



Perceptions of Dammam University Preparatory Year Students' about the Uses of Social Networking to Support and Enhance Teaching and Learning Processes

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ABSTRACT

The goal of the present research is “To study for the introductory year students at Dammam University the Perceptions of the contribution of social networks to support and enhance teaching and learning processes”. The research has been conducted during the academic year 2014/2015 on a sample of (281) introductory year students at Dammam University who correctly responded to the research tool. The final research sample has been sorted according to gender: (97 male students representing 34% and 184 female students representing 66%). The results revealed that 91.6% of the student sample uses the social networks, 40.5% of which uses it to communicate with relatives and friends, 7.6% to exchange views and ideas with others and to discover other cultures while 9.5% are using it for leisure and entertainment, while only 2.2% of the sample under study uses it, for the time being, as educative assistance. The study has also handled the mental image of the introductory year students (first year in university) towards the uses of the social networks and its applications in education. The results revealed the existence of positive mental images of the introductory year students in the following axes: a) support the interaction between the teachers and students and among the students themselves; b) content and education activities support; c) support to the learner-based education strategies with a high scoring on a scale of (5 points). The results revealed as well the existence of statistically indicative differences in the mental images of the introductory year students towards the use of social networks and implementation thereof in the education process according to gender (males and females) for the benefit of male students. Based on the study results the two researchers have presented a number of recommendations and pedagogic applications and more of the future suggested studies.

Keywords: Dammam University, introductory year, social networks, E-Learning environment.

1. Introduction:

The use of social networks is increasing unprecedentedly and has become essential part of the private life of the users in helping them create their own content, share photos, choose their favorite games and interact therewith. It is being widely used as a private tool or for business. Seeing the expansion of the social network among the community members in general and in particular among the youth and university students, the idea that the social networks would be an effective tool for education purposes is widely growing in interest recently. The social networks are being used more and more within the higher education institutions, where some

teachers use it to support the education process in addition to enhance the active learning of the students (McLoughlin & Lee, 2010; Tess, 2013). Therefore the role of the social networks as being facilitator and enhancer to the education from the student point of view deserves to be studied and investigated.

2. Theoretical framework:

2.1. Social networks technologies in higher education: the advantages and restrictions

Millions of person use the modern social networks which is available free of charge for the users. They share chatting, exchange of views and joy of use. The social networks use is on the rise everywhere and the resilience of technologies made it even more attractive and supple tools for education that it is possible to adopt it in education and most particularly in supporting the social interaction among the students (Selwyn, 2012; Seaman & Tinti-Kane, 2013).

In terms of higher education, the social networks technologies may be used in supporting the education by making the educational activities available on the internet. Its resilience may enhance education through easiness of publishing, generation of content and sharing, ideas exchange and reuse of the educational content and comments. It may as well support the access to the relevant resources in information environments managed by the students themselves (Brown, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The social networks support the interaction by allowing them to have their share in the activities in discussions where the students can post their own comments or request more detailed explanations or add someone as a friend and start communication by posting a message. The social networks use by the students supports as well the collaborative education where collaboration groups are formed where formal and non-formal interactions between the students take place via the active communication with their peers in order to achieve specific results (Irwin, Ball, Desbrow, & Leveritt, 2012; McLoughlin & Lee, 2010; Munoz & Towner, 2009).

The previous ethics have evidenced the existence of advantages of the social networks in educational purposes. Improvement in student interaction has been remarked (Odom, 2010), contribute in consolidating the education and experience drive (Hosny & Fatima, 2012), introduction of the curricula in a customized manner (Rachman & Firpo, 2011). Moreover, some researchers have found that delivery of the curricula via the social networks represent valuable tools in developing the collaborative skills of the students in that the students use the social technology as being tools to attract them (Tay & Allen, 2011). Other studies established that the use of social networks in education has contributed the learners to attain highest degrees (Pursel & Xie, 2014), to increase effectiveness or achieve tasks (Tower, Latimer & Hewitt, 2014). In addition, the educational activities delivered through the social networks the student contribution in classrooms and particularly among the most reserved students whereas they can decrease anxiety by using the social technologies instead of raising questions in high voice before their colleagues (Wheeler, Yeomans, & Wheeler, 2008).

Nevertheless, the use of social networks in higher education institutions is facing certain restrictions. The applied restrictions on usage are related to the fears that may have negative effect on the students. Such fears include time management, absence of ITC skills faced by some students, technical and infrastructure that may be limited in some of the higher education institutions (Hamid, Waycott, Kurnia, & Chang, 2014).

In terms of the applied restriction on usage of social networks in higher education institutions, some researches indicate that the students tend to separate “life” from “study and

education” and “household” from “lecture halls” (Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang, & Liu, 2012), which comply with the previous results concluded by “Jones et al” in 2010 about the deep non-satisfaction of the students of mixing education with social life via the social communication technologies (Jones, Blackey, Fitzgibbon, & Chew, 2010) and the results of the study conducted by Friesen and Lowe (2011) who questioned the credibility of social networks as being a decisive element in improving learning on the argument that the social networks are not developed for the purpose of formal education (Friesen and Lowe, 2011). For that reason, Waycott et al (2010) indicated that the teachers should not integrate the technologies in the teaching unless they see the educational value therein. This requires conducting an exhaustive evaluation prior to approving usage of social networks in the higher education institutions to estimate its sufficiency for education and learning (Waycott, Bennett, Kennedy, Dalgarno, & Gray, 2010).

2.2. Social networks technologies and the social constructive learning theory

McLoughlin & Lee (2010) indicated the possibility of concretization of Vigotsky (1978) theory by using the social networks in higher education, where learning is possible through social networks in a framework of communication and dialogue and common work. In addition the social networks could be a driving force for the existing endeavor in realizing the goals and collaboration. In this respect, certain researchers suggested that the usage of social networks in higher education may support the active contribution, achieve the teacher self-orientation and contributes in building a meaningful personal learning (McLoughlin & Lee, 2010).

In accordance with the social constructivism theory in learning, the usage of social networks in classrooms shall support as well the “situated learning theory” that provides that the learning is conducted within the common social context and that the learning is done within a specific context and forms integral part of the social and material environment of the learner, that the usage of social networks for consolidating a “community of practice” in classrooms makes a good reasoning. Furthermore, the sense of belonging to the education community constitutes a fundamental element in a successful electronic learning (Hung & Yuen, 2010).

3. Previous studies:

The present study sheds the light on certain researches related to the students perceptions towards the positive and negative advantages of using social networks in learning. The study of Hamid, Waycott, Kurnia & Chang (2015) has investigated the students perceptions towards implementing social networks technologies in delivering the education activities via the internet. Several discussions were held with a group composed of 46 student in Malaysian and Australian universities where the objective analysis established that the students have defined a number of positive images of social networks usage in consolidating the interaction among them and with their lecturers and facilitate a number of education activities and learning in a collaborative environment in addition to interacting with the curricular content.

A number of researchers (Milošević, Živković, Arsić, & Manasijević (2015)) handled the study of students’ orientation towards using the social network “Facebook” as tools for the purpose of education and learning in virtual classrooms. A sample of 238 male and female students from Belgrade university in the technical college (Serbia) have participated in this study. Upon analyzing the perceptions of participating students in the usage of “Facebook” as

a virtual classroom, the results of the study concluded that there has been an improvement in the communication with the colleagues and lecturers, expansion of discussions with the other students in addition to advising them on the latest news relevant to the lectures, examinations and other university events and consequently provide support in achieving the tasks assigned to them.

Tower, Latimer & Hewitt (2014) have conducted a study to look into the students perceptions about the effectiveness of social network “Facebook” as a tool of support to the study. This study was conducted on a sample of 373 students registered in three courses, 70% of the sample is from males. A questionnaire was handed to the participants. Among them 24% responded making a final sample of 89 student. The results indicated the existence of a positive perception of the students in using the social networks in supporting education, where the students have considered the social networks as innovative means of supporting the study and learning through consolidating the personal competencies in education. The students also described using the social networks as useful tools in enhancing learning from peers and to communicate with academics and that such tools can help them in consolidating their learning to higher levels.

Irwin, Ball, Desbrow & Leveritt (2012) have studied Facebook page as an education tool in university classrooms within specific cycles. Based on the student perceptions, the results showed that many of the participants in the curricula at a percentage of (78% of N-135) consider from the beginning from their perceptions that Facebook could be an effective education tool. Among their best responses, there was the increase in interaction and participation in discussions, publishing lectures. Nevertheless, the polls conducted after studying the curricula via the social networks, half of the participating students i.e. 50% estimated that the “Facebook” network actually helped them in the education process while the researched suggested one reason for the decrease in student perceptions to the half that is inconsistency and trials to integrate the teachers’ usage and the students’ perceptions and expectations.

In a survey conducted by Kabilan, Ahmad & Abidin (2010) on 300 randomly chosen male and female students from Seinz university in Malaysia, it was found that 74% of the students have a more positive mental image of Facebook being used as a tool in learning the English language as a second language, and that a percentage of 72% of the participants to the poll expressed their opinion that using the social networks was a motive and drive for them to communicate in English language.

Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman & Witty (2010) have conducted a limited scale survey among the teaching staff and students of the (Public) Southern University in order to comparatively study the usage of Facebook among the two groups (students and teaching staff). The study results showed that 95% of the participating students in comparison to 73% of the teaching staff have accounts on the social network Facebook. Results revealed a list of all reasons for using the communication network by the students, among which: communication with relatives and friends, vocational networking. Results showed as well that education related communications were least graded among the listed reasons and that the teaching staff were less exposed to support of Facebook network as an education tool in the college.

Brady, Holcomb & Smith (2010) have studied the usage of a site managing the social networks in the higher studies curricula via the internet in the university of North Carolina

state. Results were collected from a student sample (N=50) for three different curricula in order to determine their perceptions about the advantages of electronic education via social networks. The study results revealed that 82% of the study sample agreed that the social networks have achieved more communication among the peers and made it possible outside the lecture hall in comparison with the face-to-face communication in the lecture halls. Most of the participants agreed as well (with a percentage of 74%) that the integration of the social networks with the electronic education system allowed them to comment on the work of other student in a more effective way than in the face-to-face communication.

Another study conducted by Jones, Blackey, Fitzgibbon, & Chew (2010) exposed a different perceptions on the usage of social networks in education. Upon publishing a questionnaire on the internet and interviews with students from four universities, the study results concluded a profound distinction in the student perceptions regarding the use of social networks technologies in education applications against the personal usage. More than 70% of the students mentioned they have accounts on one of the social networks but indicated as well that they rarely use it for education purposes. Interviews conducted with a sample of those students revealed 3 subjects that may interpret this situation: a) the students tend to separate their social life (joyful) from their education (painful), b) students have fears regarding the difficulty in determining the original sources of the published ideas (anxiety against violation of copyright), c) students did not care about the extra information or restrictions related to the spare time due to usage of technology.

A study conducted by Ophus and Abbitt (2009) has investigated the student perceptions towards the profit of the social networks Facebook as an education tool. Biology registered students were polled (N=100), showing results of existence of positive perceptions of the students towards the profits of Facebook as an education tool, whereas communication with other students achieved 95%, obtain the comments and materials 86.3%, scheduling appointments and meetings 82.8% of the possible results. Discussions over the internet with the subject teacher scored 64.3% and general communication with the subject teacher scored 56.4%.

4. Problem of the study

The recent expansion and popularity of social networks technology helped the higher education teachers to use it in delivering the education activities via the internet seeing its latent huge capabilities to promote the teaching and learning experience. The pedagogy use of social networks technology in education is receiving more interest from the academics as possible tools in teaching and learning. In spite of the fact that the social networks technology promotes the collaborative education and enhances the interaction among the students, but we do not know much about how the students see the utility of interaction with social networks or their perceptions about its profits in support of their education process?

In this respect, it's evident from the above mentioned studies that the situation is not yet settled regarding student perception towards usage of social networks in supporting and promoting the teaching and learning processes. The results of certain studies confirmed the presence of positive perceptions of the higher education student (Hamid, et al., 2015; Milošević, et al., 2015; Tower, et al., 2014; Irwin, et al., 2012) while results from other studies revealed negative student perceptions towards usage of social networks in supporting the education activities (Wang, et al., 2012; Jones, et al., 2010; Friesen and Lowe, 2011).

On a third facet of the problem, the introductory year students (first year in university) join the university with predetermined ideas about the several methods in university education and learning. Such ideas may often conflict with the nature of study in the university, that requires from the researchers the detection of their perceptions towards the electronic education in general and the usage of social networks to support and promote the education and learning in the university in particular. The teachers should not integrate the techniques with the teaching until they are sure of the value thereof. This requires conducting an exhaustive evaluation prior to approving usage of social networks in the higher education institutions to estimate its sufficiency for education and learning in addition to its adaptability with the student setting in terms of their perceptions towards the profits and their prior skills using the same.

Accordingly, the present research intends to study the introductory year students at Dammam University about the usage of social networks to interact with their peers, support and promote the education and learning activities and more precisely the problematic of the research is outlined in the following: “Study of the perceptions of the introductory year students at Dammam University on the usage of social networks in supporting and promoting the education and learning processes”.

5. Research issues:

This research intends to address the following issues:

1. What is the status quo of the usage of social networks among the introductory year students at Dammam University?
2. What are the mental perceptions of the introductory year students towards the use of social networks and its application in the education and learning processes? Through:
 - a. Supporting the interactive communication between the students and teachers and among students themselves?
 - b. Supporting the content, education and learning activities.
 - c. Supporting the learner based learning strategies.
3. Are mental perceptions of the introductory year students different towards the uses of social networks and its application towards supporting education and learning processes according to gender (males and females)?

6. Importance of the research:

The importance of the research resides in the fact that:

- It helps the higher education institutions in identifying the effective factors in the usage of social networks in supporting and promoting the education and learning processes and particularly for the introductory year students and entrance to university education.
- It helps the university teachers in knowing the ways of making use of the social networks features in order to create friendlier and more resilient pedagogic environments to overcome the space and time factors.
- The attained results shall help in defining the introductory year students perceptions about the uses of social networks, design electronic collaborative and effective environments and communities that deal with the shortages in the

interaction level among the users within actually used electronic education management systems (blackboard) and in order to bolster the communication and views exchange among the students towards the application of collaborative learning by using the social networks tools and learner based education.

7. Research terminology:

The terms of the present research are defined in the following:

- **Mental perceptions:** Houdé and others define the mental perceptions: an individual knowledge representation of the external facts experienced by the individual (Houdé, Kayser, Koenig, Proust, & Rastier, 1998, p345). It means procedurally in the present study the mental visualization by the students towards the uses of the social networks in supporting and promoting the education and learning processes.
- **Introductory year:** is the first university year where the student is being prepared for the university stage by providing specialized courses in English, mathematics, computer science and the individual aspects. The students are also distributed according to their future specializations. The introductory year specialties include: medical, scientific, engineering and humanitarian courses. Various programs are provided to focus on the targeted specialty.
- **Social networks:** A widely used term to describe any technology systems related to the collaboration and communication among the individuals and users (Joosten, 2012). Certain researchers used the term: web 2.0 applications (web 2.0) as being more global when indicating the social networks such as: blogs, micro-blogs, wikis, multimedia platforms and other social networking media (Hamid, Waycott, Kurnia, & Chang, 2015).

8. Research methodology and procedures:

The two researchers adopted the descriptive approach being suitable with the research nature and achievement of its goals, as it deals with analysis and interpretation for the sake of defining the mental images of the introductory year students at Dammam University towards the social networks and application in supporting and promotion of the education and learning processes.

8.1. Research sample:

The research has been conducted during the academic year 2014/2015 on a sample of (281) introductory year students at Dammam University who correctly responded to the research tool. The final research sample has been sorted according to gender: (97 male students representing 34% and 184 female students representing 66%).

8.2. Research tool:

The present research required the preparation of: “mental perception scale of the introductory year students at Dammam University towards the uses of social networks and application in supporting and promotion of the education and learning processes”, this has been conducted as follows:

- a. **Purpose of the scale:** measure the mental perceptions of the introductory year students at Dammam University towards the uses of social networks and application in supporting and promotion of the education and learning processes.

- b. **Defining the scale dimensions:** In order to define the scale dimensions, theoretical frameworks and directives, various definitions in the field of employing the social networking in supporting and promoting of the education and learning processes, as well as in the electronic education and remote learning and some previous ethics and studies have been taken advantage of, in addition to consulting education technology and electronic education specialized experts and consultants. Accordingly the scale included three basic scopes to measure the mental perceptions of the introductory year students at Dammam University towards the uses of social networks and application in supporting and promotion of the education and learning processes, namely:
- Support the interactive communication between the teachers and students and among the students themselves (7 phrases);
 - Content support and education activities (10 phrases);
 - Support the learner-based education strategies (8 phrases).
- c. **Scoring and calculation of notes:** phrase importance scoring was calculated based on the response to the tool phrases as follows: very high degree (5) points, high degree (4) points, average degree (3) points, low degree (2) points and very low degree (1) point.
- d. **Statistical properties of the research tool:**
- Tool validity has been confirmed by submitting it to a group of professional arbitrators in the field of education and electronic learning. They were requested to express their opinion on suitability of the phrases in measuring the student mental perceptions, phrase pertinence with the scope, grammatical correctness of the phrases and its clarity, in addition to deleting or adding what the arbitrators may deem appropriate of phrases. A credit majority (85%) of the arbitrators on the validity of the phrases was to be taken as standard for approval. In the light of the comments given by the arbitrators on the tool, the suggested amendments were introduced taking into consideration their opinions. The researchers considered this as logical validity of the questionnaire. Coefficient of internal consistency has also been used between the scale phrases and axes, where Pearson's correlation coefficient between the three scale axes and the total score thereof reached (0.87, 0.93, 0.82) whose values are acceptable for the coefficient of internal consistency within the research purposes.
 - The reliability coefficient was calculated using "Cronbach's alpha coefficient" (Cronbach LJ, 1951). The total reliability coefficient for the scale phrases recorded (0.89) indicating an acceptable degree of reliability that corroborate the use of the scale to achieve the research goals.

9. Research findings and discussion

9.1. First question related findings:

In order to answer the first of the research questions "What is the status quo of the usage of social networks among the introductory year students at Dammam University?" The two researchers have counted the frequencies and percentages of the student responses under study and the results were as follows:

- **Regarding the use of the social networks among the introductory year students under study,** the results showed that 91.6% of the students under study use the social networking such as: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. 83.9% of this sample have an account on one of these networks. The results showed as well that the highest use record was of Facebook followed by Twitter and then Instagram.

- **Regarding the time spent by the introductory year students under study using the social networks:** The results showed that the percentage of those spending more than two hours per day on using the social networks recorded 75% and that those spending between one to two hours recorded 15.1% while those spending less than one hour recorded 4.3%. The following chart of Figure 1 shows these results.

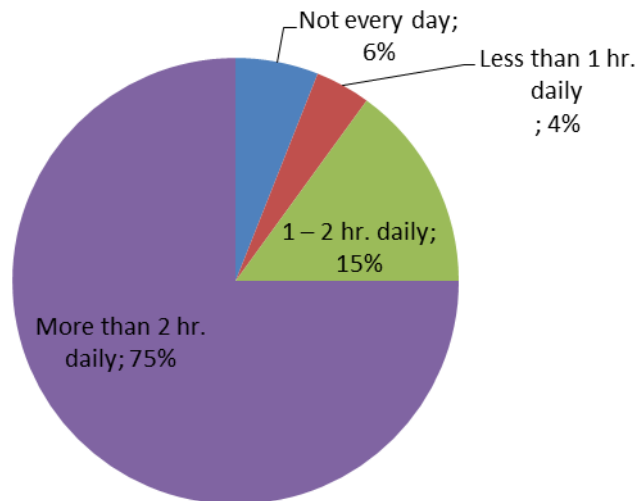


Figure 1: Time spent by the introductory year students on social networks

- **Regarding the reasons why the introductory year students under study use the social networks:** The results showed that a percentage of 40.5% of the studied sample use the social networks to connect with relatives and friends, 7.6% to exchange views and ideas with others and to discover other cultures while 9.5% are using it for leisure and entertainment, while only 2.2% of the sample under study use it, for the time being, as educative assistance. While those using the social networks for all these reasons combined recorded 40.2%. The following chart no. 2 shows these results.

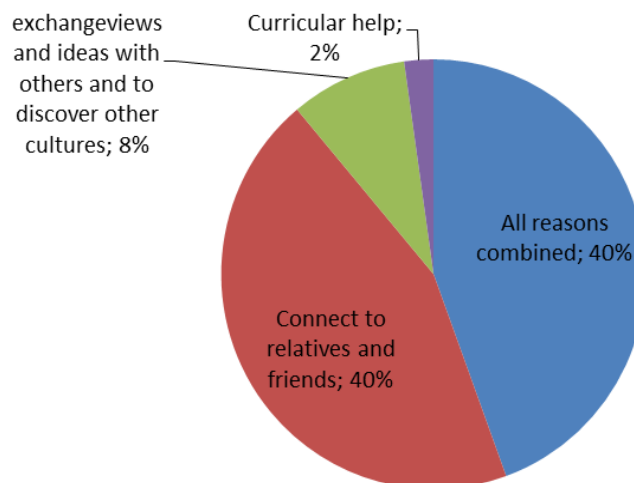


Figure 2: Reasons why the introductory year students use the social networks

- **Regarding the device used to access the social network:** The study results showed that the mobile phones (iPhone, BlackBerry, Nokia, iPad, tablets...etc.) used recorded 52.2%, laptop devices and mobiles recorded 39.6% while personal computers recorded only 7.5%. The following chart no. 3 shows these results.

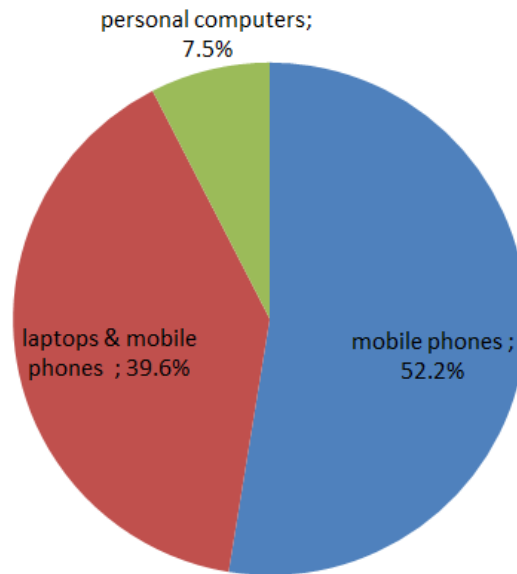


Figure 3: devices used to access the social network

- **Regarding the extent of proficiency of the introductory year students, under study, to avail of the social networks in education:** the study results showed that 73.9% of the students hold the knowledge and sufficient skill to avail of the social networks in education, while 25.4% do not hold such knowledge.

9.2. Results related to the second question:

In order to answer the second of the research question: “What are the mental perceptions of the introductory year students towards the use of social networks and its application in the education and learning processes?”

The two researchers have counted the frequencies, percentages, mathematical mean and response ranks of the introductory year students at Dammam University under study concerning their mental perceptions towards the use of social networks and its application in the education and learning processes and the phrase importance was considered “very high” if its mathematical mean exceeds 4.20, “high” if its mathematical mean lays between 2.60 – 3.39, “low” if its mathematical mean lays between 1.80 – 2.59, “very low” if its mathematical mean is less than 1.79 and the results were as follows:

- Regarding the first dimension: perception of the introductory year students towards usage of social networks in support of the interactive communication between the students and teachers and among students themselves. Table 1 shows the results as follows:

Table 1: Mathematical mean, standard deviations and ranking of the introductory year students perceptions in support of the interactive communication between the students and teachers and among students themselves

No.	Items	M	SD	ranking
1.	Achieve the continuous communication and interaction	3.59	0.97	7

	between the student and the subject teacher in order to overcome the intimidation and increase familiarity, encouragement and continued enhancement towards learning.			
2.	Continuous communication and interaction between the students themselves in a better way than what traditionally happens in the lecture hall.	3.80	1.01	5
3.	Increase cohesion of students in all curricular groups in a better way to emphasize the feeling common responsibility towards learning.	3.76	0.83	6
4.	Social networks may contribute in collaborative dialogue and critical reading of the subjects under discussion.	3.89	0.89	3
5.	Develop the collaboration spirit among students and work team spirits in collecting the scientific material of the curriculum and discuss the same.	3.95	0.88	2
6.	Social networks are a wonderful field of contribution and sharing in publishing knowledge and innovation among learners.	4.07	0.83	1
7.	I can receive the discussions and opinions of my colleagues and teachers about a specific subject via social networks.	3.83	0.99	4
	General mean	3.85	0.91	--

Upon examining Table 1 we see that:

- All phrases related to the introductory year students perceptions in support of the interactive communication between the students and teachers and among students themselves have scored 100% of positive perception and high ranking, where the mathematical means for all the phrases fluctuated between 3.59-4.07 and the total mathematical mean for all the phrases on this axis recorded 3.85 with a standard deviation of 0.91.

This result complies with the studies conducted by: (Hamid, et al., 2015) that revealed definition by the students of a number of positive perceptions about usage of social networks among which promoting the interaction among the students and with the lecturers, and the study conducted by (Milošević, et al., 2015) whose results revealed that the use of Facebook networks as being a virtual classroom has led to an improvement in the communication between colleagues and the teachers and expanded the discussions with other students, and the study conducted by (Tower, et al., 2014) whose results revealed the existence of positive perceptions of the students in using the social networks towards supporting education. The students look at the social network as innovative means to support the study and learning through promoting the learning from peers and communicate with the academics.

- Regarding the second dimension: Introductory year students' perceptions about the social networks support the content, education and learning activities.

Table 2 shows the results as follows:

Table 2: Mathematical mean, standard deviations and ranking of introductory year students perceptions of the social networks supporting the content, education and learning activities

No.	Items	M	SD	ranking
8.	I suppose that the social networks may diversify the student	4.08	0.85	1

	knowledge and skills by treating scientific, religious, literature, sports, social and various artistic subjects.			
9.	I suppose that the social networks may offer the learners reliable precise information about subjects of study.	3.48	0.97	10
10.	I believe that the social networks are a rich environment to conduct certain required education activities.	3.87	0.87	4
11.	I think that the social networks can provide me with news about the curriculum.	3.87	1.01	7
12.	I think that the social networks can provide me with publication of curriculum related multimedia and place me in an education environment rich of various resources and sharing (among text, drawings, stills and motion picture, sound file and video files).	3.99	0.89	3
13.	I think that the social networks can provide me with publication of curriculum related documents and research summaries.	3.82	0.94	6
14.	I think that the social networks can provide me with publication of curriculum related electronic polls.	3.69	0.93	8
15.	I estimate tha it is necessary to deliver the assignments via the social networks.	3.57	1.14	9
16.	I think that the social networks can provide instant feedback about my inquiries regarding the curriculum that may help in solving the educational problems we face in studying the curriculum.	3.84	0.92	5
17.	I emphasize that the use of social networks in education shall spare a lot of time and effort to invest in the learning process.	4.03	0.97	2
	General mean	3.80	0.95	--

Upon examining Table 2 we see that:

- All phrases related to the introductory year student's perceptions of the social networks supporting the content, education and learning activities have scored 100% of positive perception and high ranking, where the mathematical means for all the phrases fluctuated between 3.48-4.08 and the total mathematical mean for all the phrases on this axis recorded 3.80 with a standard deviation of 0.95.

These results comply with the studies conducted by: (Hamid, et al., 2015) that revealed definition by the students of a number of positive perceptions in facilitating provision of a group of education and learning activities in a collaborative environment in addition to the interaction with the curriculum content. It complys as well with the study conducted by (Milošević, et al., 2015) whose results revealed that the use of Facebook networks as being a virtual classroom provide the students with the latest news about the lecture, examinations and other events in the university and consequently provide support in conducting their assignments.

- Regarding the second dimension: Introductory year students perceptions about the uses of social networks in supporting the learner based learning strategies: Table 3 shows the results as follows:

Table 3: Mathematical mean, standard deviations and ranking of introductory year students perceptions about the uses of social networks in supporting the learner based learning strategies:

No.	Items	M	SD	ranking
18.	I think that the social network shall support my self-learning	33.91	0.93	2
19.	I think that the social network shall support my collaborative and collective learning with my colleagues	3.87	0.89	3
20.	I think that the social network shall provide me with various resources and effective learning multimedia to assist in the learner based learning and around resources.	3.98	0.76	1
21.	I believe that the social network is a very suitable means to conduct the self-evaluation of the education assignments and project assigned to me to meet the project based learning strategy	3.71	0.85	5
22.	I believe that the social network is a very suitable mean to increase our drive towards learning through highlighting the effective and active learners in enriching the educational material and publishing the subjects and explanations thereto as well as the becoming active in discussing and analyzing the subjects under discussion.	3.76	0.92	4
	General mean	3.84	0.87	--

Upon examining Table 3 we see that:

- All phrases related to introductory year students perceptions about the use of social networks in supporting the learner based learning strategies have scored 100% of positive perception and high ranking, where the mathematical means for all the phrases fluctuated between 3.71-3.98 and the total mathematical mean for all the phrases on this axis recorded 3.84 with a standard deviation of 0.87.

These results comply with the studies conducted by: (Tower, et al., 2014) that revealed presence of positive perceptions of the students towards the social networks as innovative means of supporting the study and learning through consolidating the personal competencies in education. The study conducted by (Brady, et al., 2010) that discovered that most of the users (74%) see that the integration of the social networks in the electronic education system enabled them to think and comment on the works of other students in a more effective way than is the case in a face-to-face situation.

9.3. Results related to the third question:

In order to answer the third of the research questions: “Are mental perceptions of the introductory year students different towards the uses of social networks and its application towards supporting education and learning processes according between different genders (males and females)?”, the two researchers have used the T-test to indicate the differences in answers of the individual under study according to the gender criteria: (males and females). Table 4 shows the results as follows:

Table 4: Mathematical mean, standard deviations and the T-test of the introductory year students’ differences towards the use of social networks and its application towards supporting education and learning processes according to gender (males and females):

Study axis	Males (N= 97)		Females (N= 181)		df	t	Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD			
Axis (1): Supporting the interaction between the teachers and students and among the students themselves	3.86	0.586	3.85	0.567	279	0.081	0.777
Axis (2): Content, education and learning support	3.386	0.607	3.73	0.532	279	3.885	0.05
Axis (3): Learner based learning strategies support	3.89	0.74	3.80	0.59	279	8.766	0.01
All the scale phrases	3.85	0.571	3.81	0.496	279	3.844	0.05

Results in the above Table 4 indicates the following: Absence of statistically indicative differences in the mental perceptions of the introductory year students (males & females) towards the use of the networks in the axis: supporting the interaction between the teachers and students and among the students themselves. This may interpret that all the students (males & females) have positive mental perceptions towards the use of the social networks in the communication and interaction among the individuals and that these networks have been originally created to achieve communication among the individuals.

The results also showed the presence of statistically indicative differences in the mental perceptions of the introductory year students towards the use of the social networks and implementation thereof in the education and learning process according to student gender (males & females) in profit of male students in the two axes: Support to the content and the education and learning activities, learner based learning strategies support and in the scale notes in general. The two researchers explain this point by the fact that male students use the social networks with a degree of freedom more than the female students who take into consideration the Islamic guidelines upon communicating via the social networks.

10. Conclusions:

The study treated the fact of using the social networks by the introductory year students at Dammam University, 40.5% of which uses it to communicate with relatives and friends, 7.6% to exchange views and ideas with others and to discover other cultures while 9.5% are using it for leisure and entertainment. Only 2.2% of the sample under study uses it, for the time being, as educative assistance.

The study also handled the mental perceptions of the introductory year students at Dammam University (first year) towards use of the social networks and its implementation to support the education and learning. The results revealed existence of positive mental perceptions of the introductory year students in the following axes: a) Support the interactive communication between the students and teachers and among students themselves at a high

score where the mathematical means for all the phrases fluctuated between 3.59-4.07 and a mathematical means of 3.85 and standard deviation of 0.91 on gradual scale of (5 points), b) support to the content and the education and learning activities at a high score where the mathematical means for all the phrases fluctuated between 3.48-4.08 and a mathematical means of 3.80 and standard deviation of 0.95, c) support to the learner-based education strategies with a high scoring where the mathematical means for all the phrases fluctuated between 3.71-3.98 and a mathematical means of 3.84 and standard deviation of 0.87. The results also showed the presence of statistically indicative differences in the mental perceptions of the introductory year students towards the use of the social networks and implementation thereof in the education and learning process according to student gender (males & females) in profit of male students in the two axes and in the scale notes in general. The two researchers explain this point by the fact that male students use the social networks with a degree of freedom more than the female students who take into consideration the Islamic & Shariah & social guidelines in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia upon communicating via the social networks.

In the light of the study findings, the two researchers recommend the following:

- 1) All the requirements for a physical education environment (such as devices, free access to WIFI within the campus and outside) should be provided in order to implement mobile learning effectively.
- 2) Programs and training courses delivered to the introductory year students in the university should focus on the competence in using the electronic learning technologies by the mobile.
- 3) Promote the performance of the university teachers to optimize taking advantage of the social networks features in order to create friendlier and more resilient pedagogic environments to overcome the space and time factors.
- 4) Assist the university teachers to design electronic collaborative and effective environments and communities that deal with the shortages in the interaction level among the users within actually used electronic education management systems (blackboard) and in order to bolster the communication and views exchange among the students towards the application of collaborative learning by using the social networks tools and learner based education.
- 5) Conduct further studies to try to adapt and integrate the teachers use of the social networks and the student perception as well as finding their expectations towards implementation of the social networks in supporting their education and learning.
- 6) Conduct further studies to consolidate the personal competencies in learning for the higher education students in using the social networks.
- 7) Conduct further studies in order to define the factors that affect the use of social networks for supporting and promoting the education and learning processes in higher education institutions.

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