Investigating Faculty Decisions to Adopt Social Networking Sites (SNSs): The Case of Sultan Qaboos University in Oman

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Abstract
The emergence of Web 2.0 and its associated technologies enables academics to operate more effectively, providing greater opportunities and helping them to achieve more goals in the education sector. Academics create knowledge and participate in Web2.0 by posting different content, allowing them to share information with each other. This study aims to address the reasons behind usage of SNSs at universities, and then pinpoint the activities that academics practice on SNSs in order to support teaching and learning. We will then explore the most popular SNSs. The study uses an online questionnaire related to the usage of SNSs by academics at the college of Art and Social Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). The questionnaire was developed using Google docs and distributed to all faculty members at the College of Arts and Social Sciences. The main findings of this study are that 57% of academics are aware of SNS usage; 43% are not. Insufficient time and IT skills were the main reasons given for not using SNSs. Finding information and communicating with old friends were the main reasons for using them. Academics’ main SNS activities were gathering information from various sources and gaining new knowledge. Facebook, Google groups and Twitter were the most popular SNSs used. The study focused exclusively on academics at the College of Art & Social Sciences, which is considered a small community. A larger sample would possibly yield different results. The study was not intended as a comparative analysis between departments, rather it addressed specific questions. The statements regarding reasons for using/not using SNSs presented in this study are based on literature reviews and it should be noted that there may be other reasons that influence the use of SNSs. This research is vitally important for the firms that control these sites: they can add value to improve the service for academics and provide them with the required facilities. Academics are expected to be more knowledgeable in order to train their students for future work. Therefore, it is important to explore their reasons for using/not using SNSs, along with the nature of their SNS activities, and then address several related issues.

Keywords: Social networks sites, Social networks, Knowledge management strategies, Website, Web2.0

Introduction
The development of Web 2.0 continues to change the way people work, learn, communicate and live. The power of information technology and communication, Internet and media, and other emergence technologies may therefore change the way academics interact with the Web. As knowledge workers, academics need to benefit from Web 2.0 applications and technologies. Many tools and technologies allow the academic community to do things more
effectively and achieve more goals in their field. Connecting, creating, collaborating with and challenging the academic community is central to academic use of Web 2.0 applications and technologies. Existing literature covers many of the tools and technologies – including social networking sites (SNSs) – that can be used to support academics in the professional sphere. SNSs now receive much attention from academics at information institutions, such as universities and colleges. They support increased collaboration between such institutions and support cross-functional communication.

People practice many activities on SNSs, depending on their nature and services. SNSs can be used for networking, study groups, sharing photos, posting portfolios and more. A study by Fuchs (2009) on the usage of Facebook and MySpace by students in Salzburg in the context of electronic surveillance shows that students use these sites for activities such as collecting and storing data, reusing and reselling personal data and distributing personalized advertising, maintaining existing friendships, and renewing old contacts. Academics may use SNSs for the same reasons and activities. Cassidy (2006) states that Facebook was the seventh most popular site on the World Wide Web in 2006. According to Facebook (2011), it has more than 750 million active users and 900 million objects with which people interact. People including academics might use this site for communication, entertainment and other purposes. These motives and activities need to be explored for several reasons:

- Understanding SNS use can support SNS the owners in providing services based on user needs.
- Knowledge of academics’ SNS activities can support colleges and universities in considering SNSs as a strategic tool in teaching and learning, and how they can be used to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- Exploring the ways that academics interact with SNSs enables us to understand the best social software that can be used in learning and teaching.

Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to identify academics’ reasons for using SNSs, their main SNS activities and to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are SNSs used by academics at the College of Art and Social Sciences at SQU?
2. Why do academics use/not use SNSs?
3. What are the main activities of academics on SNSs?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using SNSs from an academic point of view?
5. What are the most popular SNSs used by academics?

**Review of the Literature**

**What are Social Networking Sites (SNSs)?**

As many studies report the vital role of Web 2.0 in the education sector, some studies explore the tools and applications that can support learning and teaching. One of the Web 2.0 applications is social networking sites. The concept of SNSs has been discussed by a number of authors in different areas. They are described by some scholars as a type of virtual community (Dwyer, Hiltz, & Passerini, 2007). Boyd and Ellison (2007) define social networking sites as “web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within...
the system” (as cited in Gibson, 2010, p2). SNSs allow people to share user-created content (Won Kim, 2010, as cited in Rohani and Hock, 2010). SNSs are a group of Web sites that allow users to create an online profile and to share that profile with others (Barnes, 2006, as cited in Timm & Duven, 2008) and they are platform for communication by sharing information, photos, etc. (Livingstone, 2008). They represent a place where people can maintain their relationships and exchange information. SNSs offer many services for users, such as chatting, information sharing and posting different content. Users can contact a diversity of other users at the same time and communicate with friends without any barriers or boundaries. Moreover, users can share their ideas and express their feelings with other users from different cultures. SNSs have brought opportunities and chances for people who like to communicate and share information.

The study defined SNSs as a group of Web sites that provide people with the opportunity to create, share and exchange information via networks. Scholars and researchers have started to use these sites and benefit from their services. As such, SNSs are used widely among students, as reported in many studies.

In the next sections, the study investigates reasons for visiting the Internet, including SNSs. The study reviews research relating to the usage of SNSs within the context of teaching and learning.

**The Internet and Users’ Activities**

People use the Internet for many reasons. Some relate to personal learning, such as gathering information and seeking new knowledge in relevant fields. Others relate to their profession, such as finding new information and building knowledge databases.

A study by Sellem, Murphy and Show (2002) identifies different activities carried out by knowledge workers. These activities are:

- Finding: using the Web to find something specific, such as a phone number, spelling or product name.
- Information Gathering: using the Web to research a specific topic for reasons such as gathering information in order to compare results, making a selection, preparing for a future task, and seeking inspiration.
- Browsing: visiting sites with no specific goal, similar to browsing through a newspaper or magazine.
- Transacting: using the Web to execute a transaction, securing future products or services.
- Communicating: using the Web to participate in chat rooms or discussion groups.
- Housekeeping: using the Web to check or maintain the accuracy and functionality of Web resources.

Another study by Hyams and Sellen (2003) shows that knowledge workers gather information for specific current tasks, such as a children’s workshop, preparing a talk for a conference or getting ideas for a new computer game. The study indicated that knowledge workers use several methods to gather such information, for example:

1) Browsing and Reading: They gather information from other people and sources – such as magazines, books, and journals - to facilitate learning
2) Extracting: they "explicitly extracted pieces of information from the Web by copying and pasting into documents, saving whole documents as files, printing, bookmarking, archiving in email, making written notes or saving in personalized Web folders" (p.8)

3) Storing/Archiving: storing information within a personal space and URL

4) Re-use: this is relate to "reusability of the resulting collection of Web-derived information on gatherers’ desks, PCs and networks" (P.10)

A study by Kamba (2007) on use of the Internet as a tool for interactive learning, teaching and research in Nigeria shows that 40% of teachers make use of the Internet for interactive learning, while 50% use it purely for interactive research. Most used it to search for and retrieve information on entertainment, news and sports. None indicated that they used the Internet for interactive teaching. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) indicate that people use the Internet for several reasons, such as interpersonal utility, pastimes, entertainment, information seeking and convenience.

Motivations for using SNSs
SNs can be used in different ways for different reasons. For example, students use them to communicate with friends regarding school events (Subrahmanyam et al, 2008). Academics visit these sites for similar reasons, along with learning and knowledge flow. Many studies have reported on the motives for using SNSs and their potential academic application. An important study by Bolar (2009) concludes that there were seven motives for using SNSs. Motives include information-gathering and problem-solving. People, both academics and students, use these sites to find free, relevant information, solve problems through group discussion and seek ideas and advice when making decisions. Gibson (2010) identifies several student SNS activities, including posting messages and photos, downloading and uploading music and videos, updating personal websites or online profiles, blogging, participating in collaborative projects, creating and sharing virtual objects, creating new characters, submitting articles to websites, making suggestions and completing quizzes or surveys. Another study by DiMicco et. al. (2008) identifies three motives for social networking at work by employees: caring, campaigning and climbing. This can be described as follows:

- Caring: transferring content, such as lists of hobbies, outside interests, personal photos and other activities.
- Campaigning: transferring content, such as thoughts on professional topics, advice, goals, projects, campaigns, links and photos.
- Climbing: transferring content, such as lists of professional skills, experience, academic background and photos.

Previous studies have noted that people also use these sites for academic and research purposes, including information-sharing, problem-solving and decision-making in issues relating to their field. In summary, academics use SNSs to invite others to join groups in order to express creativity; interact professionally, share experience, knowledge, to discuss issues in teaching and research (Ezeani & Igwesi, 2012; Kalbande, Sonwane & Madanshingm 2012).

Using Social Networking Site for Teaching and Learning Purposes
SNSs play a key role in the university community. “SNSs promote social interaction between individuals, potentially supporting active learning, social learning, and student knowledge
construction within a student-centered, constructivist environment,” (Ferdig, 2007, as cited in Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011).

A very recent study conducted by Ahmad, Hussain and Aqil (2013) to investigate the use of Web 2.0 tools by Saudi's Private and Public Universities. The study revealed that all 22 universities out of 24 are using Web 2.0 tools such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+ and others. It is also revealed that the Kingdom's private universities have more consistency, with all eight having Facebook profiles and all Facebook profiles having standard user names. 22 of 24 Saudi Government Universities have Facebook profiles and 12 used standard user names. Authors concluded that the Facebook and Twitter are most popular web 2.0 tools among Saudi Universities.

Another study by Munoz and Towner (2009), which proposes using Facebook for educational purposes, explores the SNS usage rate among students and found they can support teaching in different ways. The study showed "a number of unique features that make SNSs amenable to educational pursuits. For example, Facebook is equipped with bulletin boards, instant messaging, email, and the ability to post videos and pictures" (P.4). The authors also found that Facebook helps teachers to connect with their students regarding courses, activities, assignments, useful links, upcoming events, and home exams.

Another study by Cain (2008) shows that SNSs allow students to connect with other students with similar interests, and build and maintain relationships with friends on campus. The study suggested that colleges should take appropriate steps to educate students about issues related to SNSs, such as privacy, safety, and personal reputations. Lockyer and Patterson (2008) shows that SNSs play an important role in enhancing formal learning. Some students experienced problems using SNSs such as Flickr, because of the time it took to learn how to use the site. The study suggested that university lecturers could play a considerable role in supporting students who are new to SNS technologies. Academics can encourage students to participate on SNSs by posting content and discussing issues related to their courses.

A similar study by Sandars and Schroter (2007) identifies the usage of SNSs by medical students and qualified medical practitioners, along with the difficulty of using SNSs for medical education. The study used an online questionnaire distributed among 3,000 medical students and 3,000 qualified medical practitioners. The study found that a lack of knowledge and skills were the main factors impeding students in using these new technologies in education, but all groups confirmed they were interested in using Web 2.0 technologies for educational purposes. Harrison and Thomas’s (2009) study on SNSs and language learning focuses on Livemocha as an example of an online community that allows collaboration between foreign language learners. The study found that SNSs allow active learning between members, and interaction between teachers and students. A study by Griffith and Liyanage (2008), using MySpace and Facebook as examples, finds that SNSs help students to create groups and interact with other educators. Another important study conducted by Al kindi and Saadat (2012) intended to address the factors motivating students at Shinas colleges of technology in Oman to use SNSs and to identify the factors that motivate them in using SNSs for educational purposes. The study found that the major reasons for frequent use of SNSs are finding information and sharing news. It also indicated that lack of experience as well as insufficient time and IT skills are effective factors of not using SNSs.

Some universities adapt existing SNS formats to create their own platforms for discussing learning and teaching ideas (Conole & Culver, 2010). A recent study by Park (2010)
conducted at Yonsei University in Seoul, South Korea, finds that academics were not active users because they were too busy. It also identified factors that influence the use of SNSs, including familiarity with information technologies, perception of the SNS, desire for expression, sensitivity to privacy, peer influences and the nature of using the internet. Another study by Estus (2010) evaluates the use of Facebook within a geriatric pharmacotherapy course and finds that Facebook could benefit teaching. For example, using Facebook allowed students to post topics, such as healthy ageing, and discuss them openly with their colleagues. Other academic activities on SNSs are information sharing (Murray, 2008; Oradini & Saunders, 2008), collaboratively socialising (Supe, 2008; Oradini & Saunders, 2008) and Content Generating (Virkus, 2008; Sandars & Schroter, 2007; Hargadon, 2008),

It can be concluded that academics engage in many activities on SNSs related to their teaching and learning. However, some of these activities can be used to enhance students’ learning. SNSs can be used in different areas and sectors. Academics can exploit these sites and use their services to support both teaching and learning. This study aims to explore the attitude of academics at SQU toward SNSs and to provide a clear map of their activities on such sites, and to determine the incentives for and barriers to use SNSs.

**Research Design**

**Objectives**

The main objectives of this research were to map academics’ motivates for visiting SNSs and to identify their main education-activities. The study also aimed to explore the advantages and disadvantages of using SNSs based on the view of academics. The study concluded by presenting the most popular SNSs used by academics at the College of Art and Social Sciences at SQU.

**Method**

In order to explore these motives and other related questions, the study used a questionnaire divided into several sections:

Academics’ reasons for using/not using SNSs and their SNS-related activities. The survey presented between nine and eleven statements based on the literature review and initial investigation. The result data was obtained under the ratings “Yes” and “No”, with academics able to select more than one option. The next section examined the advantages and disadvantages of using SNSs for educational purposes from the viewpoint of academics. The survey proposed forward seven advantages and six disadvantages and academics had to select one of the following options: “Agree,” “Disagree” or “Do not know.” The last section provided list of popular SNSs and academics were asked to identify the ones they were using at that time.

The authors used Google Docs to design an online questionnaire. It was initially distributed via email, but few responses were obtained. The researcher then redistributed the questionnaire manually to get a greater response and the data was later analysed using Google Docs.

**Participant Profile**

The study surveyed academics in eight departments: Arabic, English, History, Information Studies, Sociology and Social work, Geography, Mass Communication, Tourism, Music and Musicology, Archaeology and Theatre. There are 183 academics at the college. Of the total number of academics at the time when the survey is conducted, 35 were on study and
sabbatical leave, leaving a potential survey population of 145. The researchers distributed the survey by hand with the help of the coordinators of each department. It took two weeks to distribute all of the questionnaires. A total of 65 academics returned the questionnaire, which represented a response rate of 44.8%. a good level of response in survey research. Of these respondents, there were 51 males and 14 females.

![Gender Distribution](image1.png)

**Figure 1: Academics’ Gender**

The academic rank of participants is shown in the next diagram.

![Academic Rank](image2.png)

**Figure 2: academics academic rank**

The next table shows the number of participants within each department. It is worth noting that there were no participants from the Music and Musicology or Theatre departments, which have fewer staff and people were therefore too busy to take part.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Departments</th>
<th>No. of responders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information studies</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology and Social work</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass communication</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archaeology</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music and Musicology</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1 Number of Participants**
Most participants were from the departments of English and Information Studies and were very familiar with SNSs. Furthermore, the department of Information Studies offers courses related to this topic in both B.A and M.S programs.

Finding and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings of the research, including reasons for using/not using SNSs, the activities of academics, the advantages and disadvantages of SNSs from an academic viewpoint and the most popular SNSs used by academics.

Using Of SNSs among Academics

The study found that 57% of the academics used SNSs, whereas 43% did not (Fig. 3). Most of the respondents were aware of SNSs. Only 28 were not. The reasons are indicated in Table 2.

![Figure 3: Number of academics who use/do not use SNSs](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Time</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Information Technology skills</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not like to use them</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of experience</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do believe that they have nothing to do with teaching</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are a waste of time</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not have a trust on them</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do believe that they have nothing to do with learning</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows that insufficient time is the main reason for not using SNSs. This might be due to heavy workload, such as teaching hours and the number of students enrolled each year. According to the College of Arts & Social Sciences Annual Report (2008/2009), the number
of students who enrolled for the academic year 2008-2009 was around 34,156. Some academics were assigned additional teaching hours, which may account for the lack of time available to use SNSs. Some were engaged in research funded by SQU which kept them busy during the semester. Park (2010) also found that insufficient time was the main reason for not using SNSs: “Academics are busy researching and preparing for lectures.” (p. 425).

Lack of information technology skills were the second reason for not using SNSs, as shown in Table 2. To deal with SNSs, their services and applications, users require experience in using them. Some staff had been teaching for a long time and had insufficient training in computer and Internet use. Although SQU offers courses in IT and the Internet, many still use more traditional teaching methods.

Forty-three per cent of staff reported that they were not interested in using SNSs, while 39% lacked the necessary experience. Some used e-learning systems such as MOODLE (a software package designed for educational purpose such as developing course material, online research and communication) instead of SNSs and other Web 2.0 applications. Only 14% of academics believed SNSs have nothing to do with learning, but 79% did not consider this a reason for not using SNSs.

As shown in Figure 2, 37 academics used SNSs. The reasons are shown in the following table:

Table 1: Reasons for using SNS by academics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To find information</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To communicate with old friends</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To enrich teaching methods</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To share photos and documents with others</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To share videos and download software</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To communicate with academics</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To spend leisure time</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It costs nothing for both personal and business use</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To share news about university, college, academics, etc.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To look for new friends</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My colleagues recommended using them</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 3, finding information was the core objective (78%), a result similar to those indicated in the literature review. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) showed that people use the Internet to search for information. It can be expected that most academics might use...
these sites to find educational information. Seventy six percent of academics visit SNSs to communicate with old friends, many of whom were also professional educators.

Another reason for using SNSs is to enrich teaching methods (49%), as indicated in Table 3, suggesting academics are aware of their educational potential. Such tools have a pedagogical value: SNSs can be used to facilitate information sharing between academics and students. Other reasons for using SNSs are to share photos and documents, videos and download software – a finding consistent with many previous studies.

Only 14% of academics used SNSs because they were encouraged or invited to do so by friends.

**Academic Activities and Participation on SNSs**

The table below illustrates some of the activities of academics on SNSs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main activities</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. To gather information from other sources such as magazine, books, and journals</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To gain new knowledge on related fields</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To post topics related to my field</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. To share information with other academics</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. To communicate with others through chatting room and discussing groups</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. To get some advice from other members and make decision about such issues on related fields</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. To gather information from the academics</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. To contact students and academics</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. To publish my academic works</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. To post assignments and take-home exams for students (create professional page - only students can access it)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The main activity is gathering information from sources such as magazines, books and journals (74%). This is similar to results shown by Sellem, Murphy and Show (2002). Another activity is gaining new knowledge in related fields, as indicated in Table 4. Sixty nine percent of them visited SNSs to gain new knowledge by meeting other academics in the same field. In other words, academics tend to use SNSs for learning rather than simply for entertainment.
Only 34% of academics use SNSs to contact students and other academics, to publish their academic works and to post assignments and take-home exams for students. They use social networking sites less and have lower grades in these activities. This may be due to their use of other Web 2.0 applications or e-learning systems such as Moodle that are provided by Information Technology Centers at SQU for such purposes.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Using SNSs in Education

The highest percentage of academics (89%) believes that one of the main advantages of using SNSs is supporting and encouraging students to be active. Students who use SNSs and communicate with others may have high participation in class, but this is not a precondition. This issue needs to be addressed in future research. Another reason could be that these sites enable users to maintain relationships and communicate with many users, encouraging them to be more active. Thirty one out of 36 academics agreed that allowing students to keep in touch with their friends, classmates and relatives with different geographical locations helps students open their minds to different cultures, places and tools for learning: vital advantages of using SNSs. For example, students can create their own personalized space for information sharing, and discussing issues related to their assignment, subject and course, etc. Between 26 and 23 academics believed that the ability of users to contact a variety of other users at the same time as a way to promote student business, services, products, support and procure information on any subjects from anywhere was an advantage of SNSs. By contrast, 10 to 12 were unaware of such possibilities.

The following table presents the disadvantages of using SNSs in education from an academic point of view.
As shown in Table 6, only six academics out of 37 believed that SNSs are for entertainment rather than education.

Fifty-two percent of academics (half) believed that there was a relationship between using SNSs and Internet addiction, which they considered one of the disadvantages of SNSs. As found in Pempek, et al (2009), students spent around 30 minutes using Facebook every day. They also might spend their time using other SNSs. In other words, students might use the Internet because of SNSs, but this is not a precondition. By contrast, five had no opinion and five disagreed that there is a relationship between SNSs and Internet addiction.

The majority of academics believed that students' data could be transferred to advertisers through SNSs. This was an unexpected result due to concerns over privacy issues with Facebook, which was used by most academics as indicated in Table 7. Lipford, Besmer and Watson (2008) discuss the understanding of privacy management in online social networking, taking Facebook as an example.

Regarding heavy use of SNSs causing lower GPAs among students, 16 academics disagreed that this consider as disadvantages whereas 10 of them consider this point as disadvantages, while 11 had no opinion either way. This needs further investigation because is it a critical point that relates to student performance.

Most of academics did not know whether SNSs are a place for identity theft, fraud and defamation. This issue has not been discussing widely. However, some still believed that these were disadvantages. Many students disclosing large amounts of personal information could be putting themselves at risk.

**Most Popular SNSs Used By Academics**
The following table shows the most popular SNSs in descending order currently used by academics at the college:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Do not know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- SNSs is only good for entertainments but not for studying</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Using SNSs are one of the main reasons for internet addiction</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Students’ data are subject to be transferred to advertisers</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Heavy use of SNSs cause lower GPAs of students</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- SNSs are a place for identity theft and fraud groups, so they are not safe and secure</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- SNS is a place for defamation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It can be noted that Facebook is the most popular SNS among academics at SQU. Facebook recently expanded to include schools and universities. Many students in supported institutions have profiles on Facebook, which has now registered more than 175 million active users (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). This result was in line with expectations based on the findings of previous studies.

Google group is the second most popular SNS used by academics, perhaps because it allows communication and collaboration with other group members. Academics can create their own page or group for information sharing and other purposes, such as inviting students to participate by posting topics related to their subject. The third most popular SNS is Twitter. Academics can use Twitter to keep them updated on daily activities and to communicate with others academics or friends. As previously indicated in Table 3, there is a link between reasons for using Facebook, Google groups and Twitter and finding information and communicating with friends.

Few academics (from 8% to 22% use Yahoo!360, LibraryThing, LinkedIn, Hi5, SecondLife, Myspace, Netlog and Flixster. MySpace was one of the more popular sites with other users, but in this study only 8% of academics used it.

None of the academics surveyed used Shelfari, Tribe, Orkut, PerfSpot, Groovr, Habbo, Imeem, Bebo, Dopplr or Fast Pitch.

**Conclusion and Future Research Direction**
This study explored the main motives for and usage of SNSs among academics at the College of Art & Social Science at SQU in Oman. Some reasons related to education, some related to social activities, such as connecting with friends. The study also discovered the main activities of academics on SNSs within the context of teaching and learning, such as gathering information and gaining new knowledge related to their field. The study concluded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5: Most popular SNSs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SNSs List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
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<tr>
<td>Google Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yahoo!360</td>
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<tr>
<td>LibraryThing</td>
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<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
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<td>Hi5</td>
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<tr>
<td>SecondLife</td>
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<tr>
<td>Myspace</td>
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<tr>
<td>Netlog</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flixster</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tagged</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
by listing popular SNSs used by academics, most notably Facebook, Google groups and Twitter.

The study suggests that academics need to introduce themselves to Web 2.0 applications including SNSs. These sites can provide added value to student learning. Academics must exploit the services provided by these sites to support their learning and teaching. Offering courses at universities could assist other academics in familiarising themselves with such sites.

The primary objective of this research was to explore the attitude of academics towards SNSs. Future research should be conducted to answer several of the points raised during the course of this study, for example:

- Students’ performance and the usage of SNSs.
- The impact of SNSs in the education sector.
- Potential use of SNSs in teaching academic courses

References


Park, J. (2010), "Differences among university students and faculties in social networking site perception and use; Implications for academic library services", The Electronic Library, Vo. 28 No. 3, pp. 417-431.


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