

## *UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS SITES AND THEIR RELATION WITH SOME VARIABLES*

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to investigate the students' use of social networks sites (SNSs) and its relation to gender, type of use, GPA, type of mobile phones and types of sites. A questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 120 undergraduate students who participated in the study. It contains "yes" or "no" questions, multiple choice questions, and questions using a Likert-type scale. The results show that students use SNSs for social matters more than for academic purposes, there is no difference in using social networks sites between female students and male students, students with smart mobile phones use SNSs more than those with normal mobiles. Facebook was the most used site. There is no significant difference in students' use of SNSs due to students GPA. More than fifty percent of students sample spent two hours or more than two hours per day. The study concludes with some recommendations.

**Key words:** Social networks sites, social media, university students, Facebook

### **Introduction**

Social networks sites (SNSs) have changed today the way of human communications. From simple beginnings as a platform for sharing photos, discussing common interests, and supplementing traditional social interactions, they have become the source of change in different fields. They have revolutionized the way people interact, the way they communicate, and even the way they think (Weisgerber & Butler, 2010). The rise of social software provides new avenues and new opportunities for increased participation and collaboration and an opportunity to change the way people learn (Parker & Chao, 2008; Prensky 2011). The participatory web, including social networking sites such as Facebook and content-sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr, allows individuals to establish or maintain connections with others, establish their social networks, and share information in the form of wikis, blogs, tweets, podcasts, video, RSS feeds, and more (McCarthy, 2010). Social media has been defined in different ways. For this study, the definition advanced by Bryer and Zavatarro (2011, p. 327) will be used: "Social media are technologies that facilitate social interaction, make possible collaboration, and enable deliberation across stakeholders. These technologies include blogs, wikis, media (audio, photo, video, text) sharing tools, networking platforms (including Facebook), and virtual worlds." Over the years, social networking among college students has become more and more popular. It is a way to make connections, not only on campus, but with friends outside of school. Social networking is a way that helps many people feel as though they belong to a community. Due to the increased popularity of it, economists and professors are questioning whether grades of students are being affected by how much time is being spent on these sites (Choney, 2010). With smart phones being able to access the internet and have applications of social networking, many are concerned about how smart phones with social networking applications will affect students' grades. Social networking became popular between 2004 and 2006, after Facebook and MySpace were created. Facebook currently claims over 800 million active users sharing more than 30 billion pieces of content each month in the form of web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photo albums, etc. (Facebook Statistics, 2011). Twitter, a social networking and micro-blogging service, is averaging 140 million tweets per day, up from 50 million the previous year, and gets 460,000 new accounts every day (Twitter Statistics, 2011). People are flocking to the Internet in order to upload pictures, share videos, tell stories, and simply interact with others (Weisgerber & Butler, 2010).

The process of teaching and learning has always been fertile ground for early adopters of innovation in computing technology. It is, therefore, no surprise that educational practitioners and theorists have begun to eagerly explore how social media can be harnessed to describe and implement new paradigms for communication, learning, and education. Wikis, blogs, microblogs, online groups and forums, podcasts, Web mashups, virtual worlds, recommender/evaluation systems, social repositories, and social tagging/bookmarking are but a few of the applications enabling innovative behaviors that support the acquisition, access, manipulation, processing, retrieval, presentation, and visualization of information within a teaching/learning space. Hordemann and Chao 2012 evaluated an interactive social media learning environment to assess the design and implementation challenges of this

environment. They found that the designs of the chat and awards systems were the areas of greatest concern. Given the potential benefits of game-oriented learning, the failure of the award system is of particular note. The immediate feedback of quiz results and the ability to ask questions anonymously were the greatest successes. The note taking feature was a qualified success. Load testing's most apparent result was that large chat volume rendered chat impractical due to the limited rate at which humans can read and process text. Resolution of the chat issues will require both social adjustments to how such a system is used and technical alterations to limit the incoming rate of chat. The awards system requires a complete rework, both to make the awards more interesting and more appealing and to ensure that the correct behaviors are being motivated. The question system can be enhanced by providing more generic functionality, giving users a way to simply indicate that they have lost track of the lecture instead of forcing them to ask specific questions. Theatrically Dabbagh, and Kitsantas (2012) attempted to generate a conceptual model for using social media in formal and non formal setting. She reviewed research that support her claim, conceptualized the connection between personalized learning environment (PLE), social media, and self-regulated learning, and provided a three-level pedagogical framework for using social media to create PLEs that support student self-regulated learning. Practically, Clark, Logan, Luckin, Mee, and Oliver (2009) investigated how adolescent students perceived and used Web 2.0 technologies (social media) both in formal and informal learning contexts. Students were asked what types of Web 2.0 technologies they used and why, and completed a learning map where they were instructed to visually map out the different technologies they used and for what purpose. The results showed that while students tended to use more Web 2.0 technologies during their free time than in school, they did use Web 2.0 technologies for school purposes. However, the most common technology used was email to transfer files and seek help from teachers or peers. This result shows that students are not fully taking advantage of the benefits that Web 2.0 technologies have to offer for formal learning. The authors conclude that in order for students to use Web 2.0 technologies as formal learning tools they need training. Similarly, Cigognini, Pettenati, and Edirisingha (2011) reported that learners need support, guidance, and pedagogical interventions to make the best possible use of social media to support their learning goals.

Effectively engaging students requires not only understanding their attitudes towards academic life, but also understanding their social life (McCarthy, 2010). Many of today's younger students can be thought of as "digital natives", a term coined by Prensky (2001) to describe individuals who have known nothing but a digital environment since birth, surrounded by and using cell phones, computers, videogames, digital music players, and all the "necessities" of the digital age. In many cases this digital culture has influenced student skills and preferences in a number of key areas related to education (McCarthy, 2010). These students prefer receiving information quickly and are adept at processing that information rapidly; they prefer multitasking and nonlinear access to information; they have a low tolerance for lectures and prefer active rather than passive learning, and they rely heavily on social media for social and professional interactions and accessing information (McCarthy, 2010). Veletsianos and Navarrete (2012) indicated that learners enjoyed and appreciated the social learning experience afforded by the combination of the online social network and the employed pedagogy. Learners supported one another in their learning and noted that they perceived their learning experience was enhanced by their interactions. Nevertheless, in contrast to claims from the existing literature on informal learning in SNSs, and in support of emerging empirical evidence from the use of online social networks in hybrid courses (Arnold & Paulus, 2010), learners limited their public activity to course-related topics. Additionally, students did not appear to mix social and educational participation and seemed to need support in managing the expanded amount of information available to them. In order to manage their time and participation, learners devised strategies and "workarounds" to complete assigned activities and course commitments. Veletsianos and Navarrete (2012) observed that frequent and ongoing participation and collaboration within the context of the social network (in combination with the relatively short duration of the course) seemed to mitigate the problems traditionally facing online learners, such as isolation and lack of support, while contributing to a positive learning experience.

In a study carried out by Valjataga et al. (2011), college students' perceptions of the pedagogical affordances of social media in supporting the development of PLEs were examined in order to evaluate a course design that was premised on social media. Students were given the freedom to select social media tools to create personal and distributed learning spaces to facilitate individual and collaborative learning tasks in an educational technology course. Findings showed that students' perceptions of the affordances of personalized learning environment (PLE) dynamically changed as they navigated the course landscape of social media tools to construct and perform learning activities aligning with the researchers' operational definition of affordances of social media. This led the researchers to recommend that (a) students should be encouraged to develop skills and confidence in the selection, application,

and use of social media tools for personalized learning and that (b) new pedagogical models and approaches are needed to enhance students' abilities to organize and customize their own learning environments and advance their self-direction and self-awareness in a PLE.

In terms of the effects of social media on students learning, Stollak et al,( 2011) found that GPA did not play a role in the use of any of the major social networking tools, and minutes spent on several of the sites did not differ. The major differences lay in time spent with Facebook, which did show a negative relationship between time spent on the social network and one's grades. They also, found that juniors and seniors were more likely to use Twitter and LinkedIn, and read blogs, than their younger colleagues. However, other than Facebook, there was no significant difference in the amount of time spent accessing these sites. As expected tools such as Twitter and LinkedIn have more relevance to older students as they try to connect with others in their job search or find work. Similarly, perhaps younger students use Facebook longer as they are building their social connections, whereas older students already have a well-established network of friends and colleagues. Moon (2011) found that the correlation or relationship between Facebook use (hours spent per week on Facebook) and academic performance (cumulative college GPA) is  $-.129$ . Facebook use (hours spent per week on Facebook) is negatively correlated with academic performance (cumulative college GPA) and there is no significant effect of time spent on Facebook and academic performance, which means using Facebook is not showing an impact on academic performance, despite the fact that 25% of students in her study believe that Facebook use has a negative impact on academic performance. Ahmed and Qazi, 2011 found that SNSs are mainly used for non-academic purposes by the students. This fact may give rise to a proposition that excessive usage of SNSs might be having adverse impacts on academic performance of the student users but actual results did not imply that. An interesting conclusion has been drawn on the basis of the findings of Ahmed and Qazi 2012 study that students are managing their time efficiently and hence, use of SNSs does not harm their academic performance. On the other hand, Bauerlein (2008) explained that social networking sites (i.e. Facebook) lead to weaker writing and reading skills because students are using short-hand versions of words and new lingo (i.e. lol, g2g, and ttyl). Online social network sites are filled with incorrect grammar and new lingo. So, if students are using Facebook during their academic preparation time, they may increase grammar mistakes when writing a paper or working on a project because they are in a "social networking mindset" instead of an "academic mindset." Many of the professors blame social media, such as Facebook, for the lack of quality in their students' writing. Vanden Boogart (2006) found that a high level of Facebook use was found among students with lower GPAs. Karpinski and Duberstein (2009) found significant differences in grades between Facebook users and non-Facebook users. On the other hand, Some researchers have found Facebook use to be a helpful tool and resource for college students (Ellison, 2010; Lipsett 2008; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Lipsett (2008) believes that Facebook could be used as an alternative place to house and record academic achievements and examples of schoolwork. While Ellison (2010) found that college students used Facebook to arrange face-to-face study groups, help manage group projects, coordinate meetings, and chat or message about assignments. Ellison (2010) also asserted that college students are able to use Facebook to facilitate their academic goals and that Facebook is an untapped educational resource. Additionally, students from the Ellison (2010) study stated that they wished Facebook would offer more features and tools to help them with schoolwork Facebook can be very engaging, which is why professors might consider using Facebook as an educational tool. Professors could use Facebook to engage their students and find productive ways to reach academic objectives. For example, Facebook can be used to facilitate instructor-to-student and student-to-student course communication, respond to questions, get announcements and updates, and manage out-of-class projects. It is clear that social media for education have become dynamic, ubiquitous, distributed, real time, collaborative, bottom up, many to many, value based, and personalized. Some have referred to this movement as Education 2.0, but it should, more likely, be understood as an early glimpse of the future of the entire educational process.

The present study investigates how university students use social media in both formal and informal learning and focuses on the effects of the social network sites on the GPA, time spent on them and gender in a third world university.. The findings of this study will expand our knowledge about the use of social media and how these technologies can be used to connect formal and informal learning. With this concern in mind this study addresses the following questions:

- What are the students' uses of SNS for social and academic purposes? .1
- Are there any differences between students' social use and academic use of SNSs? .2
- Which SNSs are the most used by students? .3
- Do students' uses of SNSs vary according to their gender, GPA, and type of mobile? .4
- How many hours do students spent on SNSs daily? .5

**Study Importance**

The findings of this study can help administrators, professors and parents recognize the extent to which university students' use SNSs and how that will affect their academic achievement.

**Procedure and Instrument**

The present study was carried out during the summer semester of 2012 at the college of education at Sultan Qaboos university in Sultanate of Oman. The questionnaire was distributed to students in three sections. These sections were TECH 2007 introduction to instructional technology, TECH 2113 photography in education and an elective course ISLM. 2090 Islamic ethics. The total number for the three sections was 153, only 120 students participated in this study. This college has a student body of approximately 1629. The gender breakdown of this college is 53.2% female and 46.7% male. A survey was created by the researcher that was composed of 20 Likert type questions ten for social use of social media and ten for academic use. The survey was formatted with "yes" or "no" questions, multiple choice questions, and questions using a Likert-type scale. The survey was expected to take seven to ten minutes to complete. The instrument was given to a panel of SQU faculty members for face validation. The reliability of the instrument was found to be 0.87 as measured by alpha Cronbach and this value is sufficient for the purpose of this study. The data was then treated by the use of SPSS for analysis.

**Findings:**

To answer the first question of the study which states "What are the students' uses of SNS for social and academic purposes? Means and standard deviations were calculated by the use of SPSS. The results are shown in table (1) below.

**Table 1 Means and standard deviations of students' use of SNSs**

Social use of SNSs			Academic use of SNSs		
Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
it1	3.5167	1.09224	it11	3.6500	.89490
it2	3.1583	1.15951	it12	3.5083	.97873
it3	3.2250	1.11869	it13	3.6250	.86055
it4	4.0084	1.07747	it14	3.7899	.89133
it5	3.3833	1.16087	it15	3.5250	.96982
it6	4.3697	.76873	it16	3.5583	.95966
it7	4.3667	.73259	it17	3.8167	.92567
it8	4.0583	.89156	it18	3.8824	.85546
it9	3.9833	.95251	it19	3.3250	1.09362
it10	3.8333	.99860	it20	3.8250	1.07424
sum1	3.7894	.54374	sum2	3.6498	.60055

It is clear that from the above table items 4, 6, 7, and 8 of the social use have the highest score which means that the

students use social media for communicating with their friends, entertainment and relaxation, exchange news through text and video and to fill the leisure time respectively. Item 2 (using SNSs to know other people in my class) and item 3 (using SNSs to know other people living near to me) receive lowest rating which means that students use of SNSs for knowing other people is not highly practiced. Regarding the academic use the highest items are 14, 17, 18, and 20 which means that students use SNSs for positive scientific dialogue, to develop their ability to learn, produce personal knowledge and to collect data for conducting research respectively. The overall mean for the use of SNSs for social purposes is higher than that of academic purposes as shown in the above table. This finding is supported by Clark, Logan, Luckin, Mee, and Oliver (2009) they stated that while students tended to use more Web 2.0 technologies during their free time than in school, they did use Web 2.0 technologies for school purposes. However, the most common technology used was email to transfer files and seek help from teachers or peers. This result shows that students are not fully taking advantage of the benefits that Web 2.0 technologies have to offer for formal learning and for academic purposes.

To answer the second question which states “Are there any differences between students’ social use and academic use of SNSs? Paired sample t test was used as shown in table 2

**Table (2) Paired Samples Statistics for the social use and academic use of SNSs**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 Social use	3.7894	120	.54374	2.266	119	0.025	0.308	0.001
Academic use	3.6498	120	.60055					

It is clear from the above table that there is a significant difference at  $\alpha$  0.05 in the means for using SNSs for social use and academic use in favor of the social use ( mean =3.7894, Std = 0.5437). This result is reasonable and justified because these sites when invented were mainly for social collaboration and communication. This result is supported by many research findings e.g., Ahmed and Qazi, 2011, Weisgerber & Butler, 2010, Choney, 2010. Recently, educators started to think about using them for educational purposes (Veletsianos and Navarrete (2012), Dabbagh and Kitsantas, 2012).

To answer the third question of the which states " Which SNSs are the most used by students? Frequencies and percentiles are used as indicated by the following table

Table 3 Frequency and percent of social networks sites as used by the sample

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid Facebook	62	51.7	51.7
Youtube	24	20.0	6.7
Twitter	8	6.7	20.0
Flicker	3	2.5	2.5
g. app	2	1.7	1.7
Other	21	17.5	17.5
Total	120	100.0	100.0

The table above shows that the facebook was the most used site followed by youtube and wtwitter. This result is supported by many studies e.g., Facebook statistis 2011. Facebook currently claims over 800 million active users sharing more than 30 billion pieces of content each month in the form of web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photo albums, etc. (Facebook Statistics, 2011). Youtube claims over 800 million unique users visit YouTube each month and over 4 billion hours of video are watched each month on YouTube ( Youtube statistics, 2012). Twitter, a social networking and micro-blogging service, is averaging 140 million tweets per day, up from 50 million the previous year, and gets 460,000 new accounts every day (Twitter Statistics, 2011). People are flocking to the Internet in order to upload pictures, share videos, tell stories, and simply interact with others (Weisgerber & Butler, 2010).

To answer the fourth question of this study which states " Do students’ uses of SNSs vary according to their gender, GPA, and type of mobile? Test was used for answering the gender and the type of mobile questions and ANOVA was used to answer the GPA question. The results are shown in table 4 below.

Table 4: t test for the differences in means for gender and type of mobile

Variable	Means	Std Deviation	T	Sig.
Male	3.7940	.5246	-.085	0.932
Female	3.7855	.5628		
Smart mobile	3.7737	.43300	1.92	0.05

Normal mobile	3.5989	.51059		
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The above table shows that there is no significant difference in means between male and female use of SNSs. This result contradicts what Hargittai (2007) found in his study. He found that females being 1.6 times more likely to use an SNS. The above table also shows that there is a significant difference in means between students who have smart mobile and those who have normal mobile. This result could be explained by the fact that with smart phones students are able to access the internet quickly and make use of applications of social networking available to them. This will lead to increase their utilization of SNSs.

To check whether the different GPA leads to different use of SNSs, ANOVA was used as shown below

**Table 5: ANOVA for differences of means in GPA**

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.366	2	.183	.858	.427
Within Groups	24.741	116	.213		
Total	25.107	118			

As indicated in the above table there are no significant differences in the means of the GPA which means that the GPA has no effect on the use of SNSs. Students with different GPA use SNSs in a similar way. In addition, that means students with high GPA use SNSs as those of average or low GPA. As discussed earlier in the above literature the use of SNSs does not affect the students GPA. This result contradicts what Vanden Boogart (2006) findings in which he stated that a high level of Facebook use was found among students with lower GPAs. Karpinski and Duberstein (2009) found significant differences in grades between Facebook users and non-Facebook users. On the other hand, Some researchers have found Facebook use to be a helpful tool and resource for college students (Ellison, 2010; Lipsett 2008; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). This leads to the fact that neither GPA nor the use of SNSs affect each other.

To answer the last question which states "How many hours do students spend on SNSs daily?" Frequency and percent were used to show the time spent by students on SNSs.

**Frequency and percent of hours spent on SNSs**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Half	27	22.5	22.7	22.7
Hour	30	25.0	25.2	47.9
Two hours	25	20.8	21.0	68.9
More than 2 hours	37	30.8	31.1	100.0
Total	119	99.2	100.0	
System	1	.8		
Total	120	100.0		

The above results show that 30.8 % of the sample spends more than two hours per day. 25% of the sample spends one hour per day, 20 % of the sample spends two hours per day and 22.5% of the sample spends half an hour per day. One can say those who spend two hours and more than tow hours comprise 51.6% and this means that more than 50% of students spend two hours or more in SNSs. This amount of time is not a small and might affect their time for study, take them away from their study and distracts them. This fact may give rise to a proposition that excessive usage of SNSs might be having adverse impacts on academic performance of the student users but actual results did not imply that(Ahmed and Qazi, 2012).

#### **Conclusion and recommendations**

The current paper investigates the use of SNSs by a sample of university students. Students' use of SNSs for social purposes was found to be more than thier use for academic purposes. Facebook was found to be the most used and popular sites and after it the Youtube sites. There is no significant difference was found between female and male uses of SNSs which means gender does not affect the use of SNSs. Concerning the effects of GPA on the use of

SNSs the study found that GPA does not affect the use of SNSs. Students with different GPA use the SNSs equally. Regarding the time spent on SNSs it was found that more than 50% of students spend two hours or more in SNSs per day. From these findings the researcher recommends that the students should be encouraged to make use of SNSs for academic purposes. More research is needed to look carefully at the students' practices in SNSs and what types of SNSs could be used to enhance learning as well as matching these sites with suitable courses and relevant applications.

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