**Chapter 2: Literature review**

**2.1 Introduction**

This research investigated the impact of SNSs on the Najran University students’ attitudes towards EFL. So, there are two areas in this research that need to be expanded on: SNSs and attitudes. The first part of this chapter concentrated on SNSs and how they were already be used in the educational process in various context. The second part of this chapter examined the attitudes and its importance. A series of past studies will be reviewed and linked with the objectives of this present study. Moreover, full definitions of the variables mentioned above will be included into this chapter as well, mainly to provide a rough explanation to the readers and make sure that the technical terms are not alien to them.

The integration and application of networked technology in institutions of higher learning has gained popularity in recent times. Through the utilization of the World Wide Web (WWW), new learning opportunities have arisen. Learning and teaching styles are evolving constantly, and the tools to accommodate these new practices are changing. Computer-mediated social network sites (SNSs) have become part of the life of university students. Computer-mediated communication in the form of asynchronous communication and synchronous communication has transformed learning. Their emphasis is on collaboration and communication. Web-based tools, such as wikis and online forums are complementary to the educational technology used to facilitate a shared learning environment. These tools form the basis of the current evolution of the Internet and are based on the premise that individuals derive their competence through the connections they make (Dogoriti, et.al 2014; Siemens, 2004). Researchers on English as Foreign Language (EFL) learning have researched on how students have appropriated SNSs as a language acquisition tool in EFL, especially in non-English speaking countries. However, SNSs use is not specifically designed to offer English language learning and instruction, which can create significant problems for students and instructors. The Literature review critically evaluates research on the different web-based technologies built around social media and how well they fit into the use in EFL learning and acquisition in multiple learning contexts.

**Social Network Sites Tools, Techniques and Theoretical Approaches**

Many forms of technology have been used in the field of education. One of these forms is Web 2.0 that was developed from Web 1.0. Web 1.0 generally includes authentic materials, text, pictures, audio, video, webpages, discussion forum, email, chat, photos, music and video. Web 2.0 refers to live materials, RSS (Really Simple Syndication), Flickr, podcast, videocast, blogs, wikis blogs, online discussion boards, social networking, and so forth (Shih, 2011; Alm, 2006). Web 2.0 technologies offers structures that can be used in learning environments. Its applications offer new channels for learners to receive and exchange informative, and constructive feedback from peers and instructors.

Recently, social perspectives on learning have increasingly inspired research. Constructivist and social learning theories inspire numerous studies on online learning (Shih, 2011). Since the 1990s, constructivism has made a strong influence on education, particularly in the field of instructional technology. Social constructivist theory assumes that students act within a social environment, which is then followed by reflecting, abstracting, and increasing experiential knowledge. Within the principles of the constructivist learning theory, meaningful interactions in a learning environment are designed to enhance meaning, including sharing various perspectives and experiences in communities of practice (Kamnoetsin, 2014). Social media is a tool that provides remote social interactions between individuals, which explains why constructivist theorists have focused on this powerful tool in their studies.

Pedagogy, technology, and social interaction are the key factors for a technology-enhanced learning environment. Thus, blended learning that combines the Web 2.0 technologies and online peer assessment with face-to-face instruction can be a new and feasible means for instructors and students to enhance their performance and satisfaction (Shih, 2011). In the current digital environment, there exist challenges on using communication technologies such as social media by students and instructors in education. Despite the high potential of social media tools to improve learning, they are not optimized for the classroom but rather for general social interactions. Education institutions face the challenge of adapting the social media tools for classroom instruction without compromising student performance.

Within an educational setting, information and communication technologies have stimulated new pedagogical practices that redefine the predictable methods of learning and teaching. One new format of these new technologies that has been viewed as an active force among teachers, learners and information professionals is the social media platform. Social media platforms support collaboration, provide significant sources of information and active engagement among participants and communication. These tools transform learners into active content creators from passive receivers of information (Charlene, L., et.al, 2016). This notion of using social media as an educational tool has been carried over to the business world. Baird and Fisher (2005) are credited with conducting the first major examination of potential uses of social media in education. They identified key advantages that social media platforms provide to today's neo-millennial learners. Their study readily points out that today's students have been raised in the world of interactive media, the Internet, and digital messaging technologies. Therefore, they have very different expectations and learning styles than previous generations. This net-centric generation values their ability to use the Web to create a self-paced, customized, on-demand learning path that includes multiple forms of interactive, social, and self-publishing media tools (Goel & Singh, 2016). Teachers who want to utilize social media in their academic courses to promote student learning should be prepared to support students and be active participants in the collaborative learning community.

**Research on Social Media Use in Classroom and National Contexts**

Al-Sharqi, Hashim, and Kutbi (2015) conducted a study to evaluate the similarities and differences between art and science university students concerning their perceptions of the effect of social media on behavior. The research involved 2605 male and female participants of different ages, but all of them were college students. The findings indicated that art students were more immersed in and familiar with social media use than the science students. The study further showed that learners benefited from the use of networking platforms. For the art students, being online provided them with a channel to express their ideas, whereas, for the science students, the platform helped them to understand other people’s opinions. The students identified how networking had helped them to learn how people think. Additionally, social media enabled them to connect with different communities, and it improved their open-mindedness. By being on SNSs, boredom was reduced, and the monotony resulting from daily routine was alleviated. On the downside, distraction and unproductivity were also identified as adverse effects of social media (Al-Sharqi, Hashim & Kutbi, 2015). Some students cited mental dullness and introversion as negative impacts of social networks.

The modern world revolves around technology. Hence, in order to keep up with the pace of the highly dynamic world, instructors should incorporate technology into educational tools. One way of achieving this integration is using social media. In a study conducted to investigate how social networking sites can be used in language classrooms, the researcher, Eren (2012), an instructor at a Turkish university, found that networking sites are a potential educational tool, but the traditional classroom continues to be a backbone of foreign language education. Eren’s (2012) research involved 48 undergraduate students who had been enrolled in a mandatory one-year English course. Besides trying to determine the applicability of social networks in foreign language classrooms, he explored the attitudes that students had towards the use of Facebook in a language-learning classroom. The research found that students had a positive attitude towards the use of Facebook to supplement traditional foreign language class.

Networking media provides students with tools for performing many tasks. Group discussions, resource sharing, information access, and entertainment are some of the examples of the purposes that social networking serves. As demonstrated in the study by Al Samadani and Ibnian (2015), interactions between students over networking platforms have had both positive and negative implications. Furthermore, the researchers argued that the effects of social media on students are persistent in the short and long terms. Most of the social networks also use English as the first language, and, even for those that have been customized, English knowledge is necessary (AbuSaʼaleek, 2015). Therefore, as a first learning step, these networks enable students to learn Basic English terminologies that are used in social media.

The study by Al Samadani and Ibnian (2015) aimed at exploring the attitudes of university students towards learning EFL. Moreover, the research sought to evaluate the factors that affect students’ attitudes towards EFL acquisition. On a broader scale, the study aimed at linking students’ attitudes to their academic performance by considering their grade point average (GPA). Questionnaires were used for data collection, and they had questions that measured students’ attitudes towards EFL. Additionally, the researchers conducted interviews with students who had majored in English. Among the factors that affected students’ attitudes towards EFL learning were the nature of communication and interaction through social networks. The students said that the use of platforms, such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Pinterest, and Whatsapp encouraged them to learn English to access vital information in a simpler way. Concerning the relation between attitudes towards EFL learning and academic performance, the researchers found that students with a positive viewpoint towards learning EFL have better performances than those with negative perspectives. Students with a good stance towards learning EFL are likely to put more effort in English and other subjects to get jobs and scholarships in foreign countries (AbuSaʼaleek, 2015).

A study that is concerned with social media and English as a second language is AbuSaʼaleeks’ (2015) research. Although he focused on Facebook, the information from the study is vital for studies related to other sites and EFL education. In the study, AbuSaʼaleek sought to explain how Facebook has been used as a learning model to enhance English learning. The research aimed to explore the perceptions of students towards learning English as a second language in the context of Facebook. The author used a sample of 65 participants for the research, and the study yielded results that showed that students believe that Facebook is a powerful tool for the online teaching and learning of English as a second language. In particular, Facebook supports, facilitates, and encourages students’ English language learning. Additionally, the research findings showed that the confidence and motivation of students towards the acquisition of English speaking skills improved after using Facebook as a learning tool. AbuSaʼaleek (2015) recommended that teachers should use social media networks as teaching platforms to encourage students to learn English.

AbuSaʼaleek’s study had the limitations of a small sample size, and it focused on a single social media network. Nevertheless, his research provided valuable information. As identified in other studies, social media use improves English language learning in four distinct dimensions. First, it enhances the confidence of students. As they interact with each other through the networks, their self-esteem and confidence improve. Its effect on attitudes has something to do with "self" concepts. Social media can affect the self-esteem of students either positively or negatively (Al-Sharqi et al., 2015). Another area that is affected by online interactions is motivation. The entertainment aspect of these platforms encourages people to continue using them. Therefore, they acquire more knowledge. Third, language improvement emanates from students’ use of social media. As mentioned earlier, most of the communication on the social networks has been developed in English, and, as students try to figure out what the messages mean, their level of English comprehension improves. Finally, the overall perspective of students change when they realize that they are making progress in the English learning process.

Another study that incorporated Facebookin an English as a Foreign Language context is Omar et al.’s (2012) investigation of English learners’ use of *Facebook* groups in activities that required carrying out various tasks. A sample of 28 students for the study was enrolled in an English language communication course at a Malaysian University. Students were divided into seven groups, each based on a theme chosen by the learners and the instructor. After undertaking the task, the students’ patterns of participation were analyzed and their views regarding Facebookwere collected through an open-ended ques­tionnaire. As indicated by the results of the study, Omar et al. (2012) found that the students displayed a high-level of participation, with each student av­eraging 18 entries, three times the number that was required. Moreover, the authors discovered that 100 percent of the questionnaire respondents had favorable views towards the use of Facebook in an information-sharing task (Omar et al., 2012). An important finding for the research was that many of the respondents expressed that Facebook allowed them to have free and comfortable communication with their group members especially those who lacked confidence for face-to-face interaction and those who were shy.

Lin et al. (2014) carried out an investigation on the effects of blogging as an approach to journal writing in a university English as a Foreign Language class in Taiwan. The respondents were divided into two major groups. The experimental group was obligated to create a blog on a daily basis, while the control group utilized a more traditional journal that involved writing down on a paper. At the conclusion of the 16-week period, both groups were tested through a questionnaire and a writing test. The experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in writing quality. Although students in both groups exhibited positive attitudes about journal writing, there was a significant difference between the two groups on the subject of students’ anxiety towards writing. The experimental group experienced considerably less anxiety than the control group. The research also indicated that the use of blogs had a positive impact on student perceptions and attitudes towards learning a second language (Lin, et.al, 2014). Charlene et.al. (2016) made similar conclusions. Lin et al. (2014) concentrated particularly on blogs, which is rarely used by Saudi students, while this study investigated the impact of all SNSs on the students’ attitudes towards EFL.

Social networks have become increasingly popular in all parts of the world. Due to their multi-dimensional use, they have found wide usage, including the educational institutions. However, the learning functions of social networks are still limited. These platforms have the potential of creating new opportunities and contexts to increase student motivation for learning (Al-Sharqi et al., 2015). In fact, according to Akbari, Eghtesad, and Simons (2014), social networks have the ability to increase the motivation for students interested in EFL. In their study, which explored the potential of using social networks in learning other languages, the authors found that the mind-set of students towards foreign dialects before exposure to social media was different to the perspective after attending some classes. The participants involved in the study were from Iran, and they were pursuing Ph.D. courses. However, the results can be applied to university students in different parts of the world. The primary objective of the research was to investigate the mentality of students towards the use of networking sites when learning foreign languages. Akbari et al. (2014) concluded that social networks were useful tools for learning foreign dialects.

The ease of communication and the ability to share knowledge are vital determinants of the sentiments that students develop towards a social network. When these systems are used as conventional educational tools, research shows that the motivation of learners towards the social network improves by the end of the course (Al-Sharqi et al., 2015). Other studies have confirmed that social networks are useful teaching tools, especially for linguistic knowledge content (Al Samadani & Ibnian, 2015; AbuSaʼaleek, 2015).

Goel and Singh (2016) have conducted a study on how students’ use of social media influenced their academic performance in management. The study provides a general overview on how social media can influence student academic achievement in a particular field unrelated to English as a Foreign Language education. However, the study provides insights on how social media is useful in inculcating positive attitudes towards a specific subject, notwithstanding English learning. The researcher focused their study on Delhi, India. This region is demographically and socioeconomically different from Saudi Arabia but the inclusion of private colleges and universities, which require significant monetary resources to get into, using a purposive sampling technique, narrows the socioeconomic differences between the two countries. Furthermore, the quantitative empirical methods featuring descriptive analysis made the research valid as a yardstick to provide an overview on how social media can influence English learning (Goel & Singh, 2016). Goel and Singh (2016) found that social media was a useful tool for exchanging academic information between students, thereby increasing the potential for academic success. The researchers found that encouraging social media as a tool for information sharing could improve academic performance not only in management department but also in diverse academic areas could improve student performance.

Al-Qallaf and Al-Mutairi (2015) focused on English learning among foreign students. The researchers sought to understand how digital content, specifically blogs, could improve English language acquisition among students. Al-Qallaf and Al-Mutairi (2015) focused their study on Kuwait, which is demographically and socioeconomically similar to Saudi Arabia. However, a smaller sample size was used in comparison to Goel and Singh’s (2016) study. Similar to Goel and Singh (2016), Al-Qallaf and Al-Mutairi (2015) used a predominantly quantitative study in their research featuring a seven-point likert scale in data collection. A significant consideration in the study was gender, which is an important factor in Saudi Arabian education and socioeconomic landscape. Gender can influence the students’ attitudes towards social media use and consequently, their academic performance. The researchers found that the students had improved their EFL proficiency.

Social media has the advantage of providing interactivity in learning outside the classroom. The major impediment in the Shih (2011) research is that it focused on web 2.0 as the platform for social media learning. Web 3.0 is a significant improvement to Web 2.0 since it is more dynamic and compatible with mobile devices such as smartphones. Web 3.0 can track and store valuable information such as student Internet use habits. This allows the web to provide the student with appropriate content based on their Internet use behavior. It also allows using apps in mobile devices that can help with learning English. Using web 2.0, Shih (2011) found that the students were able to gain English proficiency through observing and commenting on their peers’ posts in Facebook. The study’s findings support the social constructivist theory of learning in which students acquire knowledge through their experiences interacting with their peers.

Other researchers support the general contention that social media use has positive effects on language acquisition and learning, and students generally have a positive perception of its use as an instructional tool. In Dizon’s (2015) study conducted in Japan, the study participants expressed enthusiasm for social media use in language learning. Some of the positive benefits cited by the students in the study population include ease of use, low-stress and convenience (Dizon, 2015).

**Conclusion**

The literature identified various benefits and challenges pertaining to using SNSs as an EFL learning and instructional tool. The study participants considered in the literature reviewed showed positive outcomes in various education fields such as management and EFL education. In general, the literature demonstrates a positive impact of SNSs in EFL learning in different educational and national contexts. However, There is a lack in studying the impact of SNSs on Saudi learners’ attitudes towards English. In Saudi Arabia, the fear of cultural contamination could be a significant hindrance to SNSs to have positive attitudes towards English.