

International Saudi Female Students in Australia and Social Networking Sites: What are the motivations and barriers to communication?

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There has been much research into college students' use of web 2.0 technologies, such as Social Networking Sites (SNS) in general and Facebook (FB) in particular. However, few have focused on international Saudi female students (ISFS), whose number is on the rise. Therefore, the current study aims to explore the use of SNS by ISFS in Australia, with a particular focus on FB. Data was collected through five semi-structured in-depth interviews with Saudi female students in Melbourne to explore their motivations for using FB. The results indicated that ISFS were attracted to SNS because of personal (e.g.: peer pressure) and technical (e.g.: convenience) attractors. Currently ISFS use Facebook mainly to keep in touch with their friends and family, to gain knowledge of the various social and political events happening around them; and to have fun through posting photos and making comments. However, with posting photos, the students appeared to be anxious and concerned about the privacy of their personal photos due to cultural factors. Interestingly, the study found that ISFS showed a positive attitude and willingness to use Facebook in an educational context, a finding that can be of great significance for Australian educators to consider when dealing with this group of students. Finally, the only factors that might decrease but not stop ISFS' use of SNS in Saudi were technical, and not cultural, for this sample of respondents.

Keywords: Social Network Sites– Facebook– International Saudi Females Students (ISFS) – Australia – Appropriation process – International Students - Communication.