The Effects of Social Networking Sites on the Academic Performance of Students in College of Applied Sciences, Nizwa, Oman.

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Abstract
The research investigates pedagogical impacts of social networking sites on undergraduate students at the College of Applied Sciences (CAS), Nizwa, Oman. Blogs, wikis, tweets, RSS feeds, discussion boards, podcasts are educational nodes in a huge network. The study tabulates the usage of these web2.0 applications and their impact on linguistic and social behaviors of young learners. The demographic segmentation constructs a framework to evaluate social tools and e-learning technologies popular amongst learners. The results of empirical evidence explore classroom and social software as paradigms that build young knowledgeable societies. It studies variables that examine the effectiveness of these social tools in knowledge sharing and general awareness of student communities.

Keywords: Social networking, E-learning, Communication, Academic performance, Oman.

1. Introduction:

The Oman government's decision to increase Information and Communication technology has resulted in initiatives to expand internet penetration. The Sultanate today has diverse media platforms to meet its information, education and entertainment needs (Taswir, 2012)

 The use of social media is a result of ' Broadband services available via ADSL, Fiber-to-the-Home (FttH), WiFi, WiMAX and mobile broadband. Recognizing the potential of applying ICT   to improve both social and economic development, Oman has taken steps to develop an Internet economy, with significant government funded initiatives launched in the areas of public administration (e-government), online payments, e-health and e-learning (Oman - Telecoms, Mobile and Broadband, 2012)

E-learning is an important tool for learners. Online social networking sites engage students and need to be studied as distributors of information. The medium of internet has evolved with growth in its applications. The interactive nature of online environments has expanded with social networks. Connecting through social networks started as a niche activity, but with time it is now a phenomenon. The social networking sites are being used in various ways like forming communities, chatting, blogging etc. Apart from that different institutions even nowadays are forming communities or groups on different Social Networking Sites.

The Omani higher education system is relatively young, as the first public university in Oman; Sultan Qaboos University was founded in 1986. Oman's Ministry of Higher Education administers six Colleges of Applied

Sciences(CAS) which started in 2005 and comprised of five departments namely English, Business, IT, Design and Communication Department (Education in Oman).

This paper studies the educational use of the Social Networking Sites, by student in the Nizwa CAS, Oman. The study is important as 'connectivity with internet has transformed post secondary learning, that we need to view it differently (Rennie et al.,2004)

2. Literature Review:

The increased use of Social Networking Websites has become an international phenomenon in the past several years. What started out as a hobby for some computer literate people has become a social norm and way of life for people from all over the world (Boyd, 2007). Teenagers and young adults have especially embraced these sites as a way to connect with their peers, share information, reinvent their personalities, and showcase their social lives (Boyd, 2007).

With the increase of technology used for communicating with others and the popularity of the Internet, "Social Networking" has become an activity that is done primarily on the Internet, with sites like MySpace, Face book, Bebo, Friendster, and Xanga (Coyle et al., 2008).

Many people actively participate in content generation and value creation, and several researchers (e.g., Young et al., 2009; Vasalou et al., 2010) have examined their profiles to determine why and to what extent they are keen on posting their entire identity, sharing pictures and videos, and indicating their religious affiliations, marital status, and political orientations on the internet. These users interact with others, exchange information about their interests, raise discussions about new topics, follows news about specific topics on different Social Networking Sites.

Teenagers now use the Internet for the majority their daily activities and information gathering, as opposed to older generations who used resources like the television or newspaper (Lewis, 2008). A recent survey showed that approximately ninety percent of teens in the United States have Internet access, and about seventy-five percent of these teens use the Internet more than once per day (Kist, 2008). This study also showed that approximately half of all teens who have Internet access are also members of social networking sites, and use the Internet to make plans and socialize with friends (Kist, 2008). In September, 2005, out of total adult internet users (18-29 years) 16% were those who were using any social networking site and this percentage increased to 86% on May, 2010 (www.marketingcharts.com).

Tuckman (1975) defined performance as the apparent demonstration of understanding, concepts, skills, ideas and knowledge of a person and proposed that grades clearly depict the performance of a student. Hence, their academic performance must be managed efficiently keeping in view all the factors that can positively or negatively affect their educational performance. Use of technology such as internet is one of the most important factors that can influence educational performance of students positively or adversely. Shah et al. (2001) proposed that student users are affected by the internet and this impact is determined by the type of internet usage. They are positively affected by the informative use of internet while having drastic impact of recreational use of internet on them. Also, Oskouei (2010) proposed that internet is advantageous to both students and teachers if used as a tool of knowledge creation and dissemination.

Several studies have been done regarding social networking and grades. Whittemore School of Business and Economics recently conducted a survey of over 1,000 students. They asked questions regarding which social network sites were used, how much time they spent on a site, what their grade point average (GPA) was, and

what they were going to school for. It was concluded that there is no correlation between how much time is spent on a social networking site and grades (Martin, 2009).

The University of New Hampshire agrees, and believes that current college students grew up in the technology era and social networking is now just a part of a student's daily routine. Their research show that '63% of heavy users received high grades, compared to 65% of light users' (U of NH, 2009). The University of New Hampshire said that a majority of students use social networking for social connections and entertainment, but are also using it for education and professional reasons.

Kirschnera revealed that students who multi-task between social networking sites and homework are likely to have 20% lower grades than a student who does not have a social networking site in visual range. Kirschnera believes that even running a social networking site on the background on a student's PC while studying or doing homework could lower a student's grade. He believes that "the problem is that most people have Facebook or other social networking sites, their e-mails and maybe instant messaging constantly running in the background while they are carrying out their tasks" (Enriquez, 2010).

American Educational Research Association conducted a research and it was declared on its annual conference in San Diego, California (2009) that SNSs users study less and generated lower grades eventually (21stcenturyscholar.org). Similarly, Banquil et al. (2009) found a continuing drop of grades among student users of social networking sites. However, many researchers also found a positive association between use of internet and SNS and academic performance of the student users. Students, using internet frequently, scored higher on reading skills test and had higher grades as well (Linda et al., 2006).

An ever increasing growth rate of SNS not only calls for the parental and teacher monitoring of student users but also attracting the focus of academicians and researchers towards this phenomenon. Student's use of social networking continues to create challenges and issues for higher education professionals and keeping abreast of these challenges has proved difficult because of the speed at which new technologies are being introduced (Bugeja, 2006; Cariccioso, 2006; Finder, 2006; Quindlen, 2006; Shier, 2005).There is evidence that higher education institutions have taken initiatives in disclosing information about online social networking involvement to their students(Read et al., 2006). An example is Cornell University's "Thoughts on Facebook", which creates students awareness about the responsible use of online social networking (Mitrano, 2006). Following Cornell University, many institutions have adopted this approach to informing students by using anecdotal literature to guide their actions (Kord, 2008).

The study looks at Social networks in relation to its impact on academic needs. Social networks are studied with an educational context; they are part of a virtual learning environment. The classroom is shifting in time and space with e learning. The rampant use of social networks for learning purposes by students makes this study imperative. SNS are part of this virtual learning environment where the classroom is shifting in time and space.

3. Methodology and Procedure:

 The research conducted was Analytical Research and the data was collected with the help of a questionnaire in a cross sectional survey. After that a critical analysis was carried out of the collected facts and figures.

3.1. Population

The target population for the study was the college students, of bachelors program, of Nizwa College of Applied Sciences, Oman.

3.2. Sample

Sample of the study was composed of 100 participants and the sample was chosen using Purposive Sampling Technique in which the researcher selects a particular group or category from the population to constitute the sample because this category is considered to mirror the whole with reference to the characteristic in question(Kumari, 2008).

3.3. Variables

In this Research, following variables were selected.

- Social Networking Sites as Independent Variable.
- Students as Dependent Variable.

In this research, Uses and gratification theory was used to check how the students use social networking sites to fulfill specific gratification as this theory assumes that members of the audience are not passive but take an active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives. The theory also holds that audiences are responsible for choosing media to meet their needs. The approach suggests that people use the media to fulfill specific gratifications. This theory would then imply that the media compete against other information sources for viewers' gratification. (Katz et al., 1974)

3.4. The Objectives of the Study are:

- To discover how the students of CAS, Nizwa are using the social networking sites?
- To determine how the social networking sites can be used as a platform for educational learning for CAS students?
- Study the uses and gratifications drawn from social media and its effects of learning.

3.5. Scope of the Study

Omani people are exposed to various kinds of Social Networking Sites on the internet and this study will help how the Social Networking Sites can be improved to be used as a platform for educational learning for CAS students in Oman.

3.6. The Hypotheses for the Research conducted is: SNS are useful platform for students learning and academic performance.

4. Findings and Discussion:

To explore the relationship between social networks and impact on students' academic performance, we chose a sample of 100 students who were in the age bracket of 18 to 25 years. The students were chosen from the undergraduate program offered in the college.

Gender	Percentage
Male	40%
Female	60%

__Table 1:Gender distribution of Respondents__

Students have internet access in the college and their hostels. The conventional model of studying for these students is classroom instruction. While the institution facilitates education through educational networks within the college like Blackboard, the students are well exposed to online social networks.

4.1. Relationship between Social Network Variables and Students Academic Performance:

To study the relationship between use of social networks and students academic performance, we selected variables that can identify uses and gratification that the students draw from social networks. These variables show effects of social networks on students' academic performance and the futuristic online and offline paradigms that can enhance teaching methodology.

4.2. Uses of Social Networks

From a sample of 100 students we found that all the students used one or the other social networking site. The social networking sites that students used for academic purposes included YouTube, Google plus and Face book. Google Plus was used as much as Face book. Twitter was the least used of all the websites.

Fig1: Social Networks Used by Respondents
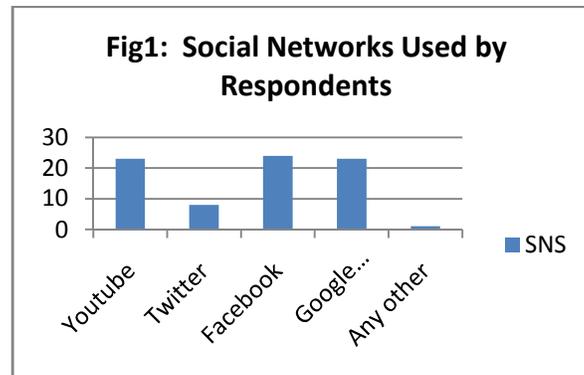
Any other SNS included Al Sabla, AL Omania and Hotmail messenger.

The respondents found Facebook and Google+ easier to use. On an average they had at least 30 to 70 friends (see Fig 2). 56% students did not have more friends online than in real life. 44% students had more friends online than in real life. Most students added that their real life friends were their online friends; while most of them had friends who were from school, college or family.

Fig 2: Friends: Real vs Virtual
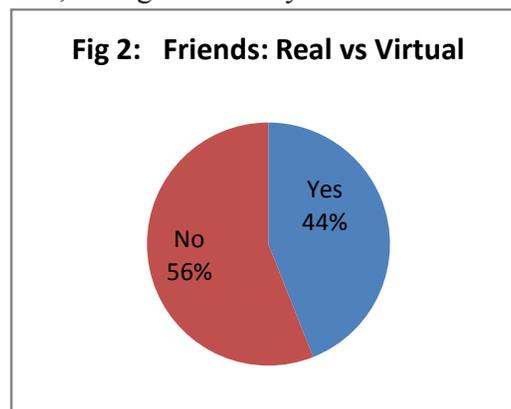
They also had friends abroad and from neighboring GCC countries. This shows the pattern of friendships on SNS which comprised more of people who were part of their daily social circle in real life. Social networks gave a sense of belonging to a student community.

**4.3. Use of Social Networks on Mobile Phones:**

80 percent students reported that they used a social networking site on phone. This increased the approachability and flexibility of being in touch. Smart features available on social networks like reading RSS feeds, location tagging and status updates were popular uses of social network on mobile phone. These were not directly related to education(Fig 3).

Fig3:   Use of SNS on Mobile phone by Respondents

■ Yes
■ No
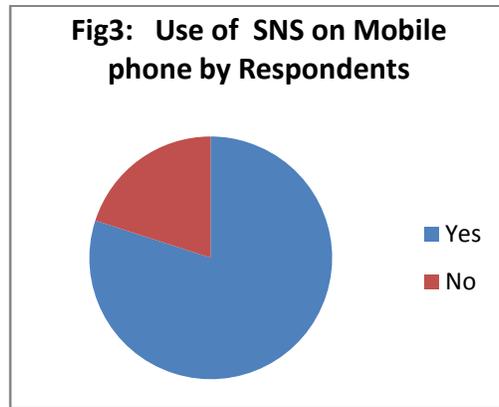
4.4. Time Spent on Social Networking Sites:

The respondents reported the number of hours they spent on social networks per day. 10% spent half hour, 35% spent two hours per day and 25% spent more than two hours. They were no respondents who spent zero hours on the social networks. The consumption levels for two hours are the highest (see Fig 4).

Fig 4:   Time Spent on SNS by Respondents

— Time Spent on SNS

30 Mins   1 Hr   2 Hr   More than 2 Hr
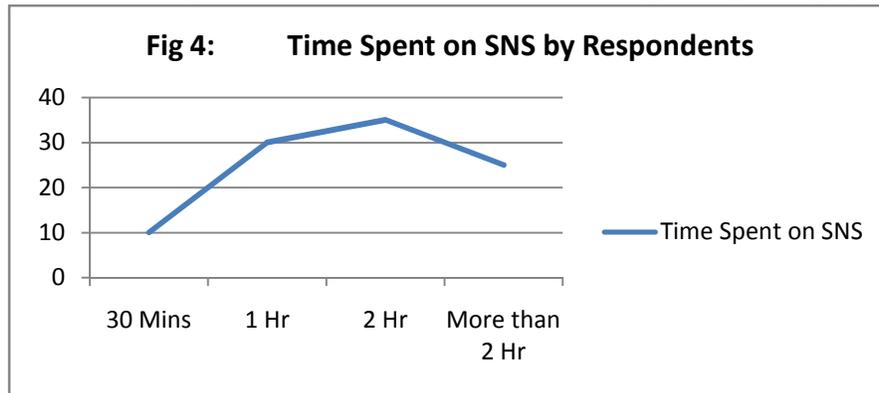
The number of social networks used by the students also varied.10% used only one social network, 42% used two , 26% used three, and 22% used more than social networks. The popularity of SNS cannot be ignored with 42 % using at least two social network (Fig 5).

Fig 5:   Number of SNS Used by Respondents

1
10%

More than 3
22%

2
42%

3
26%
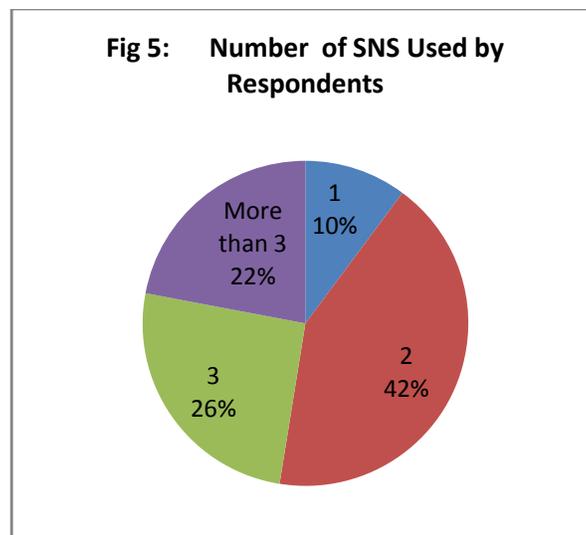
4.5. Uses of Social Networking Sites:

The next variable in this assessment was the purposes for which the students used social network sites. The students were able to point out the different purposes for which they used the SNS. In Table 2 we see that the highest score of 60 % is for downloading music and videos. 8 % used is for posting photos, 40 % used it for chatting.

Purposes	% of Respondents
Downloading music \ video	60 %
Uploading music \ video	6 %
Posting photos	18 %
Chatting	40 %
Blogging	8 %
Creating polls/quizzes or surveys	8 %
Submitting articles to website	14%
Communication with teachers/ class fellows	14%
Any other	18%

Table 2: Percentage of Usage of SNS by Respondents

Downloading music and videos were not only educational but consisted of several genres. The highest score revealed that the students used it for chatting. Downloading music/videos, posting photos and chatting can be categorized as entertainment use.

Educational activities like publishing articles, participating in quizzes/poll, communicating with teachers comprised of a lesser score. Only 6 % used SNS for uploading videos. 8 % for creating quizzes/poll 8 % for blogging, 14 % for submitting articles, 14 % communication with teachers. This reflects that SNS were used by students for entertainment mostly and less for educational purposes.

While most students used social networks for entertainment purposes, 72 % agreed that they used to social networks while working on classroom assignments (Fig 6). 28 % do not use any social network for completing assignments. This high score indicates that students find social networks helpful in getting guidance and information related to their subject.

Fig.6:   SNS Used for Assignments by Respondents
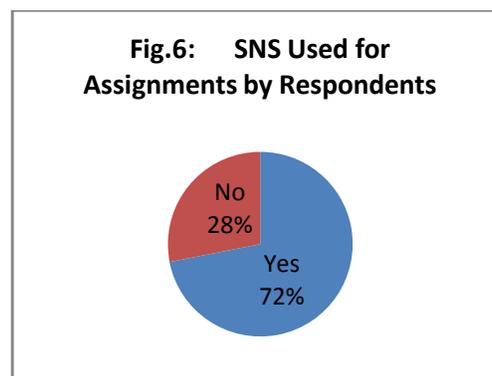
4.6. Community \ Groups \Sharing:

Nearly all respondents were members of a community or a group on social networks. The kind of communities they joined was for educational, entertainment, information and for any other uses. 22 % used SNS for educational purposes, 38 % for entertainment, 48 % for Information and 18 % for any other use.

The maximum groups and communities joined by students were for information and awareness purposes. The students chose groups that were related to their discipline and joined educational communities with which they shared common interests (Fig 7).

**Fig 7: Communities Joined by Respondents**
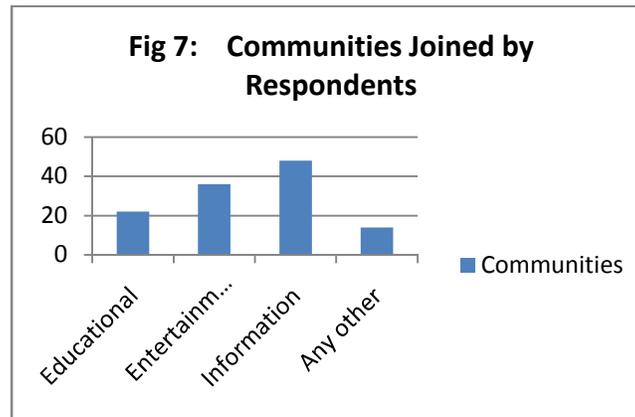
It is increasingly becoming common for universities and educational institutions to use private or personal communities for student learning. Universities and academic institutions have realized this potential. The Yes WE Care campaign by communication students at CAS Nizwa was successful in contacting students and kindling their interest in the campaign. The Campaign was a public relations project by communications students, which became popular through the online social network, Facebook. The social network proactively engaged the students. This reflects the benefit of forming groups and communities within an academic set up for undergraduate education. Communities and sharing forums encouraged students to exchange ideas and learning experiences.

Students also used the groups to search for job and career opportunities related to media. 80 % found these networks useful in exploring available job, internships and training opportunities. 20 % did not use them for career related information (Fig 8).

Fig 8: Browsing of Information related to Studies/Career by Respondents
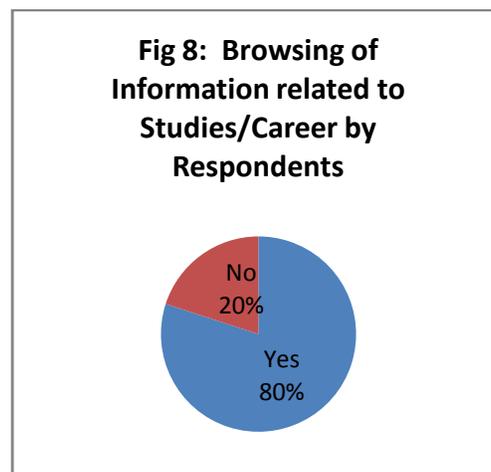
The variable of self expression offers an insight into Self-efficacy – 'the measure of one's own competence to complete tasks and reach goals' (Bandura, 1997). 72 % preferred to share their feelings while 28 % were reserved in their attitude. Their self expression can be related to habits and interactions that contribute to attainment of goals. Having access to a student focused community helps them to reach out to other students. They used SNS to overcome shy attitudes and express their feelings and ideas openly (Fig 9).

Fig 9:   Ideas/feelings expressed by Respondents on SNS

No 28%

Yes 72%
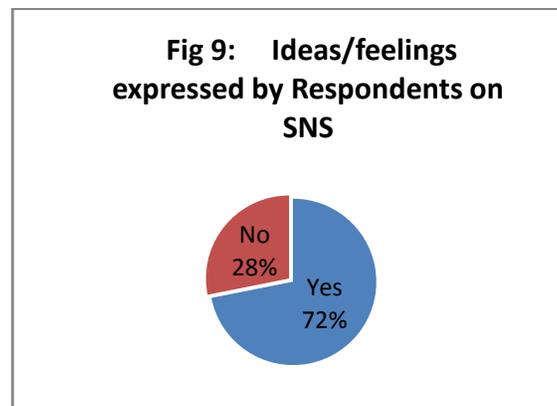
Students who are shy to talk in class, or address concerns voiced them in a message, status or a discussion. Self expression through online networks was found to have a relative effect on their academic performance as 72 % preferred to express their feelings on SNS. They weigh their opinions in the light of comments received from their friends and instructors and this expels the dilemmas they may have regarding any academic concern. While 28 % felt hesitant to express feelings on SNS.

4.7. SNS Affect Language, Study Habits And Study Timings?

58 % agreed to a change in their linguistic habits while 42 % disagreed to any difference in their vocabulary or style of discourse. The students spoke Arabic as their first language and English as a second language. 45 % preferred to use a formal style of language, 34 % used casual day to day language, and 24 % used slang (Fig 10).

Fig 10:   Language Use on SNS by Respondents

60
40
20
0

Formal   Informal   Slang

■ Series 1
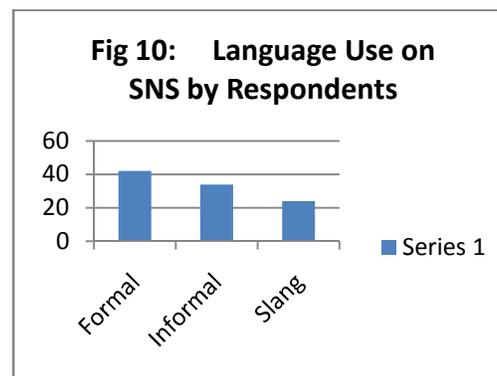
They added comments to the questionnaire and expressed that they used Arabic more than English.   They gave a list of short forms they used to save writing time. They were some new English and Arabic words that they had picked from chats and discussions on social networks. They had learnt to shorten spellings of words while messaging and chatting in both Arabic and English.

Table 3 and 4 below lists categories of English and Arabic short forms, slangs and new words used while chatting and texting on social networks. New English words and popular English short forms were common for communicating on SNS. Chatting allowed second language English speakers to develop confidence in speaking a foreign language. It gave them time to think and type in the foreign language.

| **English -** Short forms learnt through SNS	**English -** New words learnt through SNS
brb – Be right back	Dropped down
Yup – Yes	Slept
ha-ha	Carry on / go on
Sis	I would like to have a cup of tea
Bro	Mustard
Oops!	Grill
GTG (Gotta go\I have to go)	Shaker
ROFL - Rolling on floor laughing	
See you later	
OTP (On the phone)	
Loool (Lots of laughter)	

Table 3: Words learnt through SNS by Respondents

Arabic – Commonly used words on SNS	**Arabic** – Slang words used on SNS	**Arabic** version of English shorthand forms
يرجع (return) يمشي (walk) تفضل (welcome) اذهب (go)	ليهكده (why this) تحفه (beautiful) كويس (good)	برب (brb) اوبس (oops) همممم (hmmm) تيت (Tyt-take your time) اتيل (TTyl-Talk to you later)

Table 4: Words used by Respondents on SNS

Reports on the impact of short form texting and language on students' English language skills, especially on reading and writing, began to appear in the early 2000s. The findings of these studies assert that the use of textisms (using number combinations such as 2morrow) shorthand forms lead to less proficiency in English while well known linguists " like David Crystal believe that students tend to write and edit more than ever before as a result of texting. Its increased use enhances rather than harms the literacy of its users." An observation drawn after checking students assignments is that students were conscious of where to use social network jargon and they did not use it in asynchronous communication (blogs, email). Slangs and shorthand was used mostly in synchronous communication e.g. chatting and texting. (Tripping up with txting!, 2012).

 59 % students agreed that they noticed a change in their study habits, 35 % disagreed that it had brought any change in their study patterns (Fig11) These study habits on further discussion revealed that they were not only related to time spent online but the multi tasking factor. Students simultaneously used social network as well as studied from course material. Their study habits had a component of online and offline reading.

Fig 11: Percentage of Respondents habits changed by SNS

Any other 6%

No 35%

Yes 59%
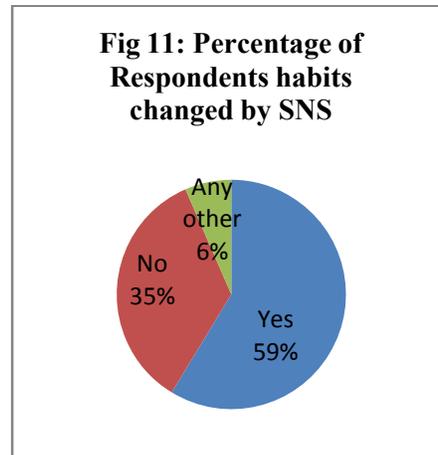
64 % denied that it affected their study timings while 36 % felt that it had distracted them and had affected the timings of study (Fig 12).

Fig 12:   Respondents Study timings affected by SNS

Yes 36%

No 64%
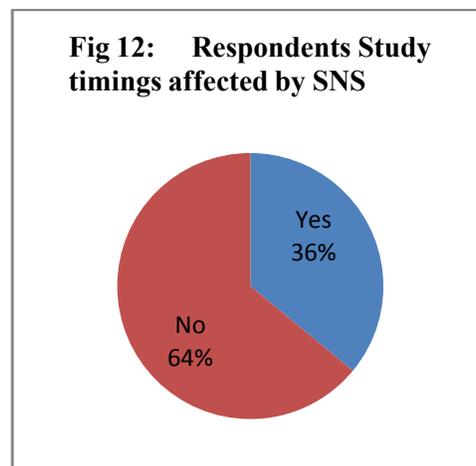
4.8. Social networks and E learning:

72 % students agreed that Social networks were an effective e-learning tool. 28 % denied that social networks could function as e-learning tools. 72 % who were in favor felt that e-learning saved time (Fig13).

Fig 13:   SNS an Effective e-learning tool

No 28%

Yes 72%
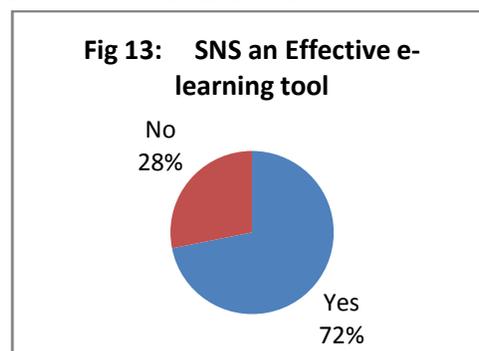
The students who supported the use of social networking as an e-learning tool gave suggestions of how the SNS could be used to help them; which are as follows:

- Special social networks for understanding assignments.
- Download supporting information in images on SNS to help with assignment
- Students should be able to exchange information and experiences with teachers

- Form specific groups related to each major (Public Relations, Journalism, Digital Media)
- Special pages where teachers can upload material related to specific topics that students can read while using SNS.
- Forum where students can clear doubts
- Online trouble shooting for practical projects

4.9. Face to face and virtual models of instruction:

Fig 14:   SNS - More effective than classroom teaching

Yes 28%

No 72%

28 % students agreed with social networks as being more effective than classroom teaching while 72 % disagreed. 72 % students felt that classroom teaching could not be replaced by social networks. This can be understood as the social netw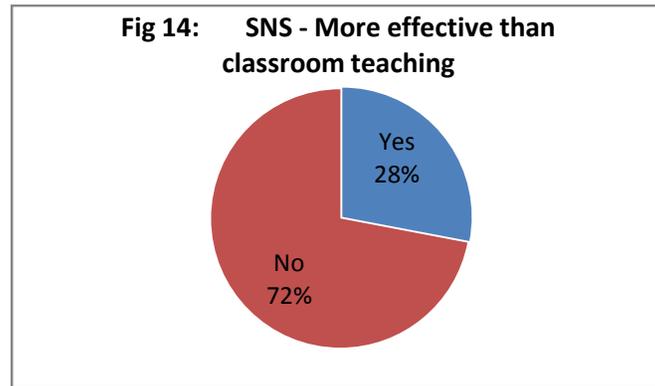orks are not yet prevalent medium of education in the College of Applied Sciences. While universities and educational institutions have already started using Facebook in the classrooms, yet the technique has not yet been used in the colleges.

5. Conclusion:

The students, on a whole, gave a more scoring response to using online networks to write their class assignments and inclusion of college related student focused groups and social networks. The observations drawn from empirical data shows that students have started using social networks for academic purposes. While some students perceived SNS as a distraction and were hesitant to share their feelings, a high percentage of respondents found it an avenue to search for information, join educational networks and look for career opportunities. The use of SNS gave them a sense of belonging to an academic community, as their online friends were mostly those who they met in college. Two step flow interactions, student to student and teacher to student favored academic learning through social networks. While the application of social networks in classroom teaching has been implemented yet CAS Nizwa has applied this technique only once during the YES WE CARE campaign. The beneficial results of this campaign and the uses and gratifications highlighted in this study, shows social networks as a significant influence in the academic performance of students. Yet the use of these networks has to be disciplined as it can lead to distraction from education. The research also concludes that a large section of students capitalize on the importance of human classroom face to face instruction, the social networks used for educational / tutoring should be able to apply these principles in a virtual classroom. Technical factors like low speeds, poor network connectivity may impede this process on a social networking site and may cause gaps in communication. According to the responses it can be concluded that social networks if designed and tailored to the specific educational needs of each student, related to each major in communication, SNS can be a useful instrument in improving academic performance of undergraduate students in CAS, Nizwa, Oman.

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7. Appendix

7.1. Questionnaire:

(The survey is being conducted for the research regarding "Effect of Social Networking Sites on the Academic performance of Students in CAS Nizwa." Your participation will greatly help to obtain the results…)

Name: --

Gender:

Male	Female

Age:

What Social media sites do you use?

Youtube   Twitter   Facebook   Google+   Anyother

How many social networking sites do you use?

1   2   3   more than 3

How much time do you spend on social media sites?

30min   1 hour   2 hours   more than 2 hours

Do you use social networking sites through your mobile phone?

Yes   No

You use social media primarily for?

Dowloading music/video   Uploading music/video   Posting photos

Blogging   Creating polls/quizzes or surveys   Chatting

Submitting articles to website   Communication with teachers/class fellows

Anyother

Do you think social media sites are changing your habits in anyway?

Yes   No   Anyother

Do you think social media sites improve your knowledge about a product, service or organization?

Yes   No

Do you have more friends on social networking sites as compared to real life?

Yes   No

Do you prefer to express your ideas and feelings on social networking sites?

Yes   No

Do you think social networking sites are affecting the way you speak or write in your everyday life?

Yes   No

What kind of language do you prefer to use while surfing on social networking sites?

Formal   Informal   Slang

Do you think social networking sites affect your study timings?
    Yes   No

Do you think social networking sites can be an effective tool for e-learning?
    Yes   No

Do you think social networking sites are more effective in communicating with your teachers than in actual class?
    Yes   No

Do you think social networking sites help you with your home work?
    Yes   No

What kind of communities to do you subscribe to on social networking sites?
Educational   Entertainment   Informational   Any other

Do you ever find any information regarding your career or academic interests on social networking sites?
    Yes   No

Do you think social networking sites can be improved in any way as a tool for learning?

                                                      Thank you for your cooperation...