

# Use of Social Networking Technologies in Higher Education in Zimbabwe: A learners' perspective.

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**Abstract—** The advent of social networking technologies has been met with mixed reactions in academic circles in developing countries like Zimbabwe as is the case in developed countries. Few studies have considered the use of social networking technologies in spite of their widespread use by students in higher education. There is therefore a need to explore the usage of social networking technologies in higher education by focusing on the learner. This study explored social networking technologies being used in higher education, their uses, extent of use, benefits and skills learners acquire from use of these technologies. The study followed a descriptive research design wherein a questionnaire was used as the main research tool. Data was gathered from 124 university students from five institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. The collected data was analysed using SPSS. An analysis of the results seems to suggest that the majority of learners were mainly using Facebook and Myspace. Furthermore, it also emerged out that learners used social networking technologies for academic purposes and more specifically to conduct group work. It was also established that social networking technologies improved learners' technology proficiency, enhanced learners' social skills and help learners to communicate in new ways with new people.

**Keywords-** Social Networking Sites, Higher Education in Zimbabwe, Facebook, Uses of Social Networking Sites, Benefits of Social Networking Sites

## I. INTRODUCTION

Currently there is heated debate on whether or not Social Networking Sites (SNSs) should be used in educational settings as part of student learning. This notion is supported by empirical evidence in [1] that this debate is being framed too narrowly either as no regulations or a complete ban on Social Networking Sites. In Zimbabwe, some universities are using Social Networking Sites despite the much talked about safety and security concerns while others have completely banned them. Research on the use of social networks in education has been carried out in developed countries; however, little or no research has been carried out in developing countries notably in Zimbabwe. This study therefore endeavors to fill this apparent research gap by exploring usage of Social Networking Sites in higher education in Zimbabwe. In an attempt to fill this research gap, reference [2] details results of a study on use of

Social Networking Sites in education. However, the study only focused on one social networking site whereas this research covers use of a wide range of Social Networking Sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Myspace and so on.

Commenting on social networks, reference [3] indicates that "Social networks of the electronic variety have become thoroughly embedded in contemporary culture. People have woven these networks into their daily routines, using Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, online gaming environments, and other tools to build and maintain complex webs of professional and personal relationships." Given this background, investigating the use of social networking sites in higher education provides some useful insights for researchers and academicians. Further, it is claimed that some of the most effective educators are those that create an informal relationship with their students through use of social networking sites [4]. Therefore, there is need to explore on use of social networking technologies in educational settings given the background that close to 100 % of university students now spend most of their time on social networking sites [10].

Reference [5] presents results of a similar research, nevertheless, the research focused on the impact of social networking sites on the youth and not in higher education which is the thrust of this research. Another research on use of Social Networking Sites in education was also conducted and results are presented in [6]. Nonetheless, in this research, attention was only paid to non-commercial education-based social networks and how they can be used to address privacy and safety concerns of educators. In this study, we consider both commercial and non-commercial social networking sites. Very few studies explore the link between Social Networking Sites use and education as evidenced in [7] that there is lack of research in this area. Further supporting evidence is presented in [8] that, up till now, a research-based discussion of SNSs and education has been virtually nonexistent. Further, in [9], it is argued that while critics characterize social networking sites as portals for antisocial and unproductive behavior, there is increasing evidence that these sites improve technology proficiency, enhance social skills, and foster learning [7],[9].

All these researches and many others not mentioned here do not address the research gap that has been stated in this section.

## II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Of late, there has been overwhelmingly apparent interest in use of Social Networking Sites among university students and the emphasis on developing 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies. Research findings show that students spend around 94 percent of their time on online social networking websites during a typical week [10]. In Zimbabwe, Social Networking Sites are being used in some universities despite the much talked about safety and security concerns as well as the commonly held notion that social networking sites are portals for antisocial and unproductive behavior. Some universities have imposed an outright ban on use of social networking sites whereas some studies in developed countries point to the fact that social networking sites improve technology proficiency, enhance social skills, and foster learning. To date, little or no research has been carried out in developing countries notably in Zimbabwe and it remains unknown whether social networking sites should be used or banned in higher education.

## III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study were to enumerate the Social Networking Technologies (SNTs) being used by learners in higher education in Zimbabwe, establish the uses of Social Networking Technologies by learners in higher education in Zimbabwe, determine the extent to which learners use Social Networking Technologies for socializing versus informal academic learning, establish and rank benefits associated with use of Social Networking Sites in higher education in Zimbabwe and establish and rank the skills gained by learners through use of Social Networking Sites.

## IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Learning

One of the terms worth defining is learning. Reference [11] defines learning in two ways, firstly, as students collaborating and discussing ideas and possible solutions and secondly, as connecting with other students around the world, on topics of study. It is common knowledge that Social Networking Technologies are used mainly for collaboration purposes. However, the million dollar question is, how are these Social Networking Technologies being used in Zimbabwe to enhance learning? This happens to be a fundamental research question that has no known answer. Learning is also viewed as social activity, where learners construct their understanding not just through interaction with the material, but also through collaboratively constructing new knowledge with their peers.

### B. Social Networking

Reference [12] defines social networking as one aspect of social media in which individuals are in communities that share ideas, interests, or are looking to meet people with similar ideas and interests. Further, the researcher notes that, at present, the two most popular social networking sites are Facebook and MySpace. Another definition of social networking is given in [7] that social networking sites are web-based tools that allow

users to develop a public or quasi-public profile, electronically communicate with other users with whom they share a connection, and view and comment on their list of communications with other members of the group. Similarly, in [13], a social networking site is defined as any website designed to allow multiple users to publish content of themselves. The information may be on any subject and may be for consumption by friends, mates, employers, employees just to mention a few. A similar definition is given in [14] wherein social networking is defined as a community in which individuals are somehow connected through friendship, values, working relationships, idea and so on. While in [15], the services in the foregoing section are defined as social digital technologies, in [16] they are defined as participatory media and in [17] they are defined them as social media.

Reference [7] suggests that interactions through social networking sites can result in more and different types of connections that would not otherwise be made. In addition to individual profiles, Social Networking Sites may include profiles of bands, companies, events, non-profit organizations or political parties. Social networking sites can serve a range of purposes, including helping users maintain existing friendships [18] or forge new relationships based on shared professional goals, political views, a common language or shared racial, sexual, religious, or cultural identities [7].

### C. Education Networking

Reference [6] defines educational networking as “the use of social networking technologies for educational purposes.” Educational Networking can also be defined as “the use of social networking technologies for educational purposes, aligns with federal and state goals to promote innovative and collaborative technology” [19].

### D. Examples of Social Networking Sites

Reference [6] indicates that Facebook, Friendster, LinkedIn, LiveJournal and MySpace are some of the examples of social networking sites. Similar sentiments are echoed in [12] that the two most popular social networking sites are Facebook and MySpace. However, in [20], NING is mentioned as a social networking site which is mainly used in academia. Reference [11] cites Bebo as an example of a Social Networking Site in addition to the ones already mentioned. Along with that, in [21] it is noted that, “The most famous in the world of social networks are Facebook (Facebook.com), Twitter (Twitter.com) and MySpace (myspace.com) and others.”

### E. Use of Social Networking Sites in education

Reference [11] posits that many students are using new media and technologies to create new things in new ways, learn new things in new ways, and communicate in new ways with new people. The researchers went on to say, “It is our position that these technologies are safe, valuable tools schools must take seriously.” They further note that the 'tween' and teen group (nine- to 17-year-olds) are the heaviest users of Social Networking Technologies. Further supporting evidence is provided in [8] that 96 percent of youth in 'tween' and teen group have used Social Networking Technologies at some

time, with their average engagement with them rivaling time spent watching TV at 9 hours a week. Reference [10] concludes that almost 60 percent of the students spent between one and five hours on online social network websites in a typical week and spent 19 percent of the time in a week watching TV.

Further supporting evidence is presented in [7] that the topic of most conversation at these social networking sites is education and 60 percent of the students maintain that they use social networking sites to discuss about education topics and more than 50 percent use social networking sites to discuss about specific schoolwork. In fact, a 2007 National School Boards Association study found that 60 percent of students use social networks to talk about educational topics, and 50 percent of students use the networks to “talk specifically about schoolwork.”

Reference [20] shows that NING (a social networking site mostly used in academic circles) is excellent for facilitating group projects. Along with that, in [11] it was noted that Social Networking Technologies can be used to communicate assignments, class discussion, and content that supported schoolwork such as videos. A similar conclusion was reached in [22] that the Southern Illinois University College of Business views sites such as Facebook as crucial tools for their communication and marketing strategies. They use a Facebook group to provide members with school news and the ability to communicate with other students, faculty and alumni.

#### *F. Benefits associated with use of Social Networking Sites*

Reference [9] observes that educational networking has the potential to improve student learning. They went on to point that social networking enriches the learning environment by early recognition of student needs and formative assessment, establishment of classroom community, student engagement, increased sense of student achievement, information management and access to marginalized students. Further supporting evidence is provided in [23] that NING (a social networking site) provides a venue for educators to “facilitate a strong sense of community among students” and encourages “personal interactions that can lead to the creation of new knowledge and collective intelligence”.

Similarly, in [24] it was established that Social Networking Sites are effective in developing essential skills such as, creating knowledge in user-defined or negotiated contexts; Selecting relevant information, Critically interpreting and analysing the socio-cultural context; Working in groups and collaboratively; Enhancing communication and interpersonal skills; Sharing knowledge and information; and Negotiating in horizontal contexts, avoiding hierarchical connections and exchanges of knowledge. In addition to the foregoing evidence, in [25] it was found that surveyed students who regularly use Social Networking Sites indicated that enhanced technology skills, creativity, receptivity to new and diverse views, and communication skills were among the most important educational benefits associated with using Social Networking Sites.

Reference [8] reports that while using Social Networking Sites, 70 percent of online surveyed teens indicated discussing education-related topics, including pre-college planning and careers and 50 percent of students discussed issues directly related to their schoolwork. Additionally, in [7] and in [26] it is established that Social Networking Sites have been found to provide unique opportunities to meet other people with similar interests as well as showcase a young person’s artistic or musical abilities. Further, in [27] it was found that Social Networking Sites have three benefits namely enhancing discussion between students, facilitating the sharing of information, personal and otherwise, which in turn can create an intimacy among students and fostering and supporting discipline-specific social networks, which allow for collaboration across geographical boundaries. Similar sentiments were echoed in [28] and in [29] that Social Networking Sites support communication and collaboration, enhance the discussion of thoughts and ideas. They further, conclude that, notwithstanding some of the drawbacks, the uses of Social Networking Sites, such as NING in Education, have the ability to support, foster, and enhance learning.

#### *G. Skills acquired through use of social networking sites*

Several studies have been conducted to establish the impact of social networking sites on the student’s skill. References [30], [31], [32] and [33] indicate that social networking sites improve academic writing proficiency. Further to that, in [25] it was concluded that from a survey on the educational benefits of social networking sites, students who regularly use SNSs enhanced technology skills, creativity, receptivity to new and diverse views and communication skills. From the findings technology skills topped the list, followed by creativity, being open to new or diverse views and communication skills.

## V. METHODOLOGY

In view of the lack of sufficient research in this area of study, particularly in the context of a developing country like Zimbabwe, a descriptive research design was considered the most suitable approach. This study employed both primary and secondary data collection methods in order to explore on the use of Social Networking Sites in higher education in Zimbabwe. A questionnaire was used in the study to gather primary data. Questions included demographics, experience in use and uses of Social Networking Sites, benefits, and skills in using Social Networking Sites. The respondents were asked to rank and comment on different questions. This was used to determine the weight or the importance of each question towards assessing the usage of Social Networking Sites in higher education in Zimbabwe.

The questionnaires included a combination of both structured and semi-structured questions. The questionnaire was validated by pretesting it with a sample of five participants who included two postgraduate and three undergraduate students. Some of the questions were adopted from [34] and [35].

The questionnaires were distributed to students as either hard copies or electronically. Limesurvey was used to create an online version of the questionnaire. The questionnaires were

distributed at random to students from five tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe.

VI. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

A. Demographics

A total of 124 learners participated in the study and the distribution of the participants is shown in Table I below.

TABLE I. FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Institution	Number of participants
Harare Institute of Technology	21
Harare Polytechnic	30
Midlands State University/TRUST Academy	22
University of Zimbabwe	36
Women's University in Africa	15
Total	124

Of the 124 participants 27.2 percent were female and 72.8 were male as is shown in Table II.

TABLE II. FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR GENDER

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	.8	.8	.8
female	33	26.4	26.4	27.2
male	91	72.8	72.8	100.0
Total	125	100.0	100.0	

Further to the forgoing demographic information, the age frequency distribution is shown in Table III below.

TABLE III. FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR AGE

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	1.6	1.6	1.6
15–20	4	3.2	3.2	4.8
21–25	83	66.4	66.4	71.2
26–30	19	15.2	15.2	86.4
31–35	11	8.8	8.8	95.2
36–40	4	3.2	3.2	98.4
41–45	2	1.6	1.6	100.0
Total	125	100.0	100.0	

Table IV below shows the frequency distribution for the year of study. This table shows that approximately 38 percent of the respondents were second years.

TABLE IV. FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR YEAR OF STUDY

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	1.6	1.6	1.6
fifth year	3	2.4	2.4	4.0
first year	20	16.0	16.0	20.0
fourth year	25	20.0	20.0	40.0
second year	48	38.4	38.4	78.4
third year	27	21.6	21.6	100.0
Total	125	100.0	100.0	

Figure 1 below shows the devices which are mainly used for internet connection. From this figure it is clear that most students (79.2%) use laptops for internet connection. The other devices which are used heavily for internet connection are smart phone (used by 70.4%), desktop (used by 56.8 %) and cell phones (used by 40 %).

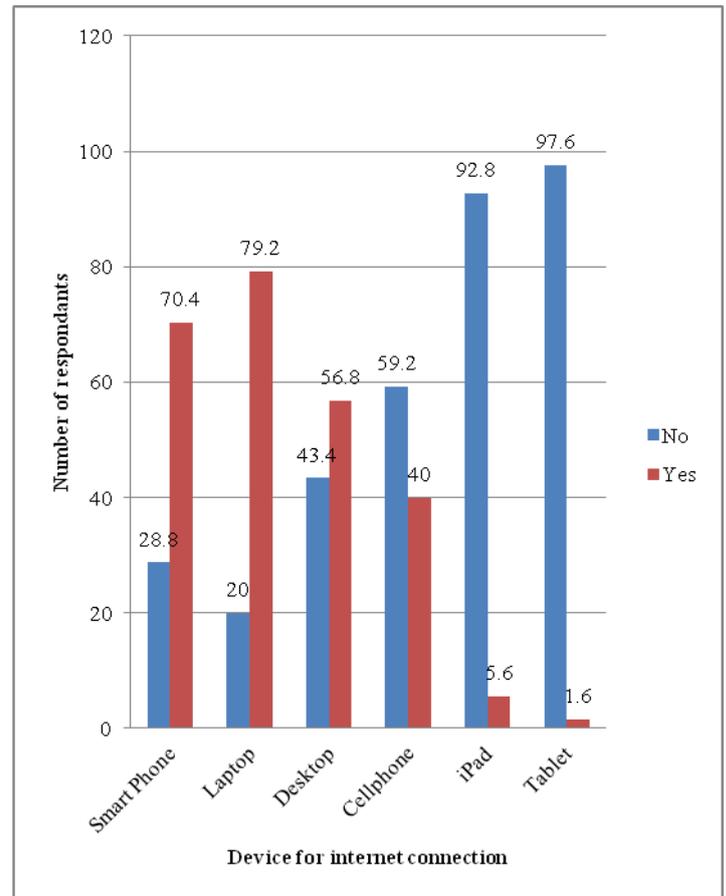


Figure 1. Devices used for internet connection

Our results seem to suggest that most of the students (64.8%) access internet from computer labs on campus. This is shown in Figure 2 below.

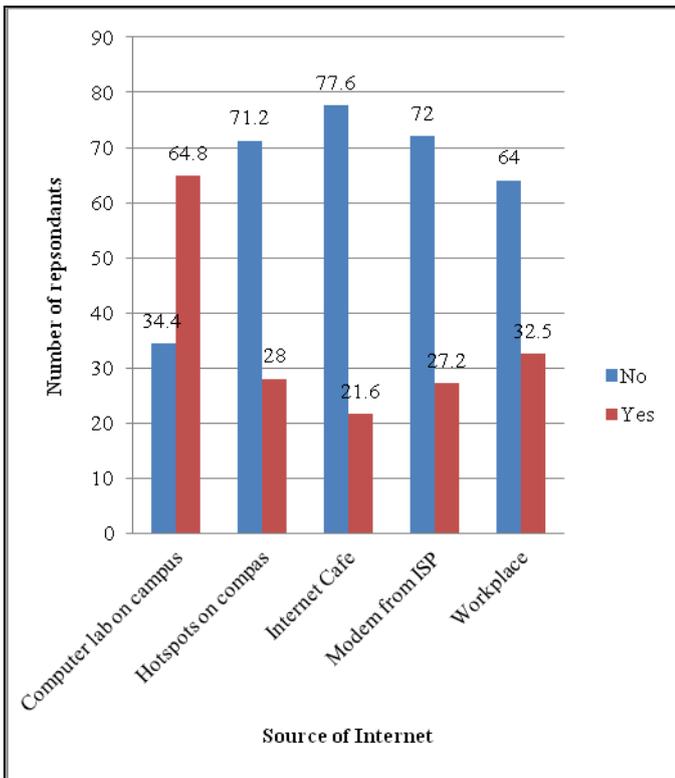


Figure 2. Where learners access internet from

Table V below shows the frequency of access to the Internet. From that table it is clear that 87.2 percent of the participants had access to the internet at least once a day. This is an indication that access to internet is not a problem among respondents.

TABLE V. FREQUENCY OF ACCESS TO INTERNET

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	1	.8	.8	.8
once a day	8	6.4	6.4	7.2
several times per day	100	80.0	80.0	87.2
several times per month	2	1.6	1.6	88.8
several times per week	14	11.2	11.2	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Table VI below shows the distribution of learners with or without social networking profiles. The results suggest that a bigger percentage (96.8) of the respondents have a social networking profile.

TABLE VI. FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF LEARNERS WITH OR WITHOUT A SNS PROFILE

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	1	.8	.8	.8
no	3	2.4	2.4	3.2
yes	121	96.8	96.8	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

From Figure 3 below, it is clear that most learners use Facebook (93.6%) and Myspace (83.2%).

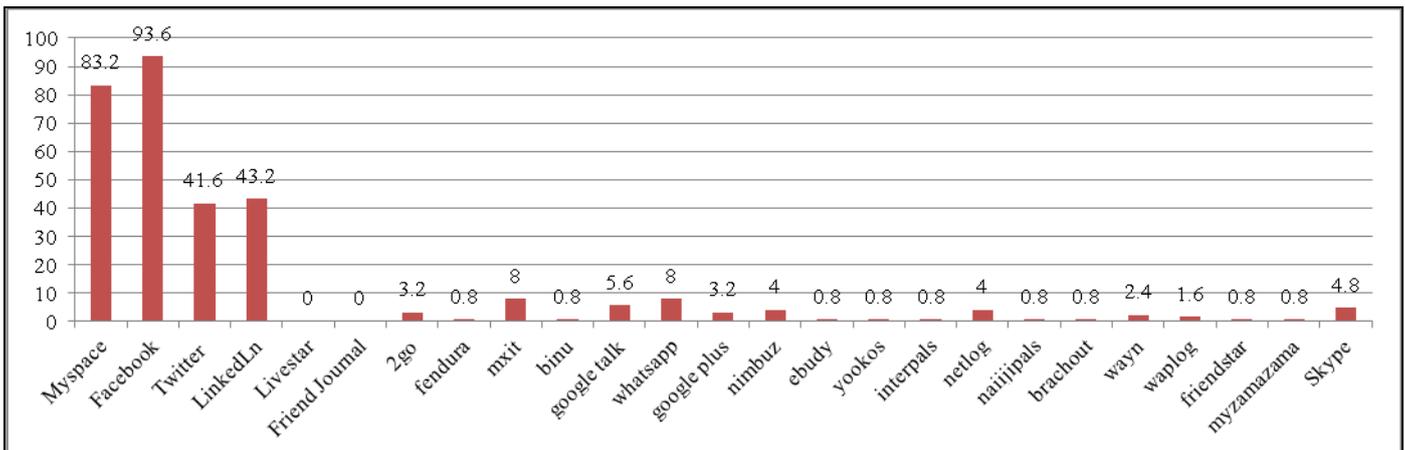


Figure 3. Use of Social networking Sites

Figure 3 above also shows that other social networking sites which are being used by learners even though they are not being used widely include LinkedIn (43.2%) and Twitter (41.6 %). Other applications which seem to be promising include whatsapp, skype, mixit and google talk.

In terms of session length, results indicate that learners spend most of their time on Facebook. This is shown in Figure 4 below.

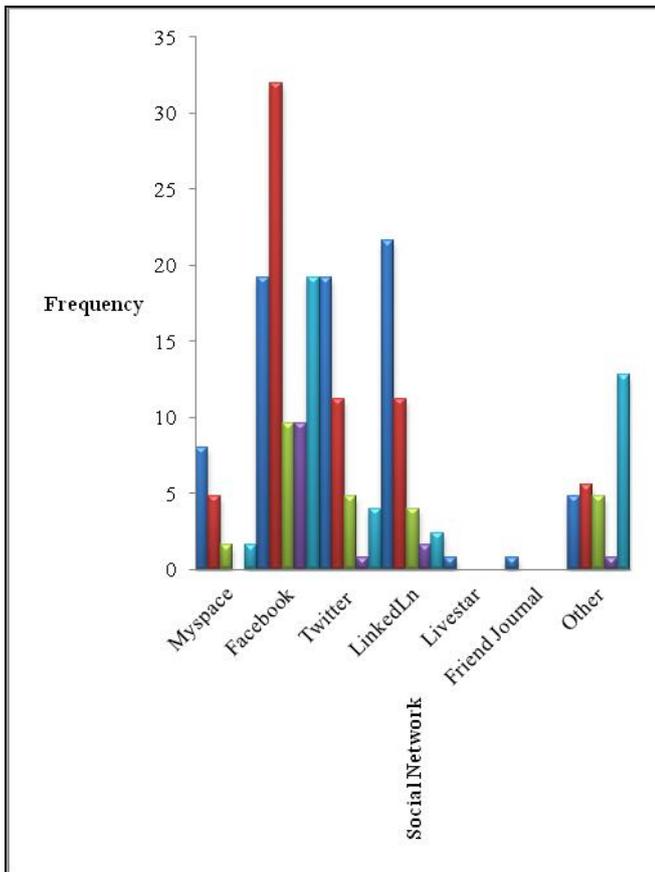


Figure 4. Session Length for each SNS

When respondents were asked to rank websites according to preference if they log on to a computer with unrestricted access to Internet, the findings are shown in Table VII below. From that table it is self evident that when students preferred social networking sites to other sites.

TABLE VII. PRIORITY FOR WEBSITES

Site	Priority
Online newspapers (Herald, Newsday, H-metro etc)	3
Social Networking Sites (Facebook, LinkedIn, Myspace etc)	1
E-mail accounts (Gmail, yahoo, hotmail, webmail, etc)	2
Ecommerce (car junction, Zimbabwe classifieds etc)	4
Other specify.....	5

When respondents were asked to indicate what they use social networking sites for, it emerged out that most learners (31%) use social networking sites for social activities. However, if we combine those learners who use social networking sites for education in general (21%) and those who use it for specific school work (17%) we get a percentage greater than that of learners who use social networking sites for social activities. In total 38 percent of the learners use social networking sites for education. This is shown in Figure 5 below.

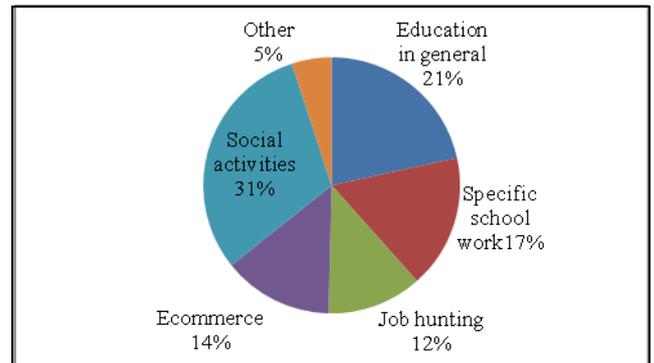


Figure 5. Uses of Social Networking Sites

Figure 6 below shows the time in hours per week spent by learners on various activities. From the graph it can be deduced that most of the learners (67.8 percent) spend less time on social activities and an above average proportion (40.2 percent) spend more than 10 hours per week on specific school work and education.

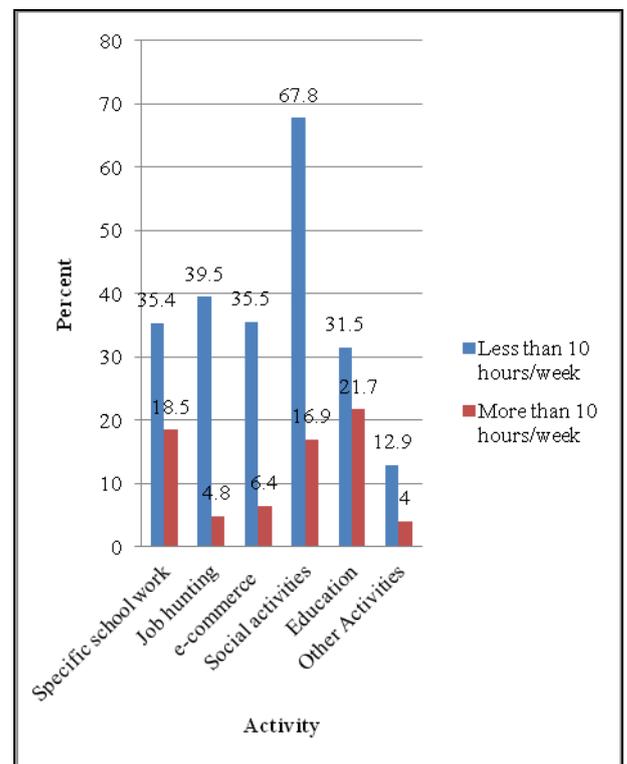


Figure 6. Time spent on various activities.

As regards use of social networking sites in education, it was found out that 76.6 percent of the respondents indicated that social networking sites should be used in higher education. This information is presented in Table VIII below. Many reasons were cited as to why these technologies should be used in higher education, chief among them were, allowing sharing of educational information (37.6 percent of the respondents cited this) and fast way of disseminating information in higher

education (13.6 percent cited this). However, those respondents who were against use of social networking sites for education were more concerned about security and privacy issues.

TABLE VIII. SHOULD SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES BE USED FOR EDUCATION?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	7	5.6	5.6	5.6
N/A	1	.8	.8	6.5
No	21	17.0	17.0	23.4
Yes	95	76.6	76.6	100.0
Total	124	100.0	100.0	

With regards to use of social networking sites by their lecturers, students indicated that most lecturers use social networking sites to communicate assignments however they also indicated that the biggest number of lecturers do not use social networking sites to communicate class discussions. This is shown in Figure 7 below.

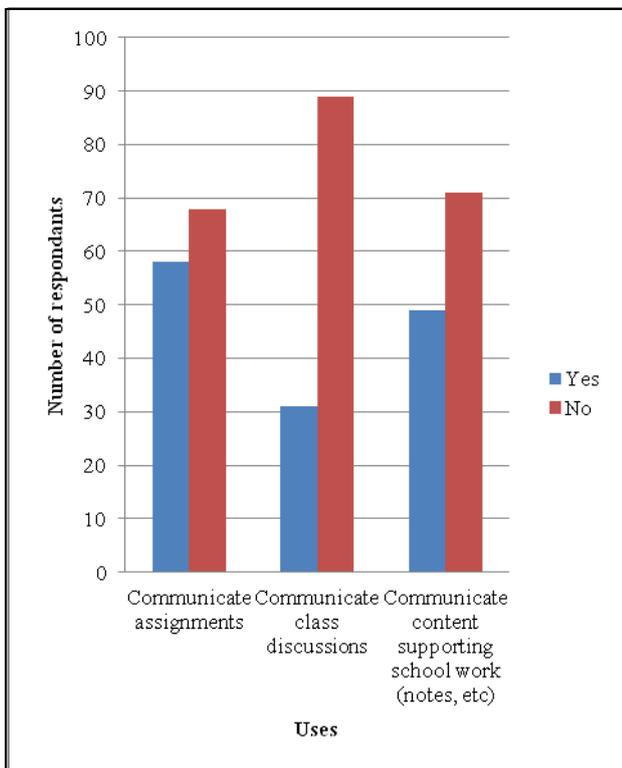


Figure 7. Uses of SNSs by Lecturers

On use of Social networking sites in conducting group projects or assignments, it emerged out that 54.8 percent of the respondents use social networking sites in carrying out group projects or assignments. This is shown in Table IX below

TABLE IX. USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES IN GROUP PROJECTS OR ASSIGNMENTS

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	4	3.2	3.2	3.2
No	52	42.0	42.0	45.2
Yes	68	54.8	54.8	100.0
Total	124	100.0	100.0	

Of all those students who use SNSs in carrying out group projects or assignments, only 3 percent indicated that use of Social networking sites in doing group work is not useful. This is shown in Figure 8 below.

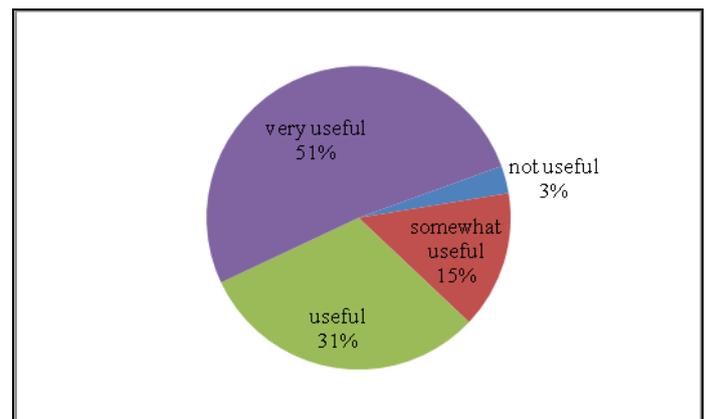


Figure 8. Usefulness of SNSs in Group projects and Assignments

As regards banning of social networking sites in universities, 87.9 percent of the respondents were against the banning of social networking sites in universities. This is shown in Table X below.

TABLE X. SHOULD SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES BE BANNED IN UNIVERSITIES?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	4	3.2	3.2	3.2
N/A	1	.8	.8	4.0
No	109	87.9	87.9	91.9
Yes	10	8.0	8.0	100.0

Table XI below summaries and ranks the benefits learners enjoy from using social networking sites. From the results, it is clear that 26 percent of the respondents indicated that they developed technology proficiency skills while 22 percent indicated that use of social networking sites enhanced their social skills. It should be noted that only 2 percent of the

respondents indicated that social networking sites facilitate group projects.

TABLE XI. BENEFITS FOR USING SNSs

Benefits	Percent
Improve technology proficiency	26
Enhance social skills	22
Communicate in new ways with new people	14
Foster learning	7
Improved receptivity to new and diverse ideas	7
Learning can extend beyond classroom hours	7
Multimodal communication	6
Improve creativity and innovativeness	5
Learn new things in new ways	3
Facilitate group projects	2
Other benefits	1
Total	100

With regards to skills acquired by learners through use of social networking sites, it was found out that most (74 %) of the students developed communication skills as a result of using social networking sites. This was followed by technology proficiency skills and research skills. A very small percentage of the students (8 %) indicated that they did not gain any skills as a result of using social networking sites. This information is indicated in Figure 9 below.

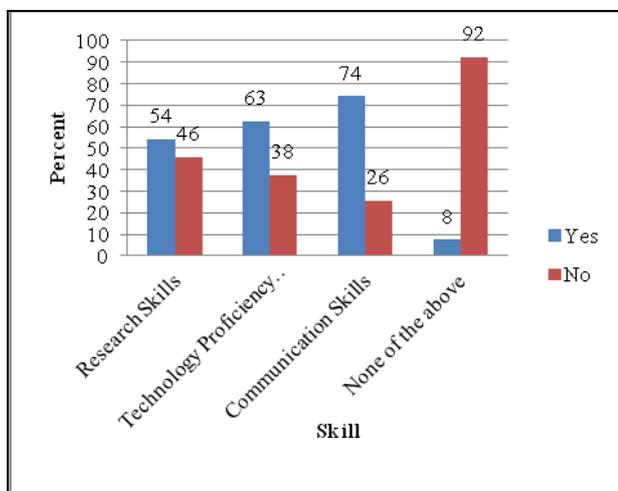


Figure 9. Skills developed through use of SNSs

## VII. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

### A. Social Networking sites being used in higher education

Research results presented in the previous section seem to suggest that Facebook is the social networking technology that is widely used by students in higher education. Results also point to the fact that students in higher education spend considerable amount of time on Facebook. Further, research findings seem also to indicate that apart from Facebook, students also use Myspace quite often. However other social networking technologies are not being used widely. This finding confirms the results in [12] that, at present, the two most popular social networking sites are Facebook and MySpace. Similar sentiments were echoed in [21] that the most

famous in the world of social networks are Facebook, Twitter and MySpace. It must however be noted that even though our findings confirm the fact that Facebook and Myspace are the most popular sites, the results do not agree with findings in [21] on Twitter. This is probably because Twitter is used mainly to establish professional networks therefore students do not use it quite often.

### B. Uses of Social Networking technologies in higher education

Regarding uses of social networking sites, it emerged out that the majority of students use social networking sites for education that is in general and for specific school work. Also, it was found out that most of the students who use social networking sites for education use social networking sites in carrying out group projects and assignments and have been found to be very useful in conducting group work. However, it also emerged out that a good number of students use social networking sites for social activities. Our findings confirm results in [8] that the topic of most conversation at social networking sites is education and 60 percent of the students maintain that they use social networking sites to discuss about education topics and more than 50 percent use social networking sites to discuss about specific schoolwork. The only difference is in terms of figures; our results suggest that 38 percent of the learners use social networking sites for education in general and 17 percent use social networking sites to discuss about specific schoolwork. This difference might be attributable to variations in introduction of these social networking sites in developing and developed countries. As regards use of social networking sites in facilitating group projects, our findings are in sync with findings in [20] that NING (a social networking site mostly used in academic circles) is excellent for facilitating group projects.

Results relating to the extent to which social networking sites are being used in higher education seem to suggest that social networking sites dominate other websites. They are closely followed by e-mail accounts in terms of popularity.

### C. Benefits of Social Networking sites

With regards to the benefits that students gain by using social networking sites, it emerged out that students gain a lot from using social networking sites. However, the three benefits that topped the list were, social networking sites improve technology proficiency, enhance social skills and help students communicate in new ways with new people. To a greater extent, our research findings are congruent with findings in [9] that there is increasing evidence that social networking sites improve technology proficiency, enhance social skills, and foster learning. Our findings point to the fact that social networking sites help students communicate in new ways with new people, this is to some extent congruent with findings in [11] that many students are using new media and technologies to create new things in new ways, learn new things in new ways, and communicate in new ways with new people. It must be noted also that, even though our results suggest that social networking sites help learners create new things in new ways, this benefit was ranked very low. Also, our results do not agree with results in [11] on the fact that social networking sites help

students learn things in new ways. Our results instead agree with what was found out in [9] that educational networking has the potential to improve student learning.

#### D. Skills acquired from use of social networking sites

Lastly, in relation to skills gained by students, it was found out those students who use social networking sites gain some skills. These skills were ranked and in the ranking communication skills topped the list, followed by technology proficiency skills and research skills. Our results seem not to agree with what was found in [30], [31], [32] and [33] that social networking sites improve academic writing proficiency. However, our findings are congruent with results in [25] that students who regularly use SNSs enhanced technology skills, creativity, and receptivity to new and diverse views and communication skills. Even though our results seem to agree, there is a difference in terms of ranking these skills. While our findings ranked communication skills as number one it was ranked last in [25] in which technology skills were ranked as number one. From these findings it is clear that students gain some education related skills from using social networking sites even though the importance of these skills vary from one setup to another.

### VIII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This research sought to explore the use of social networking sites in higher education. It looked at the social networking sites which are being used in higher education, the extent to which they are being used, the benefits and skills gained from use of social networking sites in higher education. The study followed a descriptive research design wherein a questionnaire was used as the main research tool. Data was gathered from 124 university students from five institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. The collected data was analysed using SPSS. An analysis of the results seems to suggest that the most popular social networking sites in higher education in Zimbabwe are Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn and Twitter in that order. Further, it was also concluded that learners used social networking technologies for academic purposes and they mainly used them to conduct group work. It was also concluded that the most pronounced benefits of social networking sites include that social networking technologies improve learners' technology proficiency, enhance learners' social skills and help learners to communicate in new ways with new people in that order. Lastly, it was found out that students acquire some skills as a result of using social networking sites. Some of the skills cited include communication skills, research skills and technology proficient skills.

### IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the research findings, it came out clearly that social networking sites are being used extensively in higher education and as such it is hereby recommended that the institutions of higher learning should take learning to where the student is that is on the social network. Further to that, it is also recommended that institutions of higher learning in developing countries like Zimbabwe should fully integrate social media in the learning process because learners gain a lot of useful skills from use of

social media. Lastly, we recommend that social media should not be banned in higher education because of the benefits and skills that learners gain from using them. To this effect, it is therefore recommended that universities that banned use of social networking sites should lift the ban and all universities are hereby advised to take centre stage in promoting the use of social networking sites in education.

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Appendices

**SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE ON USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE.**

We, a group of researchers at the University of Zimbabwe are surveying the use of Social Networking Sites (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Myspace, etc) among Zimbabwean student population (tertiary). We will be grateful if you could kindly fill up this questionnaire for the survey. You are rest assured that all information will solely be used for academic purposes and will be treated confidentially.

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

1. **What is your gender? (Tick one box only)** Male  Female
2. **How old are you? (Tick one box only)**  
 15 – 20  21 – 25  26 – 30  31 – 35   
 36 – 40  41 – 45  46 – 50  or 50
3. **What is the name of your university?**
4. **Which year of study are you in? (Tick one box only)** 1<sup>st</sup>  2<sup>nd</sup>  3<sup>rd</sup>  4<sup>th</sup>  5<sup>th</sup>
5. **Which of the following devices do you use to connect to the Internet? (You may tick more than one box)**  
 Laptop  Desktop computer  Cell phone  Smart phone   
 iPad  Other specify:.....
6. **Where do you normally access the Internet from? (You may tick more than one box)**  
 Computer lab on campus  Hotspots on campus  Internet Cafe   
 Workplace  Use modem from ISF  Other   
 specify:.....
7. **How often do you access the internet? (Tick one box only)**  
 Several times per day  Once a day  Several times per week   
 Once a week  Several times per month  Once per month   
 I don't use the Internet

**EXPERIENCE IN USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES**

1. **Do you have a Social Networking account or profile? (Tick one box)** Yes  No
2. **If you answered YES to question 1, which of the following accounts do you have? (You may tick more than one box)**  
 Mysapce  Facebook  Twitter  LinkedIn  Livestar  FriendJournal   
 Other Social Networking accounts, specify:.....

3. **For each account you have, specify the frequency of visits/number of times you log to your account. (Tick one box for each account you have)**

Frequency	Social Networking Site						
	Mysapce	Facebook	Twitter	LinkedIn	Livestar	FriendJournal	Other
Few times in a year							
Once in month							
Manytimes per month							
Once in a day							
Manytimes in a day							

4. **For each account you have, specify the length of the session or time you spend logged on. (Mark using x one box for each account you have)**

Length of session	Social Networking Site						
	Mysapce	Facebook	Twitter	LinkedIn	Livestar	FriendJournal	Other
Less that 15 minutes							
15 to 60 minutes							
1 to 2 hours							
2 to 3 hours							
More than 3 hours							

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1. When you log on to a computer with unrestricted access to Internet, which sites do you visit in order of preference? (use 1 to indicate the most preferred and 5 the least preferred)

Site	Priority
Online newspapers (Herald, Newsday, H-metro etc)	
Social Networking Sites (Facebook, LinkedIn, Myspace etc)	
E-mail accounts (Gmail, yahoo, hotmail, webmail, etc)	
Ecommerce (car junction, Zimbabwe classifieds etc)	
Other specify.....	

**USES OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES**

1. What do you Social Networking Sites for?

Use	Mark using x, if you use them for this activity
Education in general	
Specific school work (assignment, project)	
Job hunting	
Ecommerce	
Social activities	
Other activities (specify).....	

2. How many hours per week do you spend on each of the activities you ticked in question 1 above? (Mark using x one box for each activity you use Social Networking Sites for)

Hours Per week	Specific school work	Job hunting	e-commerce	Social activities	Education	Other Activities
Less than 5 hours						
5 to 10 hours						
10 to 15 hours						
15 to 20 hours						
More than 20 hours						

3. Do you think Social Networking Sites should be used for education? (Tick one box)

Yes  No

4. Justify your answer to question 3
- .....
- .....
- .....

1. Which of the following are uses of Social Networking sites by your lecturers? (You may tick more than one box)

Communicate assignments  Communicate content supporting school work (notes, etc)   
Communicate class discussions  Other, specify.....

2. Have you ever joined Social Networking groups (news, e-commerce, education, spiritual matters, and specific school work) before? (Tick one box)  Yes  No

3. If you have ever joined Social Networking groups, list the groups in order of preference.

- i. ....
- ii. ....
- iii. ....
- iv. ....
- v. ....
- vi. ....
- vii. ....

4. If you have joined Social Networking groups before, have you posted anything in any of these groups? (Tick one box)  Yes  No

5. Have you ever used Social Networking Sites in carrying out group projects or assignments? (Tick one box) Yes  No

6. If your answer to question 5 was yes, what was the extent or degree of usefulness of Social Networking Sites in carrying out the work? (Tick one box)

Very useful  useful  somewhat use ful  not use ful

7. Social networking Sites should be banned in Universities. Do you agree? (Tick one box) Yes  No

8. What skills have you developed by using Social Networking Sites? (You may tick more than one box)

Research Skills  Technology Proficiency Skills  Communication Skills

None of the above  Other, specify.....

**BENEFITS OF USING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES**

1. The following are benefits associated with use of Social Networks, rank them according to importance (1 is the most important and 11 is the least important)

Benefit	Your Ranking
Improve technology proficiency	
Enhance social skills	
Foster learning	
Improve creativity and innovativeness	
Learn new things in new ways	
Communicate in new ways with new people	
Collaborative problem solving	
Multimodal communication	
Learning can extend beyond classroom hours	
Facilitate group projects	
Improved receptivity to new and diverse ideas	

**STUDENTS' SKILL WITH VARIOUS COMPUTER APPLICATIONS**

Indicate your level of proficiency/skill in using each of the following technologies. (Mark Using an x.)

	No skill	Very low	Low	High	Very high
Wikis					
e-learning platforms					
blogs					
Facebook					
LinkedIn					
Twitter					
E-mail					
e-learning platforms					
Instant Messenger					

Thank you for completing the questionnaire.