The Uses and Effects of Social New Media among Moroccan University Students: An Empirical and Analytical Approach to Cyberspace in Morocco Facebook and Ibn Tofail University English Students as a Case Study

Abdelghanie Ennam: Faculté des lettres ET des sciences humaines, Université Ibn Tofail, Kenitra

Abstract: This paper is an empirical and analytical study of the uses, prevalence and effects of such social media as facebook among undergraduate students of English Studies at Ibn Tofail University (ITU, henceforth). It tries to investigate and measure the growing relationship between university youth and social media, with a focus on the effects of Web 2.0-based ICTs on the youth and subsequently on the higher education output in Morocco. It is intended to enrich the scant foregoing academic research done in this country on the herein abstracted research topic.

Background and Introduction:

The so-called Arab Spring with its awakenings and uprisings, that have brought down dictatorial, tyrannical and corrupt regimes once thought ossified and invincible, has been said to have undeniably attained such historical achievements considerably thanks to the uses, prevalence and effects of social media like Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. The 20 February Movement with its cybernetic and on-ground socio-political activism in Morocco cannot be dissociated from this digitalized Arab awakening season because of its clear impact on the ruling power which has consequently pushed forward with the so-called "new constitution" and the monarchical appointment of the first government in the postcolonial history of Morocco led by an Islamic party, Justice and Development. These constitutional and political happenings have considerably come as a result of the Movement's nationwide mobilization of its youth forces largely through the communicational toolkit provided by social media. Other factors like the heavy weight exerted by the largest Islamic organization in Morocco, Al-Adl wal Ihsan (Justice and Authenticity), and the subsequent fear of a Tunisia or Egypt-like uprising have had and continue to have a strong bearing, too.

This paper will not dwell on the link between this cyberspace-assisted socio-political activism and power change but leaves it to exclusive attention in studies to follow. It has succinctly glossed over this link to demonstrate the impact and role of social media in triggering such unprecedented changes as the humiliating end of Muammar Qaddafi and the century's trial of deposed Hosni Mubarak, on one hand,

and their momentous influence in the recent reforms in Morocco, on the other. The paper therefore shifts to consider the role and function of social media in the country's field of higher education which is highly related and vulnerable to those influential reforms/changes in society and politics.

Users of social media in Morocco, as it is the case in other Arab countries, adopt a multipurpose approach to the usage of such Web 2.0-based communication networks as facebook. Ranging from mundane communicational practices like making friends and shopping to cybernetic cultural, social, and political activism, now termed as "cyber-activism," facebook has since its inception been and is still being used in Morocco to fulfill the aims underlying these variegated electronic digital communicational needs. From a Uses and Gratification theory perspective, Moroccans, particularly the educated youth such as university students, can be said to have gone beyond the stage of media manipulation of audiences to consciously enter the stage of audiences' manipulation of media. No oblivion to the effects of this manipulation, which will receive due attention in this study, is manifest in this respect.

Moroccan university students, like their counterparts elsewhere, can be said to have started pushing web2.0 social media like Facebook to a new level of manipulation. They use Facebook, as well as other social websites as Twitter, Youtube, Myspace, Linkedin, to name a few, not only for social purposes, like updating status, posting pictures, or uploading and watching videos, but also for academic ends such establishing online study groups and discussion forums. However, one notices that they use these new information communication technologies (ICTs) in ways that blur the demarcation line between their social and academic duties, maybe to the extent that work/study mingles with play/fun to sometimes negatively affect their academic productivity and social responsibility. Hence the egression of the need to study the uses of the social media and the shaping effects they are assumed to exert on students most of whom now maybe suffer from critical and creative thinking handicaps triggered by a prevailing and passivity-engendering "Ctrl-C/Ctrl-V cyberculture"

4- Objectives of the Paper:

Empirically investigate and methodically analyze the uses and effects of such social media (SM, henceforth) as Facebook (FB, henceforth) among ITU English students

Measure the positives and negatives of the rapidly growing relationship between university youth and SM, and analyzing their manifest and latent effects on the students' output in Morocco.

Find sustainable ways and means to rationalize the uses and control the effects.

Attempt to enrich the very scant foregoing academic research on the online communication landscape in Morocco.

Enhance academic endeavors that further ground for a scientifically studied and systematically established online communication culture both within and beyond academia.

Outline of the Paper:

Background and Introduction of Research Topic

Literary Review: Social media and Facebook

Research Questions

Hypotheses

Research methods

The population surveyed

The survey: Questions, responses, & data analysis

Results of the empirical investigation

Analysis & evaluation of data obtained from the survey

Conclusion

6- Literary Review: (This section presents some general information on social media and Facebook gleaned from several e-sources, and to be re-edited and documented later on).

6.1 On Facebook

FB is an electronic digital virtual social networking service trough which people can connect to each other and share several aspects of their life.

FB has technological capacities and simple yet developed prospects for communication that fit the youth's needs which seem to go beyond the old internet like the Messenger applications, E-mail, etc.

 Launched in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg & some of his fellow computer science students.

Now privately owned and operated by Facebook. Inc

In July 2011, FB has reached more than 800 million users around the world

In November 2010, FB's value reached $41 billion to become the third largest U.S. Web company after Google and Amazon.

FB reached one trillion page views in June 2011 to become the most visited website in the world (DoubleClick stats).

Uses of FB: creating personal profiles, making friends, exchanging messages, joining common-interest user groups (like at workplace, school or college), inter alia.

6.2 Facebook in the Arab World

December 2010, FB users in the Arab world reached 21,361,863 up from 11,978,300 in January of the same year, a 78% annual growth rate (Wikipedia.org).

Beyond social relations partially motivated by sexual desire, Arabs use facebook for different reasons (like in political & social activities)

Some Arab human rights activists use FB to raise awareness for freedom of expression, genuine social/political change, religious revival, inter alia.

FB Coverage of the Arab Uprisings: Organizing protests, teaming up and calling for demos that toppled tyranny and dictatorship in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and more on the way, fighting and defeating state-run media propaganda and deceitful governments' falsehoods and rumors, etc.

6.3 Facebook in Morocco

1995, early beginnings of internet as a new communication service and culture in Morocco

2010-11, over 9 million internet users, using FB, among many other SM, for various reasons and purposes to reach out to people at home and abroad.

FB, a latest Web 2.0 tool, captivated Moroccans, from chatty teens to dedicated cyberactivists

B users in Morocco: 3 925 240 (Facebook Inc. stats)

Morocco's Web users are now moving beyond traditional Web uses like blogging to create a multi-purpose and multi-dimensional cyberspace.

Morocco hosts the first person in the world to be convicted for using Facebook: young engineer, Fouad Mourtada, was sentenced (2008) to 3 years in prison for posing as Prince Alaoui Rachid, to be released after spending 42 days in jail when Web users went on a worldwide campaign, and King Mohammed VI granted him pardon, (said Sami Ben Gharbia, manager of the advocacy component of international blogging network, Global Voices Online).

7. Setting the Hypotheses: (These hypotheses will be set based on what has been advance so far).

7.1 Alternative Hypotheses

ITU English students so heavily use SM especially FB in their everyday communication and study activities that these e-tools have considerable effects on the students' (under)achievements.

ITU English students believe that the use of SM/FB along ICTs will improve teaching/learning and enhance their productivity.

7.2 Null Hypotheses

ITU English students do not so heavily use SNM especially FB in their everyday communication and study activities that these e-tools do not have considerable effects on the students' (under)achievements.

ITU English students do not believe that the use of SM/FB along ICTS will improve teaching/learning and enhance their productivity.

8. Setting the Research Questions:

Research Question 1

What are the uses to which ITU English students put SNM/FB?

Research Question 2

What are the effects assumed to be exerted by SM/FB on ITU English students?

Research Question 3

How feasible is the use of SM/FB (along ICTs) in teaching?

9. Conceptualizing the Present Research and Survey: This section visually schematizes the four main concepts upon whose semantic and analytical loads this study approaches and investigates the research questions enlisted above. More elaboration on this will be made later.

Prevalence	Understanding
Uses	Effects
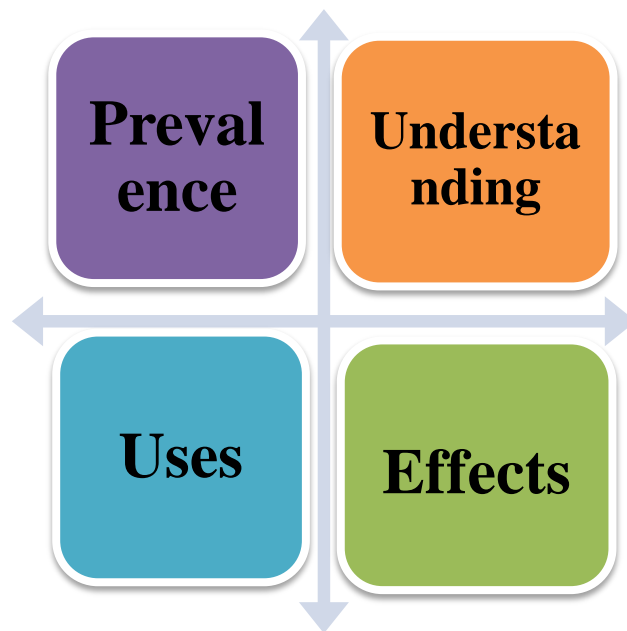
10. Research Methodology: A schematic explanation of the research method used in this study.
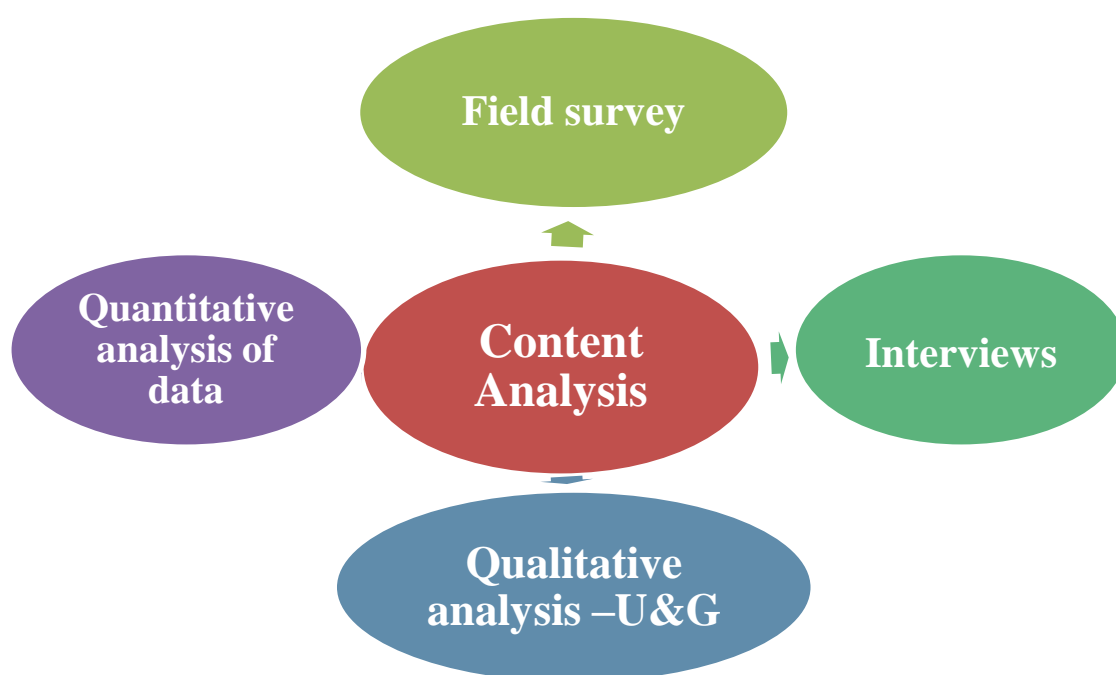
11. Description of the Population Surveyed, (A randomly sampled population)

Groups Surveyed	Identity of t Identity
Semester 3, Group 2	2nd year English students with basic knowledge on media, communication, & cyberspace.
Semester 3, Group 3	Same as S3, G2
Semester 5, Group 2	3rd year English students with advanced knowledge on media, communication, & cyberspace.
L.E.A. (Langues Étrangères Appliquées, Licence Professionnelle)	3rd year students of "Professional BA" specializing in "Applied Foreign Languages"

Table 1: the categories and levels of students surveyed.

The following section presents the number of the students surveyed and specifies their categories as based on their gender.

12. Quantifying the Surveyed Students According to Their Gender

Group	Number of Males	Number of Females	Gender Unspecified
S3, G2	22	27	0
S3, G3	19	26	3
S5, G2	19	33	0
L.E.A.	5	11	0
Total	**65**	**97**	**3**
Grand Total	**165**		

Table2: The total number of students covered by the field survey

13. Working out the Questionnaire: Questions Addressing Prevalence of FB among ITU English Student

Do you use FB for your everyday communication needs and study purposes?

How many hours/24 do you use FB for your everyday communication needs and study purposes?

For what length of time have you used FB and/or other NSM?

Have you identified any communication advantages of using FB over other NSM?

Rank the three first social networks you use most for your everyday communication and study purposes.

13.1 Questions dealing with Understanding & Uses of FB by ITU English Students

The questions of this section are schematized in form of ideas and concepts charted as follows. For detailed questions, see the appendix.

13.2 Questions Addressing the Uses of FB in the Educational Context at ITU

Do you like your teachers to use web 2.0 tools (like FB) both in class and online?

Do you think these e-tools can be more motivating for students?

Do you think that FB/SNM can be useful in improving higher   education along the traditional teaching tools at ITU?

Do you recommend FB/SNM to your dearest friends, younger family relatives, and teachers to use as a beneficial tool of effective communication and study?

13.3 Questions Addressing the Effects of FB on ITU English Students

Do you think that facebook and/or other social media has good effects on your study progress?

Do you think that facebook and/or other social media has bad effects on your study progress?

How do you evaluate the use of facebook and/or other social media tools among your ITU young students? (Beneficial; somewhat beneficial; not beneficial)

13.4 Evaluating the FB appreciation degree among ITU English Students

Excellent: …….; Good: ....…..; Can be improved: ; Bad: ……; No comments: …….

14. Method of Codifying & Quantifying the Students' Responses (Rs) to Yes/No Questions: L.E.A. Group as a Piloting Example

L.E.A Group: 16 S5 students surveyed 5 male and 11 female students. The group officially has about 40 students 16 of whom only attended on the day the survey was carried out.

Yes/No Questions (Y/N Qs) are numbered in the survey as follows: 3, 5, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.

14.1 Schematizing the Codification and Quantification Method Applied to Y/N Qs

Rs to Y/N Qs → Unitization: 1Q/1R → **Recurrence of Ys & Ns**

1Y/1N=10% Scale

Percentage of Recurrence
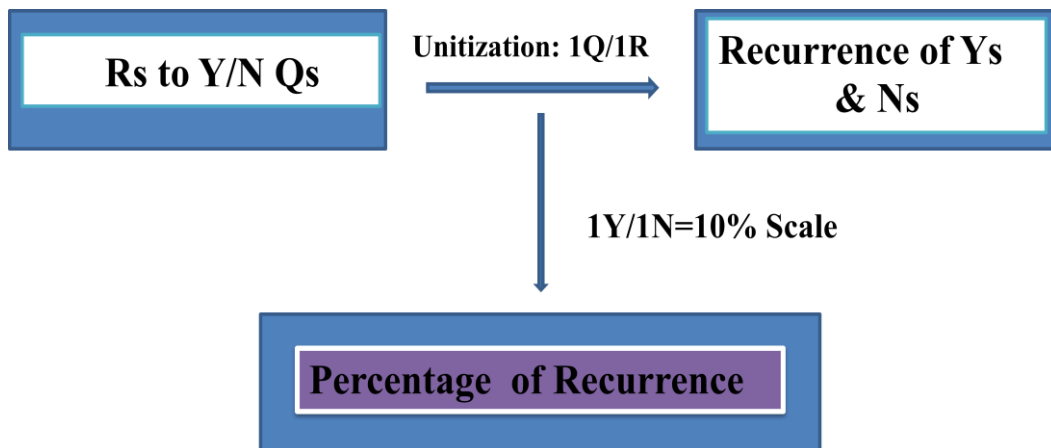
15. Findings: this section presents the findings of surveying L.E.A. Group Students as sample for this summary, while the rest of results will be included in the final draft of the paper.

Questions' numbers	Responses				Percentages			
	Males		Females		Males		Females	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
3	5	0	7	4	100%	0%	65%	35%
5	3	2	5	5	60%	40%	50%	50%
8	3	2	9	2	60%	40%	85%	15%
11	5	0	9	2	100%	0%	85%	15%
12	5	0	9	1	100%	0%	90%	10%
13	5	0	10	1	100%	0%	90%	10%
14	4	1	10	1	80%	20%	90%	10%
15	4	1	9	2	80%	20%	85%	15%
16	2	3	3	6	40%	60%	35%	65%

Table 3 Findings of surveying L.E.A. Group Students

15.1 An Inferential analysis and evaluation of the data obtained and listed in tables 3 and 4:

Q3: Do you use Facebook for your everyday communication needs?

Males		Percentage		Females		Percentage	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
5	0	100%	0%	7	4	65%	35%

Table 4. Proportions of FB use frequency among LEA students

Regardless of gender differences, which do not seem to have a significant bearing in this question/topic, the 2 proportions 100% and 65 %, representing the surveyed 5 males and 11females' responses to whether they use FB for their everyday communication needs, reflect the high degree of prevalence of this web 2.0 tool among ITU students all in terms of understanding, uses, and effects (…).

Q5: Do you use Facebook for your study purposes?

Males		Percentage		Females		Percentage	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
3	2	60%	40%	5	5	50%	50%

Table 5 Proportions of FB for-study-use frequency among LEA students.

The 2 proportions 60% (3/5) and 50% (5/10), representing the surveyed 5 males and 11 females' responses to whether they use FB for study purposes, reflect that this social network is becoming of more use in the students' daily study activities. Gender-based differences in this context seem to have generated a small distinction between males and females in their attitude towards the use of FB for study purposes (…).

Q14: Do you think that facebook and/or other social media can be useful in improving the higher education process along the traditional teaching tools at ITU?

Males		Percentage		Females		Percentage	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
4	1	80%	20%	10	1	90%	10%

Table 6 Proportions of FB & SM usefulness in teaching/learning among LEA students.

The 2 proportions 80% (4/5) and 90% (10/11), representing the surveyed 5 males and 11 females' responses as to whether they think FB/SNM can help improve the

actual conditions of higher education in Morocco, reflect the very high degree of the students' belief and subsequent need to have these e-tools integrated in the teaching/learning process. Gender-based differences in this context seem to have generated no big distinction between males and females in the expression of such a belief and need (…).

Q15: Do you think that facebook and/or other social media have good effects on your study progress?

Males		Percentage		Females		Percentage	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
4	1	80%	20%	9	2	85%	15%

Table 7 Proportions of FB good effects on LEA students.

The 2 proportions 80% (4/5) and 85% (9/11), representing the surveyed 5 males and 11 females' responses as to whether they think FB/SNM have good effects on their study progress, reflect the very high degree of the students' belief in the positiveness these e-tools have on such a progress. The gender-based distinction in this context seem to have engendered almost an insignificant difference between males and females in emphasizing this positiveness (…).

16. Conclusion: (to be composed after all survey data analysis is finalized).

17. Appendices

Complete Sample of the Questionnaire Distributed to Respondents in the Field Survey:

The survey Questionnaire:

Social New Media and University Youth in Morocco - ITU Students as a Case Study

Please specify the following:

Department:_____ Semester:_____ Group:_____

Please indicate your gender.

Male:_____; female :_____; prefer not to answer:_____

 Do you use Facebook for your everyday communication needs?

Yes_____   No_____

In average, how many hours/24 do you use Facebook for your everyday communication needs?

Less than 1 hour _____; 1 to 2 hours_____; 2 to 4 hours_____;

4 to 6 hours _____; 6 to 8 hours _____;   More than 8 hours_____.

Do you use Facebook in/for your study purposes?

Yes_____   No_____

 How many hours/24 do you use Facebook and/or other social media in/for your study purposes?

Less than 1 hour _____; 1 to 2 hours_____; 2 to 4 hours_____;

4 to 6 hours _____; 6 to 8 hours _____;   More than 8 hours_____.

For what length of time have you used Facebook and/or other social media?

Less than 1 year: Yes_____   No_____

Between 1 and 2 years: Yes_____   No_____

More than two years: Yes_____   No_____

If other durations, please specify, _____

Have you identified any communication advantage of using Facebook over other social media?

Yes _____   No _____

(*If yes, please specify*)_____
_____

Tick the social networks you use most for your everyday communication and/or study purposes? Number your three first options.

Facebook: ; Twitter: ; Youtube: ; Myspace: ;
LinkedIn: ;

Skype: ……….; Yahoo: ……….; MSN: ……….;
others:………………………………

Why do you use facebook? Please circle the appropriate option (s).

Chatting with people

Making friends

Exchanging information

Reading, knowledge, and study purposes

Pastime

Watching videos, uploading photos and commenting on them

Finding a partner for marriage

Seeking a chance to go abroad

Defending a (social, political, religious, cultural, national, human, or environmental) cause. If yes, please specify which one (s) of these: --------------------------------------
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Escaping your reality to live in a desired virtual world

Building a convenient online space for purposeful human communication

Raising awareness of the need for genuine change in society

Would you like your teachers to use web 2.0 tools (like FB) as teaching means both in class and online?

Yes_____   No_____

Do you think such e-tools can be more motivating for students to study?

Yes_____   No_____

If not, why? (Please give a brief answer)
……………………………………………………………………………………………
……………

……………………………………………………………………………………………
……………

 Do you recommend facebook and/or other social media to your dearest friends, younger family relatives, and teachers to use as a beneficial tool of effective communication and study?

Yes_____   No_____

Do you think that facebook and/or other social media can be useful in improving the higher education process along the traditional teaching tools at ITU?

Yes_____   No_____

Do you think that facebook and/or other social media has good effects on your study progress?

Yes_____   No_____

16 Do you think that facebook and/or other social media has bad effects on your study progress?

Yes_____   No_____

17 How do you evaluate the use of facebook and/or other social media tools among your ITU young students?

Beneficial: Yes_____   No_____

Somewhat beneficial: Yes_____   No_____

Not beneficial: Yes_____   No_____

As a social network service, you think Facebook is: (Please, tick the answer(s) you think right)

Excellent

Good

Can be improved

Bad

No comments