to various media, including newspapers [18], radio [19], and television [20], cable television [21], VCR [22], mobile phone [23], email [24], the Internet [25], virtual community [26], social network sites [27,28] and mobile services [29].

Elliott and Rosenberg [18] argued that whenever a new technology enters the stage of mass communication, the uses and gratifications paradigm will be applied to explain user underlying motivations and decisions to use the new communication tool. Stafford et al. [25] further suggested that uses and gratifications can be used to explain continued use of something already chosen. In recent years, there are a growing number of studies using the uses and gratifications paradigm to explain user participation in virtual communities [26,30,31]. Gratifications of using new communication technologies have been elicited by previous new media studies over the past few years. A review of the prior uses and gratifications research shows that there are three gratifications for using the Internet: content gratifications, process gratifications, and social gratifications. Recent adaptations of U&G research to the Twitter are incomplete and have not identified important new Twitter-specific gratifications.

The Aim of the Research

Aim of this research is to investigate the Twitter usage habits of high school students and to discover key Twitter functionality preferred by the participants. The study aims to find answers to the following questions:

- How do high school students use twitter?
- Hours per day, the students use Twitter.
- Why do high school students use twitter?
- Twitter as a source of information and news.
- The confidence in twitter news.
- Twitter advantages.
- Twitter disadvantages.
- Twitter benefits for high school students.

Methodology

Participants

The study was conducted between 2014-2015, participants were recruited from a high school in Kuwait, 360 students participated in this study. The sample had equal representation of both male and female participants **(Table 1)**.

Instruments

Data was collected by printed survey developed by the researcher. The survey consisted of 14 questions that included all subjects of the research determined obviously in the aim of research. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of this scale was 0.83.

Data Analysis

Data was collected using the developed scale. After the data obtained by the survey was analyzed using the SPSS program with the percentage, frequency, and rank statistical analysis techniques.

Table 1 Shows the characteristics of the sample.

Variables	Sex				Specialize				Class					
	Male		Female		Scientific		Humanities		First		Second		Third	
Governorate	K	%	K	%	K	%	K	%	K	%	K	%	K	%
Capital	30	8.3	30	8.3	30	8.3	30	8.3	20	5.6	20	5.6	20	5.6
Hawly	30	8.3	30	8.3	30	8.3	30	8.3	20	5.6	20	5.6	20	5.6
Ferwaneya	30	8.3	30	8.3	30	8.3	30	8.3	20	5.6	20	5.6	20	5.6
Al-Gahraa	30	8.3	30	8.3	30	8.3	30	8.3	20	5.6	20	5.6	20	5.6
Mubarak Al-kabeer	30	8.3	30	8.3	30	8.3	30	8.3	20	5.6	20	5.6	20	5.6
Al-Ahmady	30	8.3	30	8.3	30	8.3	30	8.3	20	5.6	20	5.6	20	5.6
Sum	180	50	180	50	180	50	180	50	120	33.3	120	33.3	120	33.3

Results and Discussion

How do High School Students use Twitter?

According to the **Figure 1, 2**.8% of students use the Twitter on their personal computer, 75% on their smart phone (55.6% I-Phone, 19.4% blackberry). When the results were examined, it was observed that majority of the participants use the Twitter via their mobile phones. Uzunboylu, Cavus and Ercag [32] noticed that mobile phones are small, and portable. So that, students carry cell phones with them [33] and most user prefer to use Twitter on their mobile phones. Many researchers stated that the personal use of mobile phones has increased in recent years [34-36]. Results of this study were supported by Smith [37] he found that 94% of people used Twitter on their mobile phones **(Figure 1)**.

The Daily Use of Twitter

The results indicates that most of participants tweet 11-15 tweets per day (61.1%), and read 41-60 tweets (55.6%), 2.8% of students writing less than 5 tweets, 25% tweets from 5- 10 tweets, 11.1% writing 16-20 tweets per day. Also the results shows that 19.4% of the Participants read 20-40 tweets, 16.7% of the high school students read 61- 80 tweets, and finally 8.3% read 81-100 tweets per day.

Hours per Day, the Students use Twitter

Table 2 shows the frequency of Twitter use. 11.1% of students use Twitter for less than two hours per day, 47.2% use it for less than three hours, and 41.7% use Twitter for more than three hours per day. The results revealed that majority of the participants, 88.9%, spent most of their time on Twitter. Webster (2010) stated that the number of Twitter usage increased rapidly from 2008 to 2010 and this is indicated by an increase in usage from 5% to 87% **(Table 2 and Figure 2)**.

Why do High School Students use Twitter?

On analyzing the data it was seen that 13.9% of students use the Twitter to obtain general information, 14.1% to follow the local news, 16.6% to meet new people, 11.4% to follow world events, 11.3% use it to discuss their academic work, 12.6% use it discuss and exchange points of view, 9.8% to social networking with friends, and finally 9% For entertainment. These results indicate that meeting new people is the most popular motive of the students to use Twitter. A study conducted in The University of
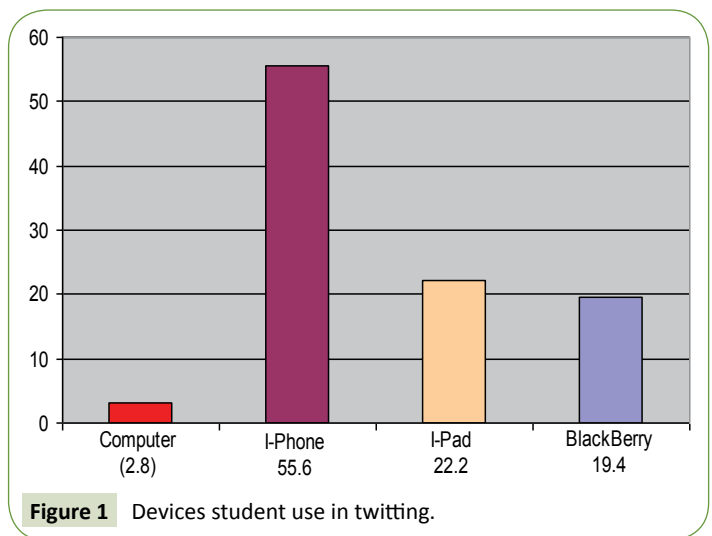

Figure 1   Devices student use in twitting.
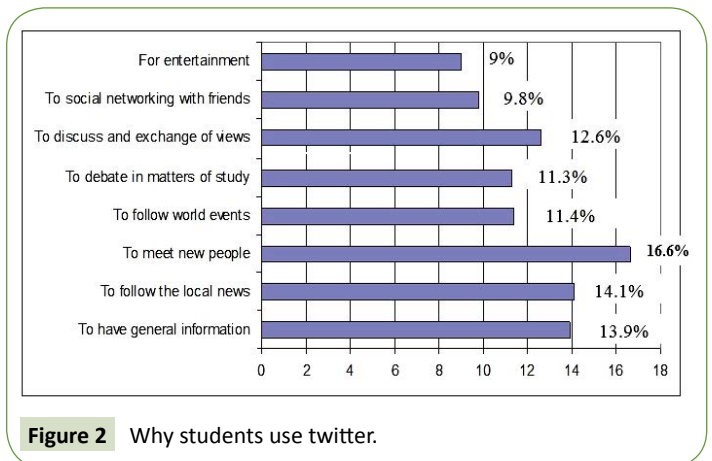

Figure 2   Why students use twitter.

New Hampshire [38] also concluded that majority of the students use social networks for entertainment purposes. On the other hand Boaru et al. [39] suggests that using Twitter has positive effects on language education. **Table 2** Indicates the various uses reported by the students.

Twitter as a Source of Information and News

It was noted that half of students (50%) used Twitter as a source of information, and never use it as a source of news. But, 11.1% of the participants always used Twitter as a source of information and news, while 38.9% of them sometimes used Twitter as a source of news, and never used it as a source of information **(Table 3)**.

Table 2 Shows the frequencies.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Less than 2 hours	40	11.1	11.1
From 2 - less than 3 hours	170	47.2	47.2
From 3 - less than 4 hours	150	41.7	41.7
Total	360	100.0	100.0

Table 3 Twitter as a source of information and news.

	Twitter as a Source of Information		Twitter as a Source of News	
	k	%	k	%
Always	40	11.1	40	11.1
Sometimes	180	50.0	140	38.9
Never	140	38.9	180	50.0
Sum	360	100	360	100

Twitters' Advantages

Participants referred to the "spread" as the most popular advantage of twitter from perspectives of high school students in Kuwait with 11% of sum ranks, then the speed which suggested by 9.9% of the students, 9.3% see that twitter is characterized by brevity, 8.3% suggested privacy, interactivity and exchange of views, and objectivity as advantages of twitter.

The research also found that 6.8% of participants used Twitter to seek guidance, 6.7% used it to increase knowledge, 6.1 relied on it for entertainment and reality, 6% used Twitter to improve their writing, and lastly 5.7% used it to improve their ability to dialogue **(Table 4)**.

Twitters' Disadvantages

According to the **Figure 3**, 2.8% of students reported that some of the limitations of Twitter is that it causes isolation, however most students reject this idea because they see that Twitter is an effective way to communicate with others, this coincides with previous findings that others studies that pointed out this as a prominent features. Twitter's interactivity and exchange of views was one of the mostly widely sought features as students used Twitter to meet new people.

On the other hand we found that Twitter was one of the strong reasons citied by students that leads to wasted time as reported by 5.6%, and reduces direct communication with people by 25% **(Figure 3)**.

Twitters' Gratifications for High School Students

According to the **Figure 4**, 19.4% of students think that Twitter helped them to communicate with others, 25% thought that it helped them in making new relationships, and 52% of students stated that Twitter helped them in spending spare time. Only 2% of the sample indicated that they used Twitter for entertainment **(Figure 4 and Table 4)**.

The Confidence in Twitter News

"According to the **Table 4**, 16.7% of high school students in Kuwait have a high trust in the information and news they follow on twitter, and 44.4% of them trust in twitter some kind, while 38.9% never trust in twitter. This result differs from what [40] noted to be an advantage of Twitter, as people liked to send updates in real time, this led Twitter to be a source of valuable information during natural disasters **(Table 5)**.

Conclusion

Social networking websites, such as Facebook, Myspace, and Twitter, have become an indispensable part of number of individuals using Twitter and its adoption is increasing significantly each day. According to Nielson Online, the annual growth rate of new Twitter users increased 1382% in 2009. Twitter allows students to connect with each other and create uninterrupted communication [41]. Elavsky and Mislan [42] pointed out that impact of Twitter on social interaction remains a fertile area for research.

This study was conducted on 360 of high school students in Kuwait. The data obtained by the survey was analyzed and commented upon using the SPSS program. Results showed that

Table 4 Twitters' advantages.

	Rank	Percent
Spread	3730	11
Speed	3240	9.9
Brevity	3050	9.3
Privacy	2710	8.3
Interactivity and exchange of views	2720	8.3
Objectivity	2700	8.3
Follow daily events	2270	7
Guidance	2230	6.8
Increase knowledge	2170	6.7
Entertainment	1990	6.1
Reality	1980	6.1
Improving writing ability	1970	6
Improving the ability to dialogue	1870	5.7
Sum ranks	32630	100

Table 5 Trust in Twitter.

	Frequency	Percent
Trust in twitter very much	60	16.7
Trust in twitter some kind	160	44.4
Never trust in twitter	140	38.9
Total	360	100.0

2.777777778 5.555555556

25

66.66666667

- time waste
- reduces direct communicationwith people
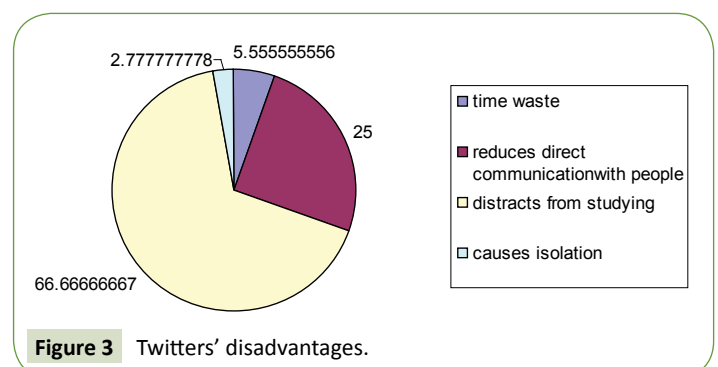- distracts from studying
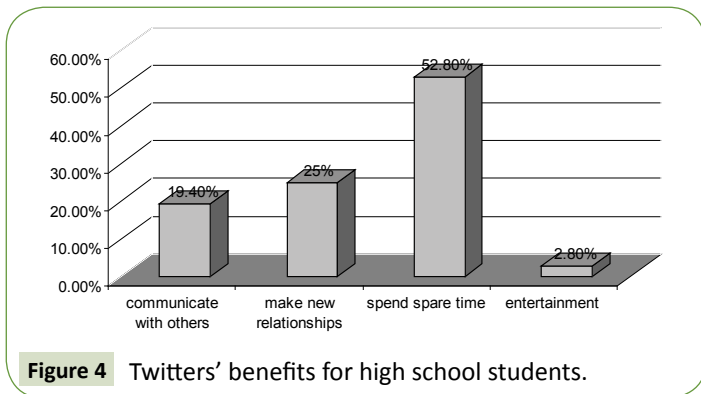- causes isolation

Figure 3 Twitters' disadvantages.

Figure 4 Twitters' benefits for high school students.

the majority of the participants use Twitter on their smart phone for 3-4 hours per day, and use it to meet new people, to follow the local news, and to discuss and exchange of views. Also the results stated that the majority of the students use twitter as a source of information, and never use it as a source of news because the doubt its' credibility [43-45].

Also the results found that most of the student think that Twitter is an effective way to communicate with others, and if we noticed the previous result for the advantages of Twitter, we find that the most prominent features is its interactivity and exchange of views and many of students use twitter to meet new people. On the other hand we found that Twitter is a very strong reason which distracts students from studying, wastes time, and reduces direct communication with people.

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