# Social Network: Academic and Social Impact on College Students

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*Abstract* – **Social network sites have spread widely all over the world and are used by various users for several reasons and purposes. Different studies were made on social networks and their effects; however, very little practical evidence is available regarding the effect of using social networks on college students' academic performance and social engagement. This paper addresses the effect of using social networks, eg. Facebook and Twitter on students' engagement in both academic and social aspects.**

## I.  INTRODUCTION

Online Social networks have gained a tremendous popularity among people all around the world, especially college

The purpose of this research is to investigate if there is any correlation between using online social networks and the academic performance of college students and to find out the ways in which social sites can enhance the students' academic performance. Moreover, we aim to discover how social networks help college students get engaged in their social life.

Our main research questions include:
- Does spending time on social sites affect the GPA?
- Can social sites enhance academic performance?
- Can social sites improve our social life?

The sample size of this research was limited to include only the freshman male students of the Petroleum Institute. The female component was excluded from our research due to the society traditions and cultural reasons. Moreover, only common social sites (Facebook and Twitter) were included in our research due to the lack of time.

## II.  LITERATURE REVIEW

Research about social networking sites shows that these sites are used in two different aspects, socially and academically. According to [1], social networking sites, Facebook for instance, are the ones that affect users regarding online and offline activities. When students use Facebook to chat and interact with each other they also

students. As students lead nomadic lives, they have considered these networks as beneficial tools for social gatherings. When students transit from high school to their first year of college, a new pivotal phase of their lives starts. Consequently, they have to encounter socializing with new people, getting engaged and involved in their new society and adapting to new educational means. Therefore, social networks play a major role in building, maintaining or even reviving relationships and improving students' learning skills. For instance, some students have looked at self-presentation within these networks, while others have looked at 'friending' and 'grouping' behavior [3]. In this research we focused mainly on two variables: the academic and the social impacts of social networks usage on college students.

develop their offline relationships. Offline relations are basically those created by online activities and the influences of those relations on students' social behavior and academic performance. Additionally, [1] and [2] show that social networks have been integrated into students' daily lives to help them maintain their pre-existing close relationships, keep in touch with their colleagues and acquaintances through communication and social gatherings tools and enhance their studying performance. Moreover, [3] states that social sites can be accessed more often and easily using smart devices.

*Facebook academically and socially*

[1] States that, the itinerant lifestyle that students live nowadays makes them face many challenges when it comes to separating between their schoolwork and their social daily life. Data resulted from [1] implies that Facebook is used not only to socialize with people, but also to help first-year students overcome their shyness factor. Some of the students may feel shy when it is related to making new friendships. However, by using Facebook 'event tool', students can arrange meetings in order to get in touch with each other even more or keep light relationships with their mates. On the contrary, [1] shows that some of those less extroverted students may feel "a bit creepy" to show up at one of these meetings. According to [1], one of the students

said that she would feel awkward going and not knowing anyone.

*Twitter as an enhancing educational tool*

According to [2], though Facebook is the most popular social networking site in the US, the authors decided to use Twitter since it is both practical for a continuing dialogue; because it is just 140 characters per post. Article [2] shows that students can utilize social networks (for e.g. Twitter) to develop their educational performance. Students have had extended and richer discussions on Twitter more than in class. Moreover, they felt more comfortable asking questions on Twitter which assisted them avoiding their shyness factor. Furthermore, they were able to express their concerns about upcoming major tests. As a result, they were capable of organizing study groups.

*Accessing social networks via smartphones*

Social networking sites users looked for ways to stay in touch with their accounts on these sites. As a result, they were able to adopt smartphones as a new technology to communicate with their families and friends easily. Researchers tried to come up with findings by several ways; they tried to make questionnaires through websites, and through universities to know the connection between time spent exploring websites through smartphones and the grades they got. According to [3], researchers found out through their questionnaire that smartphone users could spend more time accessing social tools compared to those who do not. Moreover, they found out that the connection between the amounts of time spent browsing such websites and the grades the students got, is expected to have a negative impact on their grades.

After the review of all articles, we concluded that social sites affect college students' educational performance and social lives. It is unclear whether these social sites affect students' learning performance positively or negatively. Furthermore, social sites facilitate the social live of college students. To conclude, it is an interesting topic for us to find out more about social sites and clarify their effects on students here at the PI.

### III.     METHODOLOGY

In order to answer our research questions, we used a survey as the main data gathering instrument. The survey was used to collect quantitative data to determine the extent and frequency of the perceived issue. To collect qualitative data that focused on giving us explanations of the issues, we used our own observations and experience of the issue and made use of the literature review. The survey was piloted on some students to get feedback which was used to improve it.

The survey was directed to freshman male students in the Petroleum Institute excluding females' section due to cultural and traditional reasons. A total of 30 students answered 30 surveys after being distributed to them during 8 o'clock class, after taking permission from their instructors.

Our survey consisted of 2 main sections. Section one which dealt with the effect of using social networks on students' academic life and section two which dealt with the effect of using social networks on students' social life. We focused in our style of questions on Yes/No and Likert scale technique, in order to get more specified, reliable and related answers. Two members of our team were responsible for explaining any doubts the students had while filling the survey.

Two members of our team were assigned to the task of converting the collected surveys into an excel spread sheet that contained all of the data of the survey in a way that would be easy to read and analyze. Then the two remaining members were assigned to the task of analyzing the survey data. The analysis methodology was to categorize answers of each question into positive, neutral and negative answers. For example, in the academic section, answers to questions like "Do you think online groups can be used as academic study groups?" with either "Strongly disagree" or "disagree" were considered to be negative, while answers with "Do not know" were considered to be neutral and answers with "Agree" and "strongly agree" were considered to be positive.

### IV.     RESULTS

To have a better understanding of all the responses we have received, we converted raw data into numerical results and presented them in tables and charts. These results are illustrated below. Through the survey we were aiming to find out if there is any correlation between the respondents' academic performance and their use of social networks. Thus, the respondents were required to answer some questions about their midterm GPA and the time they spend using social sites. An interesting finding shown in Fig. 1 is that the students with high GPAs spend more time using social networks, while students with low GPA spend less time.
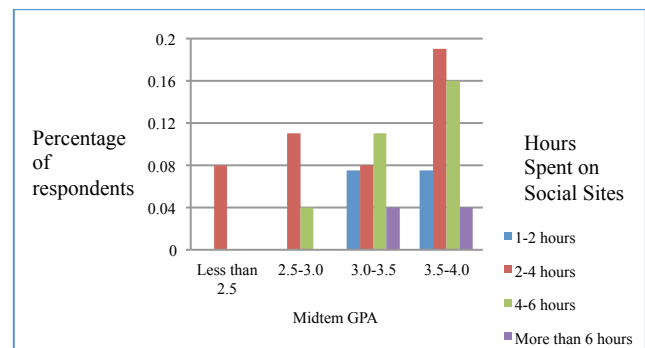


Fig. 1: Midterm GPA vs. Hours spent on social sites.

Our second objective was to know how often the respondents use social networks for academically related purposes. As shown in Fig. 2, more than two-thirds of the respondents do not share information about lectures and homework, and further, more than half of the respondents do not even look for college related information through social networks.
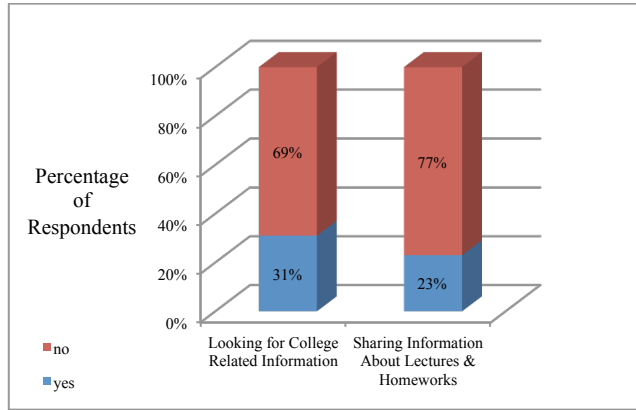


Fig. 2: Using social sites to look for and share information.

Moreover, we aimed to figure out if the respondents think that the use of online social groups could enhance their academic performance. Amazingly, as Fig. 3 indicates, a high percentage of the respondents -about 81%-encourage the idea of having debates and discussions over social sites. There are also about 73% of them who think that online groups can be used as academic study groups.
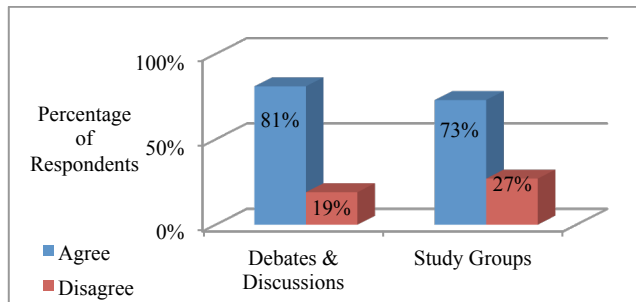


Fig. 3: Respondents' opinion about online debates and study groups

Along with the academic purposes, we focused on the social roles that social networks play. Therefore, respondents were asked to choose the three most important socially related reasons for using social sites. Fig. 4 illustrates that almost all respondents, with a percentage of 92%, use social networks to communicate with people, while 85%of them use these networks to find their old primary school friends. Expressing the ideas through a group and meeting new friends came next with percentages of 73% and 64% respectively
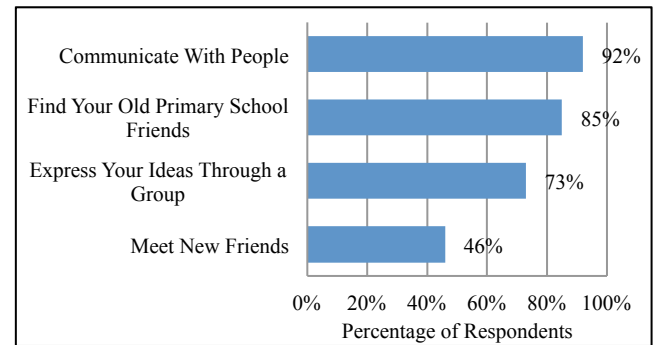


Fig. 4: The most common social purposes of using social networks

Finally, Fig. 5 illustrates that the vast majority of the respondents uses social sites for social purposes, while only 18% of them use these sites academically.
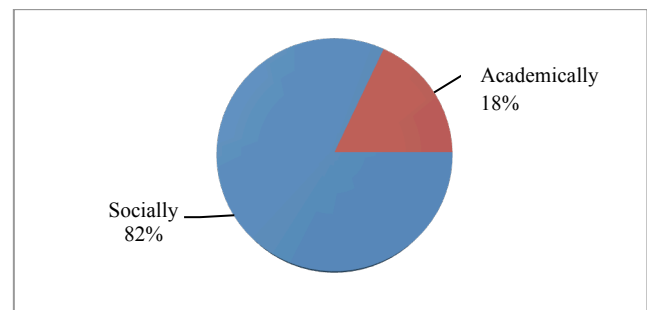


Fig. 5: Comparison between the uses of social networks

## V.    DISCUSSION

In this discussion we are going to investigate and highlight several results we obtained from our survey that are crucial to answer our main research questions and to study the use of social networking sites in the Petroleum Institute. First, we point out that a high percentage of students at the PI who spend many hours using social networks have high GPAs. A second finding was that a bulk of students does not use social sites to look for college-related information; neither have they used these sites to share information about their lectures and homework. However, a significant number of students encourage having online discussions with their colleagues and believe that online study groups can improve their study skills. A final result was that students are using social networks for social purposes more than the academic ones.

We predicted that students who spent more time on social sites would have low GPAs. To our surprise, as shown in Fig. 1, students with high GPAs spend more time on social sites. We think this might be due to good time management. Additionally interviewed students, said that they found social sites as stress relievers. After spending some time studying, they break the routine exploring social sites. On one hand, these students knew how to manage their time and divide it equally between entertainment and studying. On the other hand, students with low GPAs could not

manage their time and so they spent less time on social sites.

Fig. 2 indicates that most students in the PI do not use online social networks to find college-related information or to share information about homework and lectures. A possible reason for why students do not look for college-related information via social networks is the students' tendency to use online search engines to look for any piece of information including the college related ones, as they provide various and readily available information that can be accessed easily. A possible reason for why PI students do not share information about lectures and homework on social networks could be that it is somehow difficult to share information about courses that require specific mathematical steps like calculus and physics, so they prefer other means to share such information like face-to-face meetings. Moreover, students probably do not use social networks for academically related purposes because they think of these networks as entertainment networks and suitable places to release stress and forget about studying through chatting with friends and sharing photos.

On the other hand, according to Fig. 3, a surprising finding was that the majority of the respondents agreed with the idea of having debates and discussions over social sites, and for most of the respondents, using online groups academically is thought as an advantage when it comes to enhancing their academic performance. [1] Also supports the idea that these online groups provide students with accessibility to more education-related information. However, perhaps the most important academic reason behind using these online groups is that they ease the process of social gathering. Thus, students thought that seminars and study groups can be organized more easily online rather than asking everyone to meet at one place. Regarding the acceptance that online debates and discussions have got; it could be that these social networks make sharing ideas easier to those who do not prefer the face-to-face discussions.

Through Fig. 4, we can conclude that the main reason for using social network sites is to communicate with other people. A possible reason behind this could be that the human being is social by his nature and likes to get in touch with other people. However, students nowadays are engaged in their academic lives. Moreover, face to face meetings have become difficult due to several reasons such as the lack of time for doing such meetings. As a result, they resort to social networking sites as an outlet of this life. Fig. 4 also shows that meeting new friends is the least common reason for using social sites; this might be because most of students do not like to share their own information with people that they have not met before. Moreover, according to [3], two-thirds of Facebook users have multiple accounts and use them for inappropriate purposes like hacking and spying on others' personal information. Therefore, many students tend not to meet new people on social networks. Another reason

is that students may think of adding new people and making new relations through Facebook a weird action, while few others may think of it as a normal action. These students who like to make online relations may be trying to overcome their shyness factor [2].

To conclude, Fig. 5 shows that most of the PI students use social sites to socialize and interact with people. This might be a result of many things in students' social life. It could be to break away from the pressure caused by the routine of studying. Additionally, it also might be caused by the lack of daily interaction with the opposite sex which is a major part of college life. However, these students supported the idea of using social sites academically. They thought that online groups can be used as study groups to share information, discuss and interact with each other. This proved to be a successful experience according to [2].

Finally, throughout this discussion we aim to suggest some recommendations that can facilitate integrating social networks into students' lives. We anticipate that our recommendations will help enhancing the academic and social life of college students through social sites.

## VI.    CONCLUSION

From the research we conducted we were able to give an insight into the academic and social issues that college students encounter when using social networks. Our findings show that there is a correlation between the students GPAs and their usage of social networks. An interesting finding was that many of our respondents do not use social sites to look for college-related information; however, many of them encourage the idea of having online study groups. Another finding showed that the students tend to use social networks for social purposes more than the academic ones.

Due to traditional and cultural reasons, it was difficult to include the female component in our research. Also, we believe that broadening our sample size to include freshman students of other universities in the UAE would help us gather more reliable results and more specific answers for our research questions. Thus, since we lacked the sufficient time and our resources were limited, we had to limit the research scope to include only the male freshman students in the Petroleum Institute. The research conducted in this paper gave us a somehow better understanding of how social networks affect the students' life. In conclusion, throughout this research, we do not actually aim to solve a problem, but rather we aim to demonstrate the importance of social networks to college students, so that the stakeholders take our recommendations into consideration.

## VII.    RECOMMENDATIONS
- We recommend that instructors encourage students on using social sites academically (for e.g. online discussion assignment through Twitter as in [2]).

- We also think that instructors should persuade freshman students to communicate with them using social sites if they are too shy to ask and get involved in the class (used in [2]).
- Our team also supports the idea of creating an online social group for elder students to share experience and help freshman students.
- We also propose that students can associate their accounts on social sites with Blackboard and can know more about their assignments by just accessing their accounts on social sites.
- Our team urges freshman students to use social sites to break the routine of studying and as stress relievers.

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