The Websites of Birzeit University Students around the World via the Internet

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Abstract:

Since the spread of internet, communications in every part of the world have become easier and faster. This paper is intended to find out the world wide spatial extension of Birzeit University (Palestine) Students internet contacts through a questionnaire that was designed and distributed to a selected random sample of Birzeit University students for this purpose. Spatial distributions of communicated countries by Birzeit University students were mapped and analyzed. In addition, languages used, topics and images exchanged were tackled. Frequency of internet uses was also analyzed in addition to students' attitudes, intentions and behavior toward internet communications. In this study descriptive statistics, and correlation analysis using Fishbein, and Ajzen behavioral model were used. Finally, results of the study were reported to shed light on positive and negative outcomes of internet communications.
Keywords: net communications, social media languages, students' contact geography

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المستخلص

منذ انتشار الإنترنت، أصبحت الاتصالات في كل جزء من العالم أسهل وأسرع. تهدف هذه الورقة إلى الكشف عن الامتداد المكاني للتواصل العالمي لطلاب جامعة بيرزيت (فلسطين) من خلال استبيان تم تصميمه وتوزيعه على عينة عشوائية مختارة من طلاب جامعة بيرزيت لهذا الغرض. وتم تخطيط التوزيعات المكانية للبلدان التي تم التواصل معها من طلاب جامعة بيرزيت، وتحليلها. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تم تناول اللغات المستخدمة والموضوعات والصور المُتبادلة. كما عملت الدراسة على تحليل عدد استخدامات الإنترنت بالإضافة إلى مواقف الطلاب ونواياهم وسلوكهم تجاه الاتصالات عبر الإنترنت. وتم استخدام الإحصاء الوصفي وتحليل الارتباط باستخدام نموذج Fishbein وAjzen السلوكي في هذه الدراسة. وأخيرًا ناقشت الورقة نتائج الدراسة لإلقاء الضوء على النتائج الإيجابية والسلبية للاتصالات عبر الإنترنت.

الكلمات الرئيسية (المفتاحيّة): الاتصالات عبر الشبكة العنكبوتية ، لغات التواصل الاجتماعي ، جغرافية الاتصال للطلاب.

Introduction:

The Arab Nation in general and Palestine in specific are witnessing huge transformation through technological advancement which has great impact on socio-economic and cultural conditions. The so called "Arab Spring" has been the driving force in increasing youths' interests and uses of social media which is defined as "internet sites where people interact freely, sharing and discussing information about each other and their lives, using a multimedia mix of personal words, pictures, videos and audios". Recently, technological advancement is being used in political issues either pro or anti governments in the Arab World. Many people can communicate with each other at the same time. In addition, spatial cognition and understanding of individuals and groups has enlarged to a great extent and the main source of information does not come any more from printed materials such as books and papers since the internet is furnishing such information in terms of time, quality and quantity (Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government, 2014).

 Internet users worldwide have been increasing every year since 2005. For example, the number of internet users were one billion, two billion, and three billion and a half in years of 2005, 2010 and 2017 respectively (The Statistical Portal, 2017). Gordhamer (2009) believes that there are five ways that social media is changing our daily life. These ways are to get news; to start and do business; to meet people; to reveal personal thinking; and to influence others.

The number of internet users in year of 2019 reached 4.54 billion. This means that 45% of world population are using internet. In terms of regions, the world percentage of internet users in Asia reached 51%, while in Europe it was 16%, in Africa 11.5%, in Latin America 10%, in North America 7.2%, in Middle East 3.,9% and in Oceania and Australia 0.6% (Internet World Stats, 2019).

In Middle Eastern countries, internet users vary from one country to another, table 1. In the year 2000, the percentages of internet users were very low; the highest were: 15% in Israel and 8% in United Arab Emirates. However, by the year 2017, internet users' percentages jumped sharply in all Middle Eastern countries. The highest users' percentages were 98% in Bahrain, 94% in Qatar, and 91% in the United Arab Emirates. Regarding Facebook users in 2017, Qatar and United Arab Emirates enjoyed the highest percentages: 94% and 85% respectively. In these countries, most people have computers and internet connections at homes, schools and work places. The lowest countries of Facebook users mostly witnessed political instability such as Iraq 36%, Palestine 34%, Syria 32%, and Yemen 7%. In the Arab World, Internet World States (2017) reports that by June of 2017 there were 185 million Arabs using internet or about 44%.

Table (1): Middle East Internet and Facebook Users

Country	Internet users / December 2000	Internet Users / June 2017	Facebook Users June 2017
Bahrain	3%	98%	70%
Iran	0%	70%	21%
Iraq	3%	36%	36%
Israel	15%	80%	59%
Jordan	2%	80%	61%
Kuwait	4%	78%	56%
Lebanon	5%	76%	51%
Oman	2%%	70%	32%
Palestine	1%%	61%	34%
Qatar	1%	94%	94%
Saudi Arabia	1%	74%	55%
Syria	0%	32%	32%
United Arab Emirates	8%	91%	85%
Yemen	0%	25%	7%

Almost one third of Arab internet users prefer social media as their main source of news (Boudraa, 2013). Similar to other individuals all over the world, Arabs use internet to download educational material, gifts shopping, pictures snapping, vacations planning, jobs finding, careers planning and even cars purchasing. Furthermore, 61% of Arabs access the internet through laptops or desktops, and16% through smartphones. Arabs benefit from the internet; for example, 88% of their use of social media enabled them to have better learning.

Through their uses of internet, Arabs tackle the two topics of private and general arenas. Some Arabs look at simple issues and others seriously look at deep issues. As a result, Arab users of internet have developed their thinking toward many issues (Ghetas & Ghamri, 2012).

Hammoudeh (2013) found out that Palestinian youth in the Gaza Strip use social media for the purpose of developing themselves, getting news, and feeling free. This

may be due to the fact that Gaza is under siege and some youth find the social media the only tool to open to the world.   Others think that social media is a good instrument to achieve change in terms of personnel, society, and politics. In addition, social media has a great impact on creating public opinion within the Palestinian society (Abed, 2010). Dahdouh (2012) suggested that the Facebook may be used for educational purposes in Palestinian universities. His study showed that university students use Facebook for social and educational application purposes, while faculty members use it for pedagogical purposes. Furthermore, social media had an effect in political changes such as that which took place in Egypt since 2011 (Al-Mansor, 2012).

There are contradictions in reported researches regarding the uses of social media. Alsaafain (2013) points out that the rate of Twitter users in Palestine for the period between 2012-2013 was the highest among Arab countries at a rate of 232%. The reason for this exponential rate was that the Palestinian used Twitter during the so-called Arab Spring as a tool for civil disobedience, societal empowerment, an effective platform against Israeli propaganda, and to expose Israeli crimes and occupation. In social media in general, 40% of Palestinian youth used social media to spread awareness about the Palestinian cause by deploying Palestinian photos and videos. Other Palestinian activists were asked by Palestinian authorities to stop writing against Palestinian political issues. However, Hasan (2013) reports that 78% of Palestinians youth use social media technologies, but very few of them use it to mobilize others in regard to the Palestinian cause. For example, few Palestinians used social media to mark the "land day".

 Social media allowed Arabs in different countries to communicate with each other in terms of dominant socio-economic and political issues. This type of communications surprised both Arab governments and Arab people in general. Arab governments were conservative; therefore, did not allow opposed media to enter their borders. Most Arab countries control their various kinds of media. Arab governments believed that such control will help in perpetuating their regimes. Arab Publics t availed themselves of the introduction of electronic social media and started to use it in different issues such as personnel, economic, political, emotional, and even dating. Some Arabs used social media to get married. Others used it for nonsense issues. A large number of Arabs hesitate to use social media especially in political issues fearing Arab governments' penetration. Palestinians in general consider Israeli intelligence penetrations.

Several researches have been carried out regarding the impact of the uses of social media on political awareness locally (Al-Alami, 2011; Fenton & Barassi, 2011; Russell, 2011). Another study was carried out by Kushin and Yamamoto (2009) on the effect of uses of social media and voting decision making in American Presidential elections which took place in 2008. In addition, Raine (2015) states that social media is also used in political engagement. However, Hayes (2009) reports that people depend on their political engagement and awareness for regular television channels, and social networks

have less impact. Furthermore, social media has impact on communication, knowledge, business and entertainment. However, some people are worried about negative consequences of social media on individuals, families in terms of relationship, contacts and degradation in the level of education (Nazal, 2017).

This research focuses on Palestinian students of different levels at Birzeit University in Palestine. Students of this university are mostly Palestinians who live in the West Bank, inside occupied Palestine of 1948, and other Arab countries. Very few students come from the Gaza Strip because of Israeli siege since the year 2000. Before that, Birzeit University attracted almost 50% of its students from the Gaza strip. Students of this university have their effect on Palestinian society regarding different issues, and such an effect, especially of political issues, is intangible but huge and reaches various parts of the world.

Methodology:

A random sample of 300 students was selected from six university required elective classes called Human Geography (Table 2). The sample represents 2.5% of Birzeit University students, the total number of which is about 10000 and it was representative of all colleges at Birzeit University.

The sample students were given a questionnaire on internet contacts. The questionnaire included questions regarding students' socio-economic conditions, university level, major, language mastering, type of internet communications, gained knowledge, disseminated ideas, student's evaluation of internet communications, and their attitude, intentions and behaviors toward the internet.

Table 2: distribution of students according to their colleges

College	Number of students	Percentage of students
Arts	56	22
Science	22	9
Business & Economics	74	29.5
Engineering & Technology	31	12.5
Education	12	5
Law and Public Administration	10	4
Pharmacy, Nursing and Health Professions	3	1
Missing data	43	17
Total	251	100

Students were asked to answer five-point Likert scale questions in the questionnaire which comprised 56 questions. The questionnaire included questions of determinants of attitude and subjective norm that focused on the following:

1- Determinants of attitude: understanding that social media allows student to understand himself, peers, friends, society, knowledge issues, problem s/he may face, improve economic conditions.

2- Determinants of perceived behavior: understanding that social media is a tool of getting family members, friends, fellow citizens, Arab and world citizens to understand each other.

3- Determinants of motivation: social media makes student bored, being away of family members and friends, less time to study and meet others.

4- Determinants of subjective norm: the way family members, friends, peers, teachers and local society think of my social media uses.

5- Determinants of intentions: Student intention toward social media uses.

Analysis:

Analysis starts with tackling students' gender distribution, majors, topics used in social media, used languages, geographic distributions of communicated countries, and effects of attitude, subjective norms and students intentions on using social media.

The following table illustrates the distribution of students according to colleges. In terms of gender distribution, male students represented 33.5% and female students were 67.5%.   In general female students are more in number than male students at Birzeit university. The reason for this distribution is that female students get higher scores in secondary school exam. Therefore, they get enrolled at Birzeit University. In addition, many Palestinian families prefer to send their male children abroad to study in specialties not found at Birzeit University such as medicine.

Topics used on Facebook, blogs and forums in Arab World:

Table 3 illustrates the most general topics used in social media in the Arab World. It is clear that "connecting with people" is the most important topic with 55%, followed by "gaining information and listening to music and sharing photos" with 12%. In third place came "interesting way of using time with 8%", and in fourth place "people used the internet because it is free of charge with 1%".

Table 3: Most topics used in social media in the Arab World

(Arab Social Media Influences Summit, 2015)

Connecting with people	55%
Gaining information, working videos, listening to music and sharing photos	12%
Interesting way of using time	8%
Free of Charge	1%
Others	3%
No answers	21%
Total	100%

Languages used in social media contacts:

Table 4 illustrates languages used by Birzeit University students. There are 44% of the total used Arabic as the main language. In fact, the native language of Birzeit University students is Arabic, and it is the official language of Birzeit University. The questionnaire showed that Birzeit University students use Arabic in their social communication with relatives and friends whose Arabic is their native language. However, 36% of students used a local kind of "Arabizi" in their social media contacts. Arabizi is the Arabic chat alphabet used for online communication over the Internet. The graphemes of Arabizi include Latin script and Arabic numerals in an uncodified combination that mainly avoid Arabic diacritics and Latin multigraphs.

English is the second language used by students with a 9%. In fact, Palestinian students take a large dose of required English classes in their elementary and high schools. Furthermore, some Palestinian students use English as their native language since they grew with their relatives in the abroad and they came back to Birzeit University to pursue their undergraduate studies. Some Palestinian students join private schools and such schools use English as their instruction language. Very few students used French (2,4%) and German (1.3%) languages in their social media communications.

Table 4: Languages used by Birzeit University Students*

*Note: some students use more than one language.

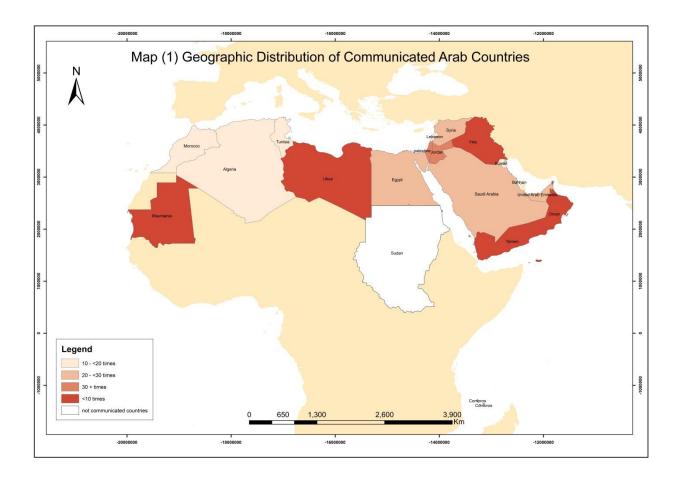| Language	Number of students	Percentage of total uses
Arabic	132	44.3%
Arabizi	108	36.2%
English	28	9.4%
French	7	2.4%
German	4	1.3%
Other Languages	19	6.4%
Total	298	100%

Geographic Distribution of Communicated Countries:

Table 5 and Map 1 illustrate Arab and World countries which were communicated through student' social media. Regarding the Arab World, countries facing political instability were the least communicated such as Iraq, Libya and Yemen. Next are countries that are remote or do not from geographic proximity to Palestine such as Mauritania in the West and Oman in the East, in addition to countries located in North Africa such as Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. Kuwait, Bahrain and Lebanon were communicated 10 to 20 times. In fact, Kuwait and Bahrain host low number of Palestinians. As for Lebanon, which hosts large numbers of Palestinian refugees, it is probable that the Palestinian refugees in there face miserable socio-economic conditions and may not have technological means. Countries communicated between 20 to 30 times are either large countries in terms of population such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria or having potential job market such as the United Arab Emirates, which attracts many Palestinians to work on its land. Jordan is most communicated country (more than 30 times) since it is within geographic proximity of Palestine and many Palestinian refugees are living there.

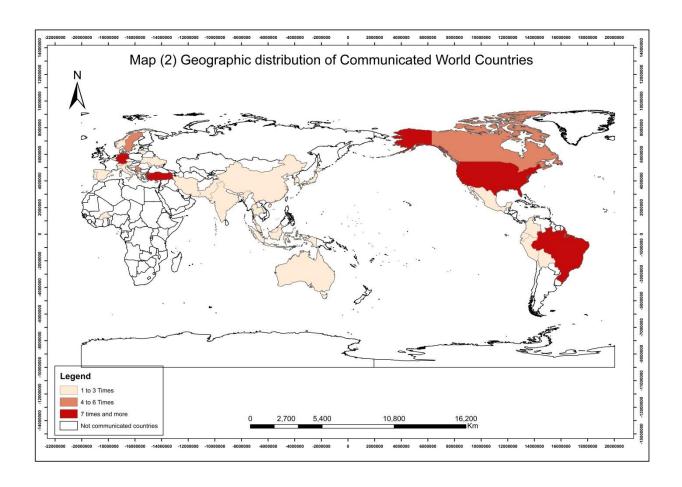**Table (5) Geographic distribution of Communicated Countries**

Arab Countries			Non-Arab Countries	
Range	**Country**		**Range**	**Country**
< 10 times	Iraq, Libya, Mauritania, Oman, Yemen,		1- 3 times	Spain, Portugal, Denmark, South Korea, Peru, Holland, India, Pakistan, Greece, Ukraine, Ecuador, Mexico, Lithuania, Belgium, Iran, Norway, Austria, Japan, China, Moldavia, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Thailand, Croatia, Bolivia, Indonesia, Italy, Malaysia, Switzerland, Cyprus, Australia
10 < 20 times	Algeria, Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia		4 – 6 times	Canada, Sweden, Serbia
20 < 30 times	Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates		7 times and more	Turkey, Germany, USA, Brazil
30 + times	Jordan, Palestine			
None Communicated Arab Countries	Comoro Islands, Djibouti, Qatar, Somalia, Sudan		None Communicated World Countries	Rest of the World

The none-communicated Arab countries are Comoro Islands, Djibouti, Qatar, Sudan and Somalia. All of these states have peripheral location and small in size in addition to their low population with the exception of Somalia, which has been unstable since early ١٩٩0's. Qatar is an exception. Although a gulf state and may attract job hunters, it was not communicated by this specimen of students, and this does not suggest any kind of prejudice.

Map (1) Geographic Distribution of Communicated Arab Countries

The most communicated none-Arab countries (map 2) are three countries in Europe: Germany, Serbia and Sweden; three new world countries: Brazil, Canada and USA; and one Asian country: Turkey. In fact, these countries share one common thing since they host many Palestinians. Usually Palestinians keep track of each other and social media enhances such contacts. There are 30 non-Arab Countries that received few communications. These countries vary from one continent to another; for example, there were fifteen European countries, five Asian countries, two South American countries and one African country. It seems that communicating these countries is random. Palestinian students did not have any contacts with any Israeli whatsoever, despite that both sides live on the same region.

In terms of social media communications, students showed that 56% of them tackle social issues with family members and friends. Only 16% of them tackle scientific issues; it was expected that more students would chose to tackle the scientific option. Sharing economic and political issues was 7%. It was expected that few students tackle economic issues since they still young and students avoid tackling political issues fearing that Israel as an occupying power may track such communications.

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Map (2) Geographic distribution of Communicated World Countries

Legend
- 1 to 3 Times
- 4 to 6 Times
- 7 times and more
- Not communicated countries

Effects of Attitude, Subjective Norms and Students intentions on using Social Media:

A major aim of geographers is the development of a model that permits accurate predictions of human behavior. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) introduced such a model with a goal to predict consumer behavior. The goal of geographers is to expand the usefulness of this model for the purpose of predicting aspects of spatial behavior intention and actual spatial behavior. Fishbein and Ajzen tried to answer two basic questions:

1- Can attitude and social norm be used to predict behavior?

2- Do changes in attitude lead to changes in behavior?

In fact, Fishbein and Ajzen described attitude as a "learned predisposition to respond in a consistency favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object". They believe that an individual intention to perform a specific behavior is the best indicator of his/her behavior rather than stressing the relationship between attitude and behavior (Ajzen & Klobas, 2013). In this theory, individual's intention to perform a specific

behavior is the best indicator of his behavior. Therefore, intention has a linear function of two factors:

1- Attitude toward performing a specific behavioral act.

2- Beliefs about what others expect a person to do. Individual's desire (motivation) influences his belief. The model was presented by three equations:

$B \sim B1 \quad = (A_{act})W_1 + (SN)W_2$
(1)

$B \quad$ = Overt behavior

$B1 \quad$ = Behavioral intention to perform a specific action

$A_{act} \quad$ = Individual attitude toward performing the act

$SN \quad$ = Subjective norm

W_1 and $W_2 \quad =$ Standardized regression coefficients

$A_{act} \; B_i \quad a_i \; = \; \sum_{i=1}^{n} \; B_I \; a_i$
(2)

$a_i \quad$ = Individual evaluation

$B_i \quad$ = Number of salient consequences

$SN \qquad = NB_j \; MC_J = \sum_{i=1}^{m} NB_j \; MC_j$
(3)

$M \quad$ = Number of salient referents

$NB_j \quad$ = Individual perception of the expectations of referent j with respect to the behavior

$MC_j \quad$ =Individual motivation to comply (Bearden & Woodside 1977).

This model has been applied in different areas such as consumer behavior (Ajzen and Manstead, 2007); fertility (Ajzen and Klobas, 2013); leisure activities (Ajzen et al., 1995); public opinion (Abed, 2012); Environment (de Leeuw et al., 2015); job satisfaction (Ajzen, 2012); map cognition (Al-Rimmawi, 2001); hiring intentions (Fraser et al., 2011); choice of travel (Bamberg et al., 2003); hunters values (Daigle et al.); and mental health care (Stecker et al., 2007).

Analysis and the results of Regression Technique:

The multiple regression technique was used to try to find out how the theory of planned behavior can contribute to understanding in what way the dependent variable (intention to use social media) may be explained by predictors or independent variables (attitude, and social norm). The model showed that the relationship is significant since the calculated F-value is 477.3 and its significant value is less than 0.05. Two independent variables (attitude and social norm) explained 73% of the variance of students' intention to use social media. Therefore, the equation is as follows:

This means that Ajzen and Fishbein regression model can explain Birzeit University students' intention to use social media in their daily life. Correlation between student's intention and their attitude is 0.85. This is a high correlation since students are aware of what they are doing. However, the correlation between intention and social norm is 0.49 and this is a medium correlation. It seems that the students believe that people around them do not make that much effect on their social media behavior since this is a new phenomenon and some people may not be aware off social media outcomes. Time will take care of ripening peoples' influence on their children social media behavior.

Conclusion:

Despite the fact that social media in the Arab World in general and Palestine in specific is a new phenomenon, there is a need to social network which connects individuals and their relationship with each other in terms of feeling, and exchange of information. In this research, it was found out that students use social media to communicate with perspective counterparts all over the world; however, this study showed certain geographical distribution for this sample of students at the time of the research. Definitely, these findings are not and cannot be static due to the variations influencing questions that include but not limited to: time, interests, accessibility, and need.

Geographic proximity will always be an important factor affecting the communicated countries especially those countries that have much in common with Palestine such as language and culture, which may have the lions share in any future communications. Other countries will vary according to students' interest and need which cannot be predicted depending on two variations that govern the students' intentions to use social media communications viz. attitude and social norm.

The researchers believe that similar research is important to gage the extent of using student's social media communications, purposes and effect of such use.

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