

**Students' Engagement in Independent Learning and Personal Development: Issues, Attitudes and Difficulties from the Female Learners' Lived Experiences of Using Social Media in the Context of Saudi Higher Education**

Submitted by

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## **Abstract**

Personal access to digital information affects all situations in life, from lifelong learning and careers to teaching and learning practices. Recently, there has been interest in individuals' uses of social media, its association with personal and academic development, and its extensive use in both formal and informal educational contexts. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), particular research attention has been given to females' use of social media due to the significance of such easy access to their learning and development in the broader cultural context. However, little is known about the educational implications of such extended personal learning practices. For instance, the issues, attitudes and difficulties of students' engagement, and the students' changing needs and expectations under current social media influence, are still not fully understood. This research employs an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to investigate the lived learning experiences of female university students, focusing on their personal use of social media to examine current issues in students' experiences in Saudi higher education.

A group of female undergraduate learners in a Saudi higher education context were selected to offer the learners' voice and perspective on educational issues related to their own engagement. Students' personal accounts and different stories of engagement in independent learning and personal development from their use of social media have been collected through two phases. In the first phase, 20 female students participated in in-depth individual interviews and reflective diary reports. In the second phase, 12 female students participated in two focus group discussions to elicit their attitudes and opinions.

The (IPA) analysis of the data drawing from different educational theories in the literature was used to understand factors related to students' engagement and non-engagement from their different attitudes and stories of success and failure when using social media independently. Themes that emerged as drivers and motivations

leading to students' engagement in learning and personal development included self-efficacy and reflection, personal values and beliefs, awareness of opportunity, challenges and transitions, social inclusion and empowerment with learning choice. Several themes were also revealed from the personal accounts as barriers and difficulties for students' engagement, including personal negative attitudes and experiences, understanding of social media risk, information overload and distraction, organisational, pedagogical and curriculum barriers, lack of social inclusion, technical problems, and time and cost issues. The research concludes with several recommendations for improving all students' engagement under the current themes of personal and self-directed lifelong learning with matching curriculum and pedagogies adopted in this context to meet current student learning needs.

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# Chapter One: Introduction

## 1.0 Introduction

In the current digital age, everything – from our daily social lives to the ways we work and do things – is affected by the use of personal technologies and the open access to the fast flow of information and social media. Under such ubiquitous influence, the focus of this research is to develop an understanding of university students' engagement in independent learning and personal development through their own use of social media as lived daily experience, in the context of higher education in Saudi Arabia.

My interest in independent learning and personal development grew out of my own academic experiences in higher education. During the last decade, I have noticed the widespread personal access to information and the influence of social media in significantly modifying individuals' ways of learning in terms of how they obtain, share and deal with information in their lives. This fast, global influence of digital media has also changed people's engagement in personal development and shaped the ways of teaching and learning in formal education. In the context of KSA, there has been interest in the contributions of social media and information and communication technologies (ICT) to the learning and teaching processes (Al-Fahad, 2009; Al-Tarawneh, 2014; Alwagait, Shahzad & Alim, 2015). However, there is still a need to examine such radical shifts in learning practices in terms of their implications on altering learners' needs and perspectives and in terms of the difficulties they create in the educational context.

There are inevitable implications for the education sector from increased access to information and social media through the extensive proliferation of personal technologies amongst current university students. Issues in educational research need to be challenged and problematised in order to match strategies to the self-

directed learners' needs and to address the problems involved in students' modern learning experiences. Thus, the use of social media and information and communication technologies (ICT) in this research is seen as a process that is not separate from students' lives, meaning that the use of social media and technologies is not supposed to be an end in itself or a replacement for formal education or the teacher's role. Instead, the view is that improving the quality of education entails a better understanding of the new requirements of students and the challenges of the current situations in education, from the self-directed learners' lived experiences and perceptions. Little or no research in the context of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has focussed on the students' lived experience of using social media and their perspectives in terms of the factors influencing their own engagement in independent learning and personal development under recent advances. A better understanding of learners' current needs and problems can create opportunities for stakeholders in education to support all students' engagement and success. Hence this research is aimed to focus on the learner and the self-directed learning practices associated with their use of social media to better understand issues in the educational context under the current challenges. Throughout this qualitative research, my initial ideas on this subject were challenged and developed gradually with the complexity and diversity of the students' experiences and attitudes of using social media in their independent learning and personal development. Such disparities in the students' experiences directed me to explore students' engagement and non-engagement. This led this research finally to examine the issues and factors related to students' engagement and difficulties in engagement, with an aim to support students of all abilities to get benefit from such opportunities successfully.

This chapter presents a brief background of the research problem. This is followed by a presentation of the rationale for undertaking the research in the particular context, as well as the focus and overall aims of the research. The significance of the

research will then be explained. Finally, the chapter concludes by setting out the structure of the thesis.

## **1.1 Brief background to the problem**

Leaving school to join university is challenging for students who need to constantly improve their levels of engagement to achieve and succeed in higher education. Astin (1984) suggests that students' engagement is an essential indicator of success and development and defines it as the time and effort students dedicate to the academic experience; acknowledging that students' involvement has both qualitative and quantitative features. Recent research argues that proliferation in the active participation of learners in the educational systems has been linked to role of social media in supporting learners' engagement in independent learning and personal development (Hall, 2008; Hemmi, Bayne, & Land, 2009). Nevertheless, there have also been concerns and significant academic debates on such generalised impact of personal technologies or social media on students' engagement. It could be argued that these influences vary significantly from one learner to another, and can also be profoundly shaped by the educational context (Crook, 2012). For instance, research that has been conducted on university learners' experiences point to significant variations in students' uses and levels of engagement and attitudes that are difficult to evaluate (Bennett & Maton, 2010; Jones, Ramanau, Cross, & Healing, 2010; Kennedy, Judd, Churchward, Gray, & Krause, 2008). According to Bennett and Maton (2010), although most young students are eminent users of information technologies in their lives and learning, they display different attitudes and learning experiences. Such variations reveal that factors other than the use of technology, it self, are involved but not well understood. This argument is also raised by Oliver (2013), who suggests that despite the research interest in the learners' voice and experience of using information technologies, little thought has been given to understanding the learners' needs and difficulties. Other studies support the idea that

such variations in students' uses indicate a lack of formal educational support and shortage in the preparation for students (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). Under the current swift changes in learning and educational practices some studies also point to a lack of adjustment to students' needs for self-directed learning in the educational context (Crook, 2012; Hemmi et al., 2009).

Recent research has also proposed university students' personal use of social media as a lens to examine current educational issues in students' performance and engagement critically. For instance, some of these studies have explored the influence of social media on academic performance and college adjustment in the West (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield, & Fiore, 2012; Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011; Stirling, 2016). The findings of such studies also indicate significant conflicts and variations in student engagement and attitudes, with some students experiencing difficulties and negative influences on their performance.

There are significant variations and complexity in the modern learners' experiences and in student engagement in higher education, as reported in the international literature. There are also concerns about social media's impact on, and the fundamental changes in students' lives and the ways in which students engage in educational contexts. Particularly, research point to the association of such engagement and use of social media with the current emergent themes of open education, professional development and lifelong self-directed learning (Bonk, 2009; Hall, 2009; Kop & Fournier, 2011; Maloney, 2007). Thus, some studies present the personal use of social media as a lens that captures a broader conceptual view of the learner experience by bridging the gap between formal and informal education contexts (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Hall, 2009; McLoughlin & Lee, 2010; Sharpe, Beetham, & De Freitas, 2010). Such a holistic prospect of social media use in the learner experience and development presents also a window on issues related to

learner engagement and personal development in the educational context (Sharpe et al., 2010).

Based on this brief review, the main focus of this thesis is on the learner and on gaining a better understanding of the factors influencing young students' engagement in independent learning and personal development in higher education in the context of KSA. This is obtained by exploring students' engagement and non-engagement from their lived learning experiences and voices through their use of social media. Hence, social media in this research presents the vehicle to examine and understand issues related to students' engagement and development that are arising from the current influences in the higher education context.

## **1.2 Rationale for conducting the research**

The fast socio-technical change and its association with lifelong self-directed learning and careers is a matter of concern in global and local higher education contexts. Recently, there has been an increased focus in Saudi higher education on improving the quality of graduates' preparation through equipping students with professional knowledge and attitudes that would improve their identities for future career prospects and lifelong development (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). This was translated through different practical steps for supporting students' engagement in self-directed learning, academic performance, and personal development. As discussed, the pervasive digital media in different contexts of learning have produced complexity in practices in Saudi higher education alongside this there is also an interest in improving students' engagement. However, there is still lack of conclusions on how to support students' self-directed learning. For instance, Al-Fahad's (2009) study suggests that students present positive attitudes towards engagement in independent learning when faculty offer formal support via personal devices and social media. However, several researchers in this context have

identified a negative relationship between students' grades and their utilisation of social media in Arab and KSA universities (Al-Tarawneh, 2014; Alwagait, Shahzad & Alim, 2015). Some of the student problems with engagement can be linked to the institutions' lack of pedagogical adaptation to the current needs of self-directed learners. Al-Shehri (2010) suggests some sources of students' difficulties grow from the university environment and the curriculum itself. There can be mismatches between current students' self-directed learning practices that are influenced by accessing digital information, and the traditional formal setting and organisational culture (Crook, 2012). Traditional methods in which the instructor is seen as the primary source of learning promotes a culture that can lead to a superficial attitude to learning and less commitment to self-directed, lifelong learning and development (Allison, 2006). An organisational and social culture that relies on rote learning can also be a barrier to students' active engagement regardless of the availability and the widespread use of technologies in this context (Alebaikan, 2010; Alibrahim, 2014; Hamdan, 2014).

The link between social media use and themes of careers, personal development, and lifelong learning have been observed outside the realm of formal institutions through Saudis' increased activity on these platforms. Based on statistics, 70% of the population in KSA are active in social media (Arab Social Media Report, 2015).

University students are amongst the age groups with the highest social media usage in KSA (Aljasir, 2015). There has also been an increase in the formal use of social media amongst faculty in Saudi universities (Al-Khalifa & Garcia, 2013). However, despite the significant contributions of social media for supporting engagement in higher education, there are also concerns about some students who face difficulties in their studies influenced by social media (Al-Tarawneh, 2014; Alwagait et al. , 2015). Students who find it challenging to engage in independent learning, for whatever the reason, will find it even harder to engage in the academic study due to

the impact of social media and personal devices. In such a case, the student's problems and needs remain masked to educators due to the complexity of current practices with the variations amongst the student population.

Social media offers important educational tools either is used formally and informally, and indeed they turn learning and education to become continues process in the students' lives (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Hall, 2009; McLoughlin & Lee, 2010; Sharpe, Beetham, & De Freitas, 2010). An in-depth understanding of students' engagement in a university environment from their own experiences of using social media would add to research knowledge, in this context, on how to support self-directed learners' engagement positively and successfully. The findings of students' experiences and voices would also be of interest to policymakers and faculty members seeking to gain insight into the influences of fast-changing practices in education in order to better understand and improve the underlying policies to facilitate and support all students' development and success.

### **1.3 Focus and aims of research**

The aim of this qualitative interpretative research is to explore the issues, attitudes, and difficulties relating to students' engagement in independent learning and personal development from the learners' lived experiences and perceptions, in a higher education context in KSA. The study adopts an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) to explore different learners through their lived experience of using social media as a significant event in their studies as well as social and academic lives.

This research exploration relied on students' personal accounts of their daily lived experiences of engagement in learning and interpretations of using social media. Underpin such uses their stories and attitudes of engagement in personal development and how they perceive themselves as learners besides their learning



choices. A range of different female students' personal accounts of their attitudes and stories of success and failure in engagement in personal development around their use of social media were collected. The students were selected from different backgrounds, including subject specialisation, educational level, cultural background, and experience of engagement in the setting. The focus of the research was on the following:

- Exploring students' personal accounts of engagement in independent learning and personal development from their lived experiences of using social media, in a setting in KSA higher education.
- Exploring students' attitudes, motivations, and difficulties of engagement in independent learning and personal development from their personal accounts.
- Exploring issues related to educational benefits and the educational challenges of students' engagement in independent and personal development under current influences in this context.

#### **1.4 Significance of the research**

This research is significant in terms of its focus on the learners' attitudes, motivations, and difficulties of engagement from their use of social media, which highlight educational issues in the context linked to their current needs. In Saudi higher education, there is an increased demand – rising from personal access and social media influence – prompting a focus on the learner in order to foster a whole integrated view that is necessary to promote independent and engaged learners for lifelong learning. Thus, this research has also been designed to be significant in terms of its broader conceptualisation of student engagement. Such design presents a unique opportunity to concentrate on the individual learner, rather than on the contribution of social media to the learning process when studying the student's

experience and uses. This also enables an understanding of the complex factors concerning modern students' engagement from different students' experiences, which might have been overlooked in other research.

Although the exploration of female students' engagement from their use of social media is significant with respect to cultural issues which render technology an important source for female development in the Saudi context, most studies that have examined female learners' experiences have evaluated the contributions of the use of social media as a tool for supporting the process of engagement and personal development regarding gender separation in the society. Such studies have not investigated the students' perceptions in terms of their own motivations, needs, or the difficulties they face as self-learners when using social media. Eventually, the findings from this research should contribute significantly to research knowledge in this context by exploring the issues, motivations, and difficulties related to students' engagement in Saudi higher education. In terms of practice, the issues with respect to learners' experiences enable educators and policymakers to evaluate and reflect on their practices in response to the current changes in learners' needs under the pervasive influence of technologies in education. This research is also significant because it develops its knowledge from the students' own experiences, narratives, and perceptions with respect to their own social media use and self-learning and the different challenges they face, an approach which has not been utilised widely in research.

## **1.5 Organisation of the thesis**

The remainder of the thesis is organised into the following chapters:

Chapter Two describes the social and political context in which the Saudi approach to the implementation of quality education aimed at students' acquiring professional, social, and personal skills, as well as personal development, takes place. It presents

an account of the Saudi education system and its adoption of modern networked education practices, as well as a review of the policies that have been implemented by the Saudi government to support students' whole development and independent learning skills as an area of social concern in this educational context.

Chapter Three reviews factors influencing independent learning and personal development within a range of different models in the literature that focus on fostering students' autonomy and change of attitudes, along with student performance. A central issue discussed in this chapter is the relationship between the use of social media and the fostering of students' autonomy and change of attitudes and performance.

Chapter Four reviews the recent studies conducted on the role of social media in shaping learners' attitudes and development in general, including its influence on personal development, outcomes, performance, and professional development, both globally and in the particular context of Saudi Arabia. The review also identifies the factors influencing students' attitudes towards using social media to foster their independent learning.

Chapter Five describes the research approach used, including the philosophical perspective central to knowledge construction. This includes a justification of the selected research paradigm, an account of the sampling, data collection, and analysis procedures, as well as a discussion of the research validity, reliability and subjectivity, and the ethical issues that arose.

Chapter Six presents the findings from the analysis of the individual interviews, reflective diaries, and focus groups. The main themes are presented to answer each of the research questions.

Chapter Seven presents a discussion of the research findings and relates them back to the literature in order to identify the contribution to knowledge made by this thesis. This is followed by a consideration of the central issues raised in this research.

Chapter Eight sums up the research findings and highlights the theoretical and methodological contributions to the field. The practical implications of the research findings are presented, as well as the limitations of the study. Finally, some recommendations and suggestions for further research are proposed.

## **Chapter Two: Research Context and Setting**

### **2.0 Introduction**

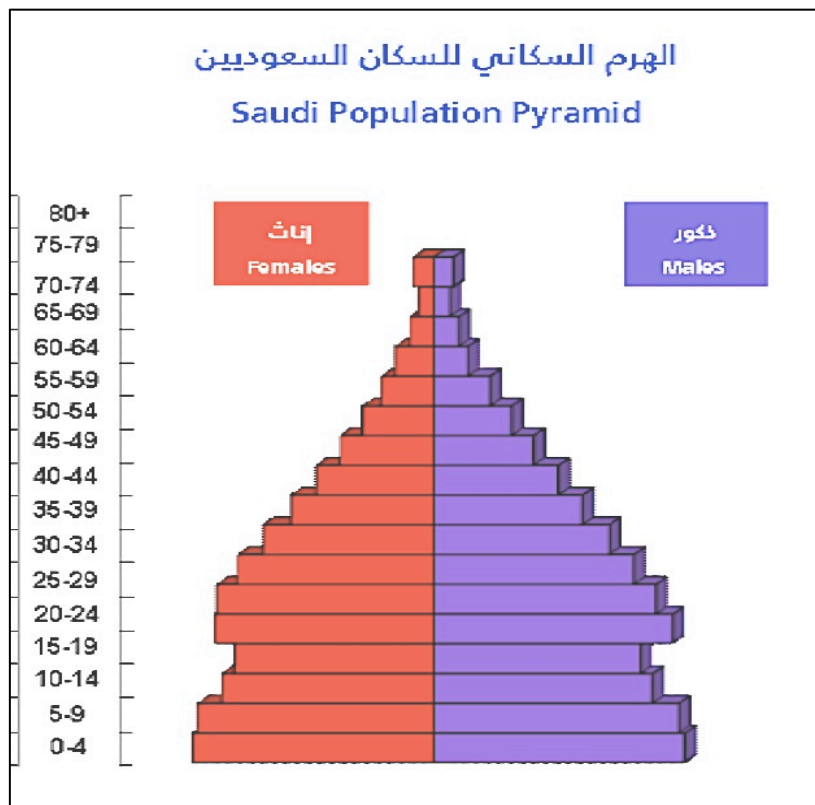
A discussion of the socio-political environment provides a suitable background to understand the different social, cultural and educational factors relevant to this research. This chapter explores briefly the Saudi education system and policy within a historical and cultural context. The influence of the socio-technical advances and globalisation on the recent educational policy developments and the emergence of themes of personal development and self-directed, lifelong learning in education are outlined. Finally, the role and the use of information technologies in the improvement of formal education practices and their significance in supporting students' engagement in self-directed learning are discussed in terms of the changing educational needs of students.

### **2.1 Brief overview of Saudi Arabia**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), a land of ancient civilisations, is centrally located in the Middle East. In terms of size, KSA is the largest country in the region and is surrounded by Yemen, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Iraq and Jordan. The General Authority of Statistics GaStat (2016) gave the population of the Kingdom at 31,742,000 in 2016 compared to 27,236,000 in 2010, with an average annual increase of 2.54%. This important growth rate was due to a high birth rate and increased immigration. 63.2% or 20,065,000 million inhabitants are of Saudi nationality. The population is distributed over thirteen administrative regions where the main cities are located. Approximately 50% of the population is under the age of 20, with a similar age distribution of males and females in all age groups (see Figure 2.1). Schoolchildren make up a significant proportion of the whole population. Given the current demographic situation of the country, the need to improve the capacity

and quality of the education system, along with increasing students' opportunities to pursue higher education, has become a priority in the Saudi educational development plans.

**Figure 2.1: Age distribution of the Saudi population**



Source: General Authority of Statistics GaStat (2016)

## 2.2 People and Culture

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and all its legislative systems are derived from two main sources: The Holy Qur'an and the Prophet's teachings. The Kingdom is a monarchy with a system of governance based on "Shura", i.e., consultation according to the principles of Islamic Shari'ah law. The country is divided into thirteen administrative regions, each of which has its own metropolis where the region's headquarters are based (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017).

Saudi people's beliefs and values are derived from Islam. Islamic values are considered universal (Halstead, 2004), indicating that the religious principles are

integrated in the daily lives of Muslims and encompass all aspects of personal and interpersonal relationships. Consequently, social and religious issues overlap to shape Saudi society and influence locals' day to day lives and social relationships. These ethical values and responsibilities that underpin people's personal, family and interpersonal relationships, and their ways of life, are part of responsibilities that are defined in the main sources of Islam i.e., the Quran and Sunnah (practices of the Prophet).

Islamic principles encourage personal development and the pursuit of knowledge. Halstead (2004) argues that the concept of education in Islam focusses on three dimensions: individual development; social and moral education and acquisition of knowledge. Thinking and reflection are a fundamental part of the religion. In fact, the acquisition and development of knowledge is incumbent upon all Muslims, irrespective of gender, age, ethnicity and social class (Saleh, 1986). Islam places such a strong emphasis on education and the search for knowledge that scientists and educated people are respected and held in high esteem by Muslims.

Furthermore, Islam supports social inclusion and acknowledges the role of an individual's environment on identity formation and development. Individuals also have a social responsibility towards the community and are encouraged to help disadvantaged people. The doctrines of the religion of Islam, therefore, support an inclusive way of life and shape interpersonal relationships amongst groups. Some of these duties of the individual towards their community include, but are not restricted to, teaching and sharing knowledge, or engaging in charity work.

## **2.3 The Educational System**

### **2.3.1 Structure and philosophy**

The Saudi Arabian educational system adopts the Islamic philosophy of education. Before any formal provision, Islamic education had its historical roots in informal learning practices of the holy book, the Quran, and its recitation (Hamdan, 2005). It was only in 1954 that the Ministry of Education (MoE) established running formal education and this was only for boys; since 2002, this has been extended to include girls' education. Prior to 2002, girls' education was under the aegis of a separate organisation. The MoE is responsible for public and private education for individuals aged 5 to 21 years. Since 2015, the MoE has become the only agency responsible for education, including vocational, higher and further education. The Government offers education to all students free of charge at all education levels, including higher and further education. The main departments of the MoE are (Ministry of Education, 2017):

- General Education which links 42 district officers of local schools for boys and girls across the Kingdom. The General Education Department supervises public and private schools, including international schools and those located abroad, at the following levels: primary (6-12 years), intermediate (12-15 years), and secondary (15-18 years). The secondary level encompasses general secondary, academic institutes, Islamic institutes, vocational institutes (agricultural, industrial and commercial), teacher preparation, technical and sports.
- The Higher and Further Education Department which is the focus of this study. The Higher Education Department supervises 26 state universities distributed over the 13 administrative regions, eight private universities, and students and scholarship schemes for study abroad.
- Adult Education and Literacy Department;
- Nursery Education Department;



- Special Education for Disabled Department;
- Talent and Gifted Care Department.

Girls and boys are taught separately at all educational levels, including higher education. Gender separation is a cultural norm in Saudi society. Such a practice, adopted at all education levels, including higher education and work environments, is part of Saudis' daily lives and is generally accepted as a normal convention.

### **2.3.2 Recent achievements of the MoE**

Steps towards globalisation were established along with several improvements to modernise the education system's structure over the last decade. According to Smith and Abouammoh (2013), the centralised administration of the MoE, a well-known historical feature of this context, has gradually been replaced by a more decentralised administration in which power is delegated to schools and universities to achieve authoritative structures. Thus, the role of the MoE has become one of supervision and coordination to ensure consistency amongst the different stages of education under one comprehensive policy of national educational requirements.

Amongst these stated steps is a focus on the learner, including skills and identity development and the surrounding learning environment, with less focus on learning processes; thus adopting a learner centred model (Ministry of Education, 2017). The vision 2030 document sets out further processes to increase the focus on the learner's personality as whole, with an interest in values, characteristics and attitudes, as well as skills (Vision 2030 document KSA, 2016). The outlined educational aims are not restricted to academic dimensions and skills but address different aspects related to students' physical fitness, values and morals, citizenship, decision-making, self-control, social skills and teamwork, and the ability to engage with the rest of the world positively (Ministry of Education, 2017).

The Ministry, in its recent educational development plan, divided skills in the curriculum into two categories: one to be related to all subjects and transferable, and the other particular to each subject and profession. According to this classification, the curriculum is based on the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes. These skills contribute to whole learner development at all educational stages and are compatible with higher education and with the requirements of global societies (Ministry of Education, 2017). In terms of teachers, the appointed role was in preparing stimulating learning environment that are learner centred, in order to support students' skills and personal growth (Ministry of Education, 2017).

There is little literature evaluating these new advances in Saudi education in practice. However, the challenges of the educational system in this context have increased with the recent rise in the number of students, along with the challenges of preparing teachers to meet students' different needs. These challenges include the discrepancy between public and private schools in this context, where public schools tend to have more crowded classes and to encourage rote learning (Alebaikan, 2010). In addition, the curriculum in this context generally lacks flexibility by adopting firm schedules that hinder some of the self-directed learning practices of both learners and teachers. Al-Saadat (2006), for instance, points to several shortcomings of the teachers' preparation at all levels, which act as obstacles to the application of learner centred methods that support learners' engagement in critical thinking and self-directed learning.

### **2.3.3 Developments in Education and Higher Education**

Using information technologies and the opportunities offered by globalisation, the KSA Government have adopted several measures to increase the population's access to knowledge and improve their abilities and skills. The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) National Plan signaled a new epoch of

development in 2003. All government institutions became supported by networks that enhanced productivity and improved the efficiency with which services were provided (Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, 2006). The recent policy document "Vision 2030" proposes further steps to engage with a global knowledge economy reliant on the resources of human talents and skills (Vision 2030 document KSA, 2016). Vision 2030 gives special significance to the modernisation of the education system and the reevaluation of the country's educational aims. The document lays emphasis on human talent and the need to increase equality of opportunities, along with enhancing the skills and competencies of students in order to raise their employability.

In 2007, King Abdullah's National Project to improve the whole system of education was launched (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). This project includes teacher training, the professional development of teachers, curriculum and textbooks and provides the latest learning and teaching technologies. It looks at education as a way to prepare students to deal with the world in a positive way by increasing student confidence and growth as a whole person. Through these measures, King Abdullah's project aims to remove obstacles in preparing students for life by extending education beyond the boundaries of schools and increasing their self-directed learning. Such an approach is in sharp contrast to the traditional rote learning practices (Alibrahim, 2014).

The introduction of new technologies in Saudi education has had an impact on the quality of educational assessment, and contributed to connecting students, teachers and parents to the educational setting. However, the way in which teachers support the self-learners depends completely on the curriculum and the readiness of teachers to deal with different student needs. According to Al-Saadat (2006), teachers lack an integrated view that focusses on the learner and essential

pedagogical preparation for encouraging the critical thinking needed for applying the self-directed learning approaches associated with technologies and networks.

In terms of higher education, the influence of globalisation and fast socio-techno changes have brought the themes of personal development, lifelong learning and quality assurance to the Saudi universities. The elements related to improving higher education in King Abdullah's project are known as "AAFAQ" or, in English translation, Horizons (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). They relate to the enhancement of the teaching and counselling process and also the backing of research development in universities. According to Smith and Abouammoh (2013), attention to students' preparation was improved by the introduction of students' and skills' deanships in universities, along with the quality assurance of student preparation programmes. The important alliance between ICT and the initiatives of the knowledge economy and globalisation that have been identified in the society on the whole have had a significant role to play in shaping the practices of universities. The integration of ICT into educational practice by incorporating courses and methods on to the Learning Management Systems (LMS) has enabled faculty support of students' self-directed learning of the courses. A range of means of communication, including emails and SMS, mobile technology and social media, are used to communicate with students. Faculty and student access to academic knowledge has been improved through links to national and international networks and academic libraries.

Moreover, ICT not only plays an important role in improving teaching and learning methods but also in enhancing the quality of access to higher education opportunities and continuous development generally. Each university in KSA has introduced a deanship for electronic and distance learning, and continuous training in community colleges (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). E-learning and distance education programmes have been adopted to increase the engagement of remote communities and to increase opportunities for higher education for all (Mirza & Al-Abdulkareem,

2011). The use of ICT also helps to solve some of the cultural problems and barriers for females to increase equality and flexibility in their access to education in a gender separated environment (Mirza, 2008).

There have also been several developments in Saudi universities in terms of the curriculum, introduction of new academic subjects and specialised universities.

According to Hamdan (2005), there have been several achievements with respect to the modernisation of the curriculum in local universities, which have added newly introduced practical choices for male and female students such as law and design.

Furthermore, there has been an important focus on science disciplines. Table 2.1 presents the rate of growth of new specialisms in higher education, along with community colleges, during the last decade.

**Table 2.1: Growth rate in the number of special disciplines colleges in KSA (2003 -2009)**

Specialty	Number of Colleges	Growth Rate
Medicine and medical sciences	54	400%
Science	27	285%
Pharmacy	13	333%
Computer science	18	500%
Engineering	26	271%
Community colleges	52	160%

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2010)

Several public and private universities, which specialise in practical and science majors, have been launched, e.g., the King Abdullah University for Science and Technology (KAUST).

The higher education sector is working towards diversifying its specialisms and build bridges with international institutions in order to create increased opportunities for development for faculty and students. Graduate identity has been the main focus for improving the quality of higher education practices (Ministry of Higher Education,

2010). In spite of several achievements in this respect, there are still challenges in terms of high unemployment along with access to higher education because of the doubling of the population (Profanter, 2014). Saudi workers who graduate from university still tend to be less competitive in the private sector job market due to their attitudes and a lack of efficiency and competency (Alebaikan, 2010). Notwithstanding the newly introduced practical paths for increasing students' employability, the balancing of need, opportunity and ability is still challenging for higher education in this context (Profanter, 2014).

## **2.4 Higher Education**

This section reviews the main issues in the Saudi higher education with respect to student engagement in independent learning and personal development, and preparation programmes.

### **2.4.1. University students**

As discussed in the previous section, significant emphasis has been placed on the quality assurance practice of Saudi universities with a focus on improving both skills, attitudes with knowledge enrichment that contribute to the student's whole personal development (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). In addition, Saudi universities now admit international students and support a multicultural environment of both faculty and students. The main requirements to be admitted to higher education differ for each college but include a score in the General Aptitude Test administered by the National Centre for Assessment in Higher Education, besides a specific level of secondary level grades.

In recent years, Saudi universities have shown an interest in improving their capacity and curriculum through the diversification of specialisms by adding new advanced disciplines for both males and females. Over the last decade, there has also been an

increase in the number of public and private universities along with the development plans in the whole country. According to Hamdan (2005), females have more choices in terms of availability of different practical subjects in local universities and they also constitute a large portion of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP).

Following the latest developments, students have many options for obtaining a diploma, bachelor's degree, master's degree or doctorate, inside or outside the country and in humanities or science subjects. Students can also obtain scholarships to study different subjects abroad each year for both undergraduate and graduate levels.

The female students participating in this research were chosen from a college of education subordinating from a university in KSA. The female participants of this study take up the BA in Education in order to become qualified teachers. In this programme, the students have the possibility of choosing among different specialisms, such as pre-school education, special education, or subjects such as English, mathematics, ICT, science and home economics.

#### **2.4.2 Students' preparation**

The aim of King Abdullah's project is to educate students in such a manner that they become competitive, not only locally but also globally, based on international standards. University graduates have been given special significance in the project. They are expected to have good personal and professional skills, to improve their self-image and increase their confidence during the course of their study. These skills and attitudes should prepare them to enter the workforce, to complete further education or to be self-employed. The preparation of students is seen as essential in developing their autonomy and critical thinking which impact on their transition to workplaces and provide them with a clear orientation in life in general. According to Profanter (2014), the preparatory year programme, which is a bridging programme

between high school and college, primarily emphasises instruction in English, the medium of instruction of scientific subjects in most Saudi universities, along with the study skills to build motivated, confident and self-guided students. Not only does the programme aim to improve students' English language skills but it also endeavours to develop their communication, social and personal skills, self-learning skills, and other research and study skills. In Saudi universities most scientific and practical (applied) specialisms are taught in English, while humanities and social sciences are usually taught in Arabic.

In line with economic initiatives stemming from globalisation, the programme of skills in higher education aims to hone students' talents and confidence through focusing on their personal, social, and professional skills. A curriculum unit has been invented in each college to ensure that these skills are embedded in the assessment of all courses. The main aims as specified by the Ministry of Education (MoE) are:

- to develop the basic skills needed in the job market and society in general;
- to improve students' ability to continue their education, find appropriate solutions to problems, and develop their thinking skills;
- to develop graduates' vocational, social and personal skills;
- to enable students to broaden their knowledge base. (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010, p.33)

Profanter (2014) points out that despite these positive changes in Saudi higher education in terms of students' preparation, the transition from school to university where students require to depend on themselves creates a major challenge in a conservative society and a traditional learning culture. There are several obstacles to students' preparation. For instance, in public schools, which tend to rely on traditional methods of rote learning – such methods do not assist the development of critical thinking or self-directed learning skills. According to Alebaikan (2010), self-directed learning skills vary significantly amongst university students based on their different



secondary schools. In fact, the transition to higher education, where self-learning methods with technologies are applied, can be particularly challenging for students who come from state schools where the opportunities to apply individual pedagogies and access to technologies are sometimes limited.

### **2.4.3 Faculty**

In line with global influences and quality assurance requisites in Saudi higher education, the higher education system has made several improvements linked to students' preparation and needs. Present educational development plans place significant emphasis on an integrated curriculum where the learners' needs are addressed and supported in order to ensure their whole personal development in the university environment (Smith & Abouammoh, 2010). Hence, faculty and teachers remain the most important factor in the success of such improvement, as they act as direct advisors for the students and can affect the quality of education and the development of the students. For instance, faculty members have been encouraged to engage in research and academic productivity, such as participating in events, conferences at home and abroad, and organising social service work, besides participating in academic, administrative and pastoral support for students (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). Such measures and actions can help in facing some of the challenges with respect to new educational methods involving technologies and the challenges of students' self-learning – although it could be argued that the main method of teaching and curriculum in higher education is still traditional learning and that assessment methods depends mainly on memorisation (Smith & Abouammoh, 2010).

Recent studies suggest that social media and networks have been integrated in the teaching practices of faculty members at Saudi universities (Alsolamy, 2017). These networks and platforms are also used as a means of communication with students.

However, there might be differences in terms of adoption of new technologies amongst faculty in Saudi universities. The younger generation of teachers and those who have studied abroad in other cultures are more likely to integrate these technological advances in their teaching. Nevertheless, Saudi universities are now also providing faculty with a university environment and a range of resources to support continuous personal and academic development, which aim to help in promoting their creativity and efficiency in the fields of teaching and research (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010, p.32). These include, but are not restricted to, engaging faculty in continuous research, building bridges and relationships with international universities and participating in conferences.

## **2.5 The Recent Influence of Social Media on Education**

### **2.5.1 Background of popular sites usage**

Inhabitants of the Arab world were quick to adopt social media when they were first introduced a decade ago. These sites have, over the last few years, been shaping people's daily communication habits and practices, the way they exchange information and their access to news and knowledge. According to Askool (2012), there has been a prominent increase in practices of learning and professional development in these countries following the wide spread of social media. In KSA, people make extensive use of social media platforms. In fact, most of the population utilises social media as their main way of exchanging information and communicating with each other. Such practices are seen as the efficient modern way of life.

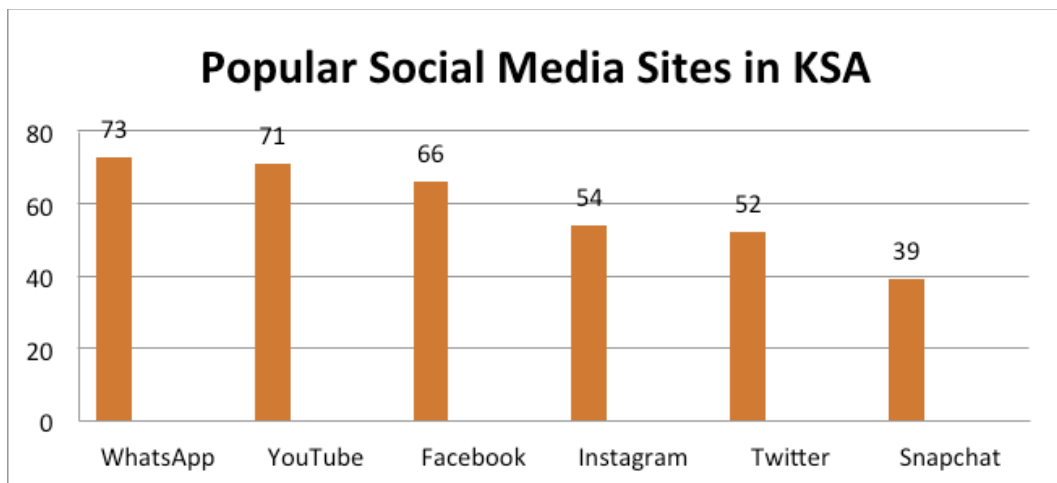
**Table 2.2: Social media sites in KSA**

Social Media Site/App	Active users (millions)	Percentage of Population
WhatsApp	24.27	73%
YouTube	23.61	71%
Facebook	21.95	66%
Instagram	17.96	54%
Twitter	17.29	52%
Snapchat	12.07	39%

Source: Global Media Insights (2018)

According to Global Media Insights, in 2018, out of the Saudi population of 33.25 million, there were 30.25 million Internet users, giving a 91% rate of usage. 25 million, or 75% of the whole population, are active on social media through different applications (Global Media Insights, 2018). The numbers and percentages of the Saudi population who are active on the main social media sites are shown in Table 2.2 and Figure 2.2.

**Figure 2.2: Popularity of social media sites in KSA in millions**



Source: Global Media Insights (2018)

### 2.5.2 Social media in Citizenship Education

Social media offers benefits for people's education and learning in KSA with respect to its culture, through flexible personal technologies that facilitate continuous learning and development of skills, irrespective of age, location or gender. Of course, the increased personal access to knowledge and participation in social media has had

an impact on education and society at large. The ready availability of social media, at present, is also challenging for the educational system in terms of students' acquisition and development of proper skills and critical thinking for self-direction. For instance, through this access to social media, some students have the opportunity to develop their skills. In contrast, those who do not have such easy access to social media or lack the proper support for using the technology to develop their learning skills might become educationally disadvantaged.

It is clear that social media plays a central role in the education and personal growth of the younger generations, who have developed a different set of skills and attitudes compared to the generations who had not been exposed to global media. Given that most of KSA's population is under the age of thirty-five, the influence of social media on society is obvious (Al-Subaie, 2014). The prevalence of social media has undeniably also had a negative impact on Saudi youth. Alharbi (2017) points to different challenges in education related to youth identity and attitudes towards some professions and social traditions. Such a situation has highlighted the need to equip students so that they can fulfil their responsibilities and understand rights (Alharbi, 2017).

Citizenship Education (CE) is seen as one way of providing students with the skills to deal with the challenges of contemporary society. Citizenship Education (CE) is defined on the information network on education in Europe (Eurydice) as: "aspects of education at school level that prepare students to become active citizens by ensuring that they have the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to contribute to the development and well-being of the society in which they live" (Eurydice, 2011 cited in Alharbi, 2017, pp. 79-80). The aims of CE in KSA are to ensure that all students have the necessary awareness, knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop a sense of belonging to their community, to be open to understanding differences and respecting others, and to engage in wider participation for the greater benefit of

society (Alharbi, 2017). Alharbi (2017) examines the many challenges that students are currently faced with in specific areas of citizenship, including voluntary work and appropriate methods to voice their opinions. He points out that CE, in the Saudi context, has many limitations with respect to improving critical thinking, inquiry skills such as the ability to question and reflect on different ideas, and dialogue skills such as analysing, interpreting and evaluating different viewpoints. Problem-solving skills, time management skills, and dialogue skills are also areas in need of improvement (Alharbi, 2017).

## **2.6 The sociocultural context of the research**

It is important to understand the wider socio-cultural context and factors in order to fully appreciate the educational issues and personal development experiences of female students in this research. For instance, as explained earlier, women have a specific situation in Saudi culture and thus in Saudi educational settings including higher education.; females are taught separately from their male counterparts. The participants of this study are all females studying in a women-only college. In this context, it is also acknowledged that technology facilitates female interaction and education with respect to the abovementioned cultural features.

Indeed, one of the reasons for conducting this research on female participants in Saudi higher education is the potentially significant influence of social media and technologies on female engagement and development regarding cultural and gender issues. For instance, Alebaikan (2010) points out that female students can be limited in terms of their transportation and face-to-face interactions, and they might also have social and family responsibilities. As far as cultural norms are concerned, the use of technology can help to overcome these barriers and therefore is fitting for delivery of formal learning in this context. Alsolamy (2017) also identifies the contribution of social media and communication through technologies on female students' participation in learning in the context of gender separation in Saudi higher

education. These studies have examined how social media and new technologies facilitate female students' educational interactions and development in relation to cultural factors.

However, the focus of this research is on the students' attitudes, motivations and difficulties assuming a complex and dynamic relationship between technology, education and culture. For instance, Hamdan (2014) points to a reciprocal relationship with a back-and-forth or bidirectional effect between the person and the social environment. According to Hamdan (2014), in such a changing landscape, technology use can sometimes be shaped by culture, though at the same time technology use is also changing the culture and people's attitudes and practices. On the one hand, culture has an essential role in shaping people's practices of social media, including in education and learning, in a country that is strongly influenced by religion and traditions. On the other hand, the openness and globalisation brought about by personal access and the agency of individuals has also had an impact on Saudi society (Alyedreessy, Helsdingen, & Al-Sobaihi, 2017). Alyedreessy et al. (2017) suggest that many of the social limitations on women's full participation in society have become less prevalent over the last decade. The higher education sector has also seen changes. Now more female students can choose amongst different specialisations, and more women can participate in the work market (Hamdan, 2005). Furthermore, females make up a significant proportion of Saudis who are awarded scholarships to study abroad in other cultures. Al-Subaie (2014) observes that women's exposure to the influences of social media and their travels abroad have also contributed to altering public opinion regarding females. For instance, younger females have experienced cultural differences and broadened their horizons. Thus, an understanding of such a fast-changing socio-cultural situation is crucial in comprehending students' use of social media in order to appreciate the range of different experiences in development and uses. The cultural and social issues are important factors acknowledged in this study. However, this

research also utilises a theoretical lens and a methodology that recognises the individual agency which comes with female students' personal access and use of social media. Thus, this qualitative research adheres to its purpose by appreciating different experiences and cultural backgrounds. The theoretical framework adopted to support the understanding of such an interactive relationship between the individual agency and the social environment is described in detail in the next chapter.

## **2.7 Summary**

There have been significant changes in the Saudi education system and policies over the last decades brought about by globalisation and fast socio-technological change. This has led to a focus on the continuous improvement of education to hone students' skills to thrive in the global economy. Despite the achievements in terms of improving and developing national educational practices and the support of the Government, there are still challenges for students' preparation in this context. Indeed, little is known about the way in which students' skills and engagement in personal development can be improved and about whether teachers and faculty are applying pedagogies that are suitable for supporting students' individual and self-directed learning with technologies. Besides that, an integrated curriculum that focusses on the learner has not yet translated into practical measures and concrete steps. The use and influence of social media in this context present increased challenges for the education system in terms of a growing need to improve students' skills of self-direction and critical thinking.

## **Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework**

### **3.0 Introduction**

The themes of self-directed learning and personal development within a learner centred model in education has emerged alongside the influence of social media on the personal access to information and communication. Thus, this chapter aims to address the significant theoretical assumptions grounding this research exploration of students' engagement in independent learning and personal development from their daily-lived experiences of using social media. The first section of this chapter outlines the main assumptions that underlie independent learning and personal development with a review of how social media support students' engagement. The second section discusses the main assumptions of the theories related to engagement and non-engagement in independent learning and personal development. Finally, the third section explicitly presents a synthesis of the connection between independent learning and personal development in relation to self-directed learning, self-efficacy, and self-regulated learning theories.

### **3.1 Independent learning and personal development**

This section is divided into three parts. First, the theory underpinning student agency and engagement in independent learning and personal development is discussed. Next, students' personal development and skills in the education curriculum are briefly reviewed. Finally, the section concludes by identifying the role of social media in supporting engagement in independent learning and personal development.

#### **3.1.1 Independent learning and personal development within a humanist approach**

Selecting a broad framework of student engagement in independent learning and personal development from their lived experiences gives a specific uniqueness to



this research that focusses on the learner, rather than on the learning process. Constructivist approaches in education are interested in learners' development through their lived experiences and interactions in the social environment including friends and teachers inside and outside the education system (Winn, Harley, Wilcox, & Pemberton, 2006). Of particular significance is the explanation offered by constructivists, which centres on how individual learners build knowledge in their minds and the personal meaning they develop from their interactions and experiences in their environment. Duffy and Jonassen (1992) point that the process of constructing meaning from interaction with the social environment has been divided into three categories by different constructivists. First, there is the radical approach, which suggests knowledge and meaning as mind-centric and subjective to the learner. Second is the social approach, which posits knowledge as transmitted to the mind from the culture. Finally, there is the experiential or dialectical approach, which posits knowledge as arising from interaction between the mind and the culture. Anderson and Dron (2011) indicate that most educational studies over the last decades have adopted the social approach of constructivism. The focus of these studies is on the influences of culture and social interaction on the learning process and on students' thinking and development with less focus on learner agency or motivation in the learning environment.

The experiential approach, according to Kolb (1984) and Rodgers (2002), refers to Dewey's definition of experience in education, which posits that meaning and understanding are co-constructed in the social environment. Such a viewpoint indicates that the person is not a passive receiver of what is in the social environment, rather they are active in developing experiences and insights from, and then feeding them back into, the social culture. Ashworth, Brennan, Egan, Hamilton and Saenz (2004, p.7-8) describe this constructivist approach as "essentially humanistic. It sees the process as a dialectical one whereby the person and social

environment are both active in the process". Arghode, Brieger and McLean (2017) state that the humanistic focus on the learner rather than on the learning process is a comprehensive approach that takes into account not only the influence of the social environment but also the learner's needs. Significantly, any learner requires first having a suitable level of ability to build knowledge and understanding in order to grow their experiences in the social environment. This approach is the most appropriate amongst other constructivist approaches for understanding the varieties of students' use of social media to support their engagement in independent learning in this research.

The humanist approach to education was developed by psychologists in the 1960s by linking one's ability of learning independently to one's own life essentials such as one's personal development and wellbeing (Arghode et al., 2017). For this reason, humanists seek an education that increases the individual's independence, self-reliance and self-awareness for life. Consequently, Hiemstra (1994) argues that humanism is the approach that does not isolate education from the personal problems and difficulties of the students or their wellbeing because the concept of the self that arises from achievements and performance plays an important role in students' growth and development. Furthermore, this also means a focus on the individual learners' needs because everyone is different in their abilities and achievements, in the sense that what works for one student might not work for another (Hiemstra, 1994).

Over the decades, the use of media and technologies in education has led to the development of several approaches to explain the learning process and how it can be facilitated. For instance, behaviourists perceive learning as a response to a stimulus and cognitivists see learning as a quest for knowledge to expand mental processes, whereas constructivists focus on the process of the individual learner building and sharing knowledge in the social environment (Weegar & Pacis, 2012).

Huitt (2001) points out that the humanist approach differs from these approaches in terms of its focus on the learner, their values and on the evaluation process. Thus, the main pedagogical methods of the humanist approach rely on students' independence and choice, self-evaluation, reflection, sharing of experiences and motivation in the social environment. By focusing on self-evaluation and reflection, the humanistic approach sees one's problems as an inseparable part of education and sees personal development as a lifelong process on how the individual learns and lives their life with greater self-reliance, self-awareness and critical thinking (Arghode et al., 2017).

It is better to give students control over their learning, along with the opportunities of sharing their experiences with others by which they can develop self-awareness, in order to prepare independent, free and responsible individuals (Merriam & Cafferella, 1999). Kolb (1984) suggests that experience is the source of all human learning and development and that education must support the growth of students' experience and independence in the social environment. The experiential learning approach involves engaging learners in learning by gaining experience by themselves, or by observing others' experience, which allows for their insights to emerge through reflection and self-evaluation. Teachers could support learner reflection by allowing their learners to construct the meaning of their learning and to self-assess the adequacy of their actions. This not only assists students' acquisition of knowledge through the excitement that is involved in the sharing of experiences in education, but it also helps in the development of shared values and experiences that have an influence on improving behaviour to realise and solve problems of their own and of their surroundings, and to live their lives better (UNESCO, 2002). Tennant (1997) suggests that learners' motivation and engagement is favored over teaching methods because the outcome of learning and education occurs through self-motivated, progressive, social and reflective learners.

The humanist approach in education emphasises the learners' needs and personal development and its methods are based on the development of critical reflection and self-evaluation process. According to Hiemstra (1994), the main processes of experiential and self-directed learning are valuing processes, such as self-awareness, self-evaluation, self-reflection and self-regulation. Through such processes the learner develops insights and responsibility towards their own self and towards their culture. All these processes of valuing strengthen the individual's connection to society and are developed in a social environment where the learner can critically evaluate themselves within social and ethical standards. Hiemstra (1994) argues that freedom of choice, learners' needs and independence within a humanistic approach does not mean that it is a self-interested paradigm that ignores social responsibility. Rather, it is an approach in education that is meant to improve an individual's self-reliance and ability to solve problems of their own as well as the problems that lie outside themselves to support their social environment.

### **3.1.2 Personal development in the education curriculum**

The incorporation of learning skills or 'learning how to learn' in the curriculum with the recent attention to 21<sup>st</sup> century skills can be seen as an example of a humanist approach in education, which aims to increase students' lifelong self-reliance. Skills in the curriculum are personal to each learner, with no discrete divisions into formal and informal education but are seen as attributes that are present in all learning and life situations (Malcolm, Hodkinson, & Colley, 2003). Every student has the right to improve the skills that are relevant to their lives and are culturally valued (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robison, 2009). The framework of the Partnership for 21st Century Learning, formerly known as P21 skills, identifies the constantly changing requirements in learning and skills as gaps that need to be added to the curriculum to back students for achievement, and to thrive in a global world (The Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2017). It is argued that these skills can be

mastered when integrated in an interdisciplinary and meaningful way to support students' talents and successes across different situations in the school curriculum. Some areas related to social media use are relevant to this research focus and can be listed under life, career, and personal skills: adaptability, flexibility, self-direction, leadership, responsibility, productivity, accountability, social and cross-cultural skills (The Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2017).

Fallows and Steven (2000) define transferrable skills in higher education as the skills that involve self-study and self-organisation which are important for coping smoothly with transitions in both academic and career life. Such skills stay with the students for life, for instance, they will help the students to deal with transitions and academic success in the university, in work environments later, and in their lives generally. Similarly, Kumar (2007) explains that some international and UK higher education institutions have adopted general frameworks that expand the narrow definition of a set of academic skills by engaging learners in a process of reflection on integrated personal, career, and academic development. Such integrated skills include: authority and self-directness, self-organisation skills, time-management, problem-solving, self-awareness (ability to identify one's own interests and needs, strengths and weaknesses), self-efficacy (understanding of one's abilities and decision-making) and opportunity awareness (Kumar, 2007).

Recently, Normand and Anderson (2017) have stated that attitudes emerge as important outcomes in higher education as well as skills with the rise of the current social culture of lifelong learning alongside the information revolution in the digital age. These attitudes include learners' self-efficacy, coping with transitions, self-awareness, resilience and confidence, agility, empathy, ethics, media and creativity, communication, emotional intelligence and regulation, and active citizenship. This also incorporates the increased focus in higher education on ethical practice, self-awareness and reflection, as parts of citizenship and lifelong learning, which have

become an integral part of the preparation of graduates with new transferrable and professional skills (Normand & Anderson, 2017).

### **3.1.3 The role of social media in supporting students' engagement in independent learning and personal development**

With recent advances in the educational field and technology, it has become necessary to explore the new trends of engagement in independent learning and personal development in education systems. Social media increases students' opportunities for control and choice in their lives and studies. Hall (2008) suggests that social media supports students' agency and practices of making decisions. The various platforms also present significant opportunities for students' control of, and adaptation to, personal needs, which influence their motivation and self-regulated learning (McLoughlin and Lee; 2010). However, the opportunities offered by social media and its influence on the students' self-reliance and development experiences do not come without their problems and tensions in education. Research has identified variations in students' engagement in their use of social media, with some still not able to engage in independent learning and personal development in their lives, even though they are high users of social media (Junco, 2012; Kop & Fournier, 2011). International and Saudi studies also indicate some negative influences of social media on students' academic performance and wellbeing (Al-Tarawneh, 2014; Alwagait et al., 2015; Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). Studies done by Crook (2012) and Hemmi et al. (2009) highlight several challenges and issues, which have not been fully explored and are not properly understood, in educational contexts and in students' engagement resulting from new trends in learning and education practices. Attwell (2007) points to some present-day challenges for educational systems under the influence of social media as lived experiences of students:

- To recognise that learning is continuous and open and to seek to provide support for that learning;
- To recognise the individual's need in organising their own learning;
- To recognise that learning will not be provided by a single learning provider;
- To recognise that students need increased awareness, intention and willingness.

Social media gives access to open opportunities of learning that can increase students' skills and knowledge beyond the boundaries of the education system. This allows the students to practise independence and decision-making outside the formal context and increase their adaptation to their needs and agency. However, this outcome can vary from one student to another based on their skills and critical thinking, which will either significantly increase or decrease their engagement and motivation levels. Thus with such constant rapid changes in socio-technological state, globalisation and the new trends in education, students need to be self-reliant, self-aware and have to learn how to learn (Kitsantas & Dabbagh, 2010). To identify and understand issues related to students' current learning practice, this research builds on theories explaining student agency and engagement, as discussed in the next section.

### **3.2 Theories of engagement and non-engagement in independent learning and personal development**

Nowadays, students have increased personal access and freedom of choice and these have a direct impact on their engagement in both independent learning and personal development. However, levels of engagement vary significantly from one student to another for a variety of reasons, as explained below. In this research, students' experiences of using social media and their engagement in independent learning and personal development are explained using theories that are based on a bidirectional interaction between the learner and the social environment. These

include:

- Self-directed learning;
- Self-efficacy and attitudes;
- Self-regulated learning.

These theories present more detailed accounts of humanist and experiential learning approaches to understanding learner engagement and non-engagement from the different lived experiences of the students.

### **3.2.1 Self-directed learning**

Self-direction is rooted in humanistic thought that emphasises the personal development of the authentic self (Loyens, Magda, & Rikers, 2008). The main assumption of self-directed learning in the curriculum is that education needs to present opportunities for learners to act autonomously, solve problems, increase the growth of their experience and thereby enhance their propensity for lifelong learning and continuous personal development (Derrick, 2003; LeNoue, Hall, & Eighmy, 2011). Under the philosophy of humanism, self-direction is the concept used in education to empower students with choice and control over their learning in order to support the growth of their critical reflection skills and independence. Loyens et al. (2008) suggest that self-directed learning could be referred to as problem-based education in which the learner engages in solving a problem through making decisions about their learning; this happens only when they are offered freedom of choice of what to learn. Candy (2004, p.10) suggests that self-directed learning is the personal capacity to be autonomous and that autonomy in learning needs to be practised from childhood in order to increase one's capacity for personal responsibility and critical decision-making.



There is no single definition in the literature for self-directed learning and most researchers agree that it is an umbrella term that encompasses learners' autonomy and ability to act independently on problem-solving. Merriam and Cafferella (1999) define self-directed learning as the ability of the person to plan and manage learning. Candy (2004) describes self-directed learning as a general term that encompasses autonomy, self-management, learner-control and the personal, non-institutional pursuit of learning opportunities, in the natural societal setting. According to Song and Bonk (2016), self-directed learning is a useful term for understanding any informal learning, including that which occurs in social or accidental situations. Garrison (1997) notes that self-directed learning often occurs within a social environment and thus it could be referred to as collaborative learning. It has also been referred to in the literature as informal learning, peer learning or experiential learning, where the emphasis is on the personal rather than the interpersonal in the learning experience (Eraut, 2004). Another definition is the learner's agency and the individual's capacity to interact with others and with the material environment to shape conditions for their life development and learning (Ecclestone, 2009). Generally, self-directed learning is presented in the literature as autonomy and independence to learn from one's experience through interactions in the social environment to make changes for the better. Knowles (1975) describes self-directed learning as a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in (1) diagnosing their learning needs, (2) formulating learning goals, (3) identifying human and material resources for learning, (4) choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and (5) evaluating learning outcomes (p.18, cited in Brunner, Bedenlier, Stoter, & Hohlfeld, 2014).

The main assumption of self-directed learning is that learners are self-motivated. The theory of self-directed learning emerged from adult learning theory, which describes adult learners as self-directed and self-motivated for learning, not as passive

receivers of information, but rather as critically evaluating its relevance to their lives. They have an urge to learn which is shaped by their own life experiences, such as their social roles and responsibilities (Abdullah, Koren, Muniapan, Parasuraman, & Rathakrishnan, 2008; Merriam, 2001; Merriam & Cafferella, 1999).

The main process of self-direction is decision-making, which entails the individual's critical thinking along with evaluation and reflection processes (Garrison, 1992). A self-directed learner is independent and has the ability to make rational choices. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) maintain that the key decisions in self-directed learning concern: (1) what the learners want to learn (that is meaningful or useful to them), (2) how they want to go about learning (techniques, resources needed, location, and pacing), and (3) which criteria will be used, and in what ways, to evaluate whether the learning experience was worthwhile and satisfactory. In their essence, self-directed learning opportunities increase learners' development of worthwhile knowledge along with changing attitudes and awareness. According to Garrison (1997, p.31), self-directed learning increases students' awareness and "creates the conditions where students learn how to learn".

A self-directed learner could be identified by increased levels of self-motivation, self-management, and self-evaluation. Garrison (1997) proposes that these three properties indicate that the learner is taking responsibility for their learning. Self-directed learners are self-motivated to take responsibility to manage their learning through different processes, including critical evaluation and reflection on their needs, and they check the progress of their learning. Students who accept this responsibility to critically evaluate, not only their needs of what to learn but also the strategies that would lead to achieve an outcome, and base their future direction upon this evaluation, are more self-directed (Garrison, 1997).

Individual differences are characteristics noted amongst learners in self-directed learning (Guglielmino, 2008). Most recent research in self-directed learning in education has centred on the characteristics that identify drivers and motivators for learners to accept responsibility and readiness to learn (Brunner et al., 2014).

Guglielmino (1978, cited in Bonham, 1991, p. 95-96) identifies eight characteristics of self-directed learners: (1) openness to learning opportunities, (2) self-concept as an effective learner, (3) initiative and independence in learning, (4) informed acceptance of one's responsibility for one's learning, (5) love of learning, (6) creativity, (7) future orientation, and (8) ability to use basic study and problem solving skills. Scales of readiness for self-directed learning have been widely used in higher education and in online learning.

Several limitations of self-directed learning have been noted. Merriam and Cafferella (1999) argue that the theory focusses on learners' internal motivation but is unable to identify the sources of motivation and metacognitive knowledge and the awareness that drive the self-motivated learner. Research also suggests that motivation can be highly shaped and modified by the social context, meaning that the social environment will greatly affect self-directed learners' motivation. This is especially true in educational contexts (Entwistle, 1989; Kaplan & Flum, 2009; McCaslin, 2009; Paris, 1997). Critics have also suggested that not all adult individuals are self-motivated or rational in their decisions; some adults present a highly dependent approach to learning, as opposed to some children who present a highly autonomous approach (Merriam & Cafferella, 1999).

For this research, self-directed learning presents a suitable framework in which to understand self-motivated learners' experiences and their internal motivations for engaging and accepting responsibility for independent learning and personal development. Bonk, Lee, Kou, Xu and Sheu's (2015) study uses this theory to understand the motivations underlying self-directed learners in open learning

environments. Similarly, Abdullah et al. (2008) suggest that self-directed learning is used in research to identify issues related to internal motivations, such as why self-directed learners participate in learning activities or why some learners achieve engagement in spite of obstacles and others cannot. Consequently, the theory helps this investigation into students' engagement and non-engagement by identifying the internal motivations of the learner. However, the theory has some limitations in its ability to understand the influence of the learning environment and educational context on the learners' motivations and thus does not cover all the aspects related to understanding students' experiences of engagement in this research. Therefore, other theories are needed to address the subject of students' engagement in independent learning and personal development from their lived experiences.

### **3.2.2 Self-efficacy and attitudes**

Students' attitudes whether negative or positive are linked to their past experiences and can determine their future behaviours. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) define attitudes as personal psychological dispositions that have been constructed in specific situations and are impacted by one's past experience and behaviour. Maio and Haddock (2009) define an attitude as a perception that endorses a personal evaluation of an issue with a negative or positive feeling that is based on personal cognitive, affective and behavioural information of the issue. Thus, Ajzen (1991) argues that the attitudes one has towards any issue in life, whether this view is negative or positive, will determine one's behaviour of rejection or acceptance. Several factors that influence personal attitudes and behaviours have been identified. These include cognition, social norms, and perceived behavioural control (the perception that the job is easy) (Ajzen, 1991). Hence, Ajzen (1991) and Maio and Haddock (2009) suggest that attitudes and eventually behaviour can be changed when a positive experience is encountered, when promised advantages or usefulness are revealed, or when people expand their cognition, beliefs and

experience.

The theory of self-efficacy emerged in the context of social cognitive theory (SCT). It proposes a suitable framework to gain an understanding of the person's interactions in a social environment, and the influences of one's own behaviours and attitudes in the environment on one's development (Hall & Hall, 2010). It also presents a detailed explanation of how one's interactions in the social environment lead to achievement and further development, and why some people are unable to achieve. Significantly, the concept of self-efficacy is used in the literature to give an interpretation of how students' attitudes towards any issue of life, including their own personal competencies, can be changed through their use of social media (Argyris & Xu, 2016; Hassell & Sukalich, 2015). For instance, DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield and Fiore (2012) utilise self-efficacy theory to present social media sites as an intervention to change university students' attitudes towards college adjustment.

Self-efficacy is a self-perception, or an attitude that is defined as "people's judgments of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391, cited in Linebrink & Pintrich 2003, p.120). Bandura (1977) suggests that people would avoid engaging in tasks when they believe them to be difficult, or when they doubt their ability to perform well in these tasks. From this perspective, people's self-judgments and self-evaluation of competency have a significant influence on their behaviour and engagement and, eventually, on their achievement and success. Self-efficacy judgment is measured through self-evaluation and perception of personal ability. It is "the conviction one can engage in behaviour that will produce the desired outcome" (Bandura, 1977, p.193).

It is also important to note that self-efficacy judgment can be different from one task to another and from one situation to another. There can be different types of self-

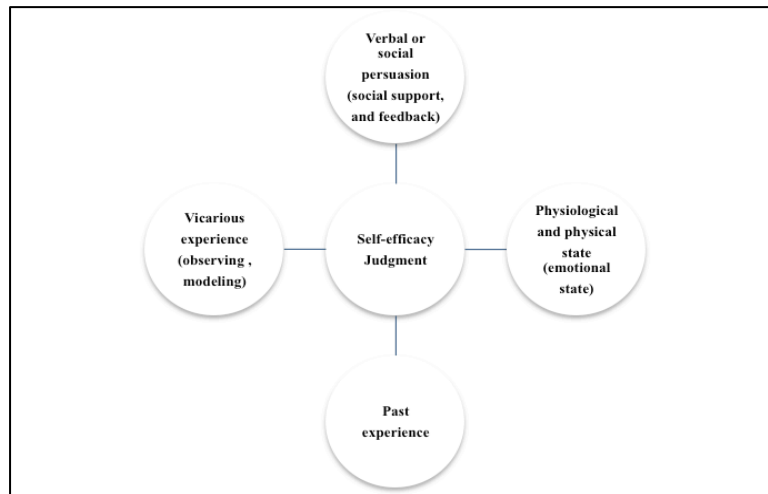
efficacies for different types of skills and competencies or situations, as the perception of one's ability can vary in different situations or tasks (Bandura, 1977, 1993; Pajares, 1996; Schunk, 1991). Self-efficacy beliefs are context sensitive, they are different from other expectancy beliefs, such as ease of use and usefulness, because self-efficacy judgments are both task- and situation- specific, and consequently "individuals make use of these judgments in reference to some type of goal" (Pajares, 1996, p.546). Consequently, the theory of self-efficacy facilitates the essential argument of the specificity and correspondence of social media usage as being not only learner specific but also situation specific, which differs from one situation to another and from one learner to another (Argyris & Xu, 2016). This is to avoid any confusion between self-efficacy perception and the perception of ease of use and usefulness of social media. All students use social media for different purposes. There are no technical barriers to using these tools. The competency that is involved in this study is related to learners' abilities to learn, rather than to use the tools. Consequently, self-efficacy relates to personal capabilities; one can perceive the job easy but fail to engage because of a lack of motivation or self-confidence to achieve. The theory is general yet specific enough to be applied to understanding the general learner's development and organisation, as well as to understand the development of specific skills. However, in terms of utilising social media in personal development, self-efficacy refers in this research to the general ability of the students, such as to organise and achieve goals, including study goals.

Furthermore, Bandura (1993) suggests that the self-evaluation attached to self-efficacy perception is not easy, as people engage first in critical reflection on their own strong and weak points with regard to the task and the effort required to perform in a task. This view has implications for the way students make self-efficacy judgments and perceive their abilities as learners. Reasonable judgment of one's ability makes sure that one engages in realistic goals that are neither higher nor

lower than one's expectation. Consequently, Eastin and LaRose (2000) state that critical self-evaluation of ability and competency make the judgment of self-efficacy an antecedent to the real skills and proficiency of performance, as gained from past experiences. This means that someone who is satisfied with their skills to achieve outcomes from past experiences generally has high self-efficacy.

The theory also suggests that people who have a strong belief in their ability are capable of reflecting and accurately evaluating the sources of failure and success in their performance and modifying them (Kuo, 2010; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). This objectivity and critical attribution of the sources of failure and success are important for engagement and persistence and, eventually, achievement combined with motivation to set higher goals (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Pajares, 1996). Self-efficacy therefore is the self-perception supported by critical evaluation of self-ability, reflection and self-evaluation, along with faith and confidence in one's ability to succeed. If two students have the same skill and performance ability level, the one who demonstrates positive perceptions of ability and confidence will have more willingness and be more likely to have control of their behavioural engagement and overcome difficulties to persist in achieving their goals (Bandura, 1977, 1993; Kuo, 2010; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). Students who believe in their abilities are more committed and able to control, and this is combined with a greater sense of responsibility for their learning. They are more competent at using the opportunities available to them for collaboration and communication. They are also more willing to seek help from others. Therefore, self-efficacy perceptions determine one's ability to make learning decisions and to control one's behaviour to make the effort, overcome difficulties, and eventually realise achievement (Bandura, 1977; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Schunk, 1991).

**Figure 3.1: Sources of self-efficacy judgment**



People's critical judgments and reflections are important for making progress and self-improvement in their lives. If they avoid tasks that make them feel incompetent or embarrassed then, when they have greater control, they will try strengthening their self-efficacy through different sources. These sources of self-efficacy are: (1) past experience: successfully having accomplished the experience; (2) vicarious experience: observing others successfully engaged in an experience related to the task they are going to be involved in; (3) verbal or social persuasion; (4) physiological physical state (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1989; Hu, Gu, & Zhang, 2017).

The above-mentioned sources have given rise to the development of self-efficacy within the social cognitive theory (SCT) of learning (Hall & Hall, 2010). SCT developed from a study of the influence of media on aggressive behaviour in children, which uncovered an underlying mechanism of how social environment, and media in particular, influences one's development and excitement (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1989; Hu et al., 2017). It is suggested that people learn from exposure to others' experiences in the environment, through which they can self-regulate, self-evaluate and self-organise (Hall & Hall, 2010; Hu et al., 2017).

Under the influence of fast technological change, there is increased need for individuals to renew and change through the ability to reflect on, and evaluate their



experiences. It could be argued that the lack of socio-cognitive drive through sharing experiences with absence of personal feedback has been responsible for learners' lack of excitement or development within formal educational settings. Based on SCT, social media can now support development by providing the sources of self-efficacy that increase one's independence, decision-making and engagement (Argyris & Xu, 2016; Hall & Hall, 2010; Hu et al., 2017). For example, students can be engaged in vicarious experiences by observing models in social media or they can also find the social support or feedback they need (Argyris & Xu, 2016; Hall & Hall, 2010; Hu et al., 2017). Consequently, Bandura (2001a) suggests that people can easily improve their efficacy using the resources of the Internet and mass media when they are self-aware and self-regulated to adapt to their personal needs. Bandura (2001b) identifies the following adaptation processes that facilitate self-regulation and contribute to the development of self-efficacy from the mass media as follows: ability to make choices, ability to control effort and withhold rewards and having self-awareness with ability of self-reflection. These involve a monitoring and self-assessment process of "performance comparison with personal goals and standards" (ibid, p.8). Self-reflection is defined as "the metacognitive capability to reflect upon oneself and the adequacy of one's thoughts and actions" (ibid, p.10).

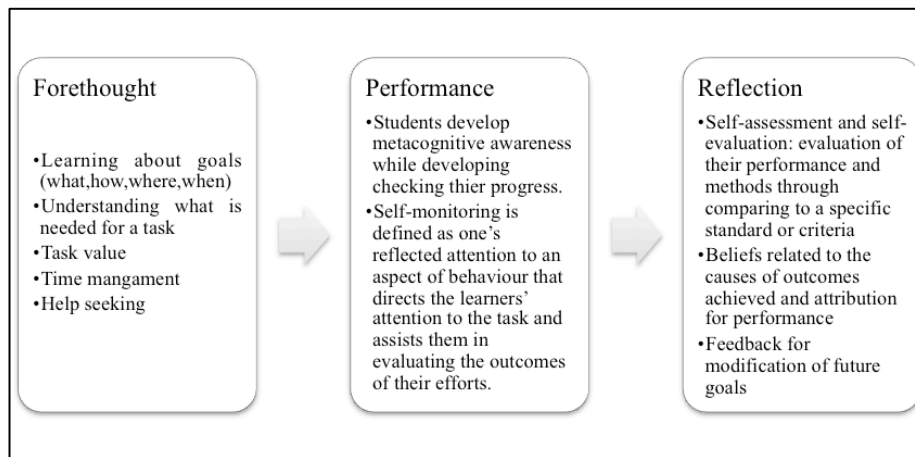
The theory of self-efficacy provides an explanation of the general self-efficacy and organisational skill of achieving personal goals. It is important to understand students' experiences of engagement in independent learning and personal development and the way in which social media impacts on self-efficacy and engagement in personal development. The theory of self-regulated learning is closely connected to personal self-efficacy, and explains how students acquire skills and knowledge in the academic context. It particularly identify how students behave when they self-study and explains why some students find difficulties in achievement and how they can be supported.

### 3.2.3 Self-Regulated Learning

In the last century, researchers who were interested in the processes students use to direct their efforts to acquire knowledge and skills employed social cognitive theory (SCT) to understand the interactions of the learners in the social environment and its influence on them. Zimmerman (1989, p.329) defines self-regulated learning as the “processes that students use to initiate and direct their efforts to acquire knowledge and skill”. Students can be described as self-regulated when they are active in their learning. Not only do they make the effort, but they also use strategies to interact with the learning environment to “plan, organise, self-instruct, self-monitor, and self-evaluate at various stages of the learning process” (Zimmerman, 2002, p. 308). SCT determines that the environment, including teachers, lecturers, friends, and technologies or media, has no influence if the student has a negative self-perception from past experiences or when they adopt poor strategies (Bandura, 1989; Zimmerman, 2002). Researchers suggest that self-regulated learning strategies are ultimately the main links between students, the environment and actual achievement (Pintrich, 2004). Self-regulated learners are prompt in their strategies, self-motivated and engaged in directing their effort, and take advantage of sources of knowledge and socialisation (Smith, 1982).

A significant area of research identifies learners’ individual differences in self-regulation as main reasons for academic underachievement. Winne and Hadwin (1998) indicate that all learners are self-regulated to some extent when they plan their efforts towards attainment; unfortunately, some students for various reasons fail to self-regulate or find this very difficult. Zimmerman (2002), based on a study of some sources of failure amongst students, shows that students who fail to self-regulate are not able to compete with the distraction caused by technology and media. Their motivation levels are low because, when they fail to perform, they have false beliefs about themselves rather than about the strategies they used.

**Figure 3.2: Zimmerman's (1989) self-regulated learning model**



Adapted from Matzat & Vrieling (2016, p.80) and Nussbaumer, Dahn, Kroop, Mikroyannidis, & Albert (2015, p.20)

Self-efficacy judgment impacts students' behavioural engagement and ability to persist and complete the learning task. Zimmerman (1995) suggests that students who lack achievement and confidence cannot benefit from metacognitive knowledge about learning strategies. They first need to have positive experiences of engagement and achievement which will help them raise their self-efficacy and increase their motivation and further behavioural engagement. Therefore, Zimmerman's (1989) suggests a model of self-regulated learning that supports student engagement in the social environment (Figure 3.2). It explains a strategy that combines self-efficacy beliefs and use of strategy to increase students' engagement. This model, according to Zimmerman (1989), supports students who struggle and those who have difficulties in their academic engagement and achievement. The model is used to raise students' engagement and self-efficacy through improving their goal-setting, performance and self-assessment. As shown on figure. 3.2 the three main processes of self-regulated learning are (1) forethought, (2) performance, and (3) reflection. The model also identifies more than 14 strategies to increase students' motivation and engagement as actions to facilitate their academic performance. These strategies include setting goals, time management and time slots, task evaluation, performance, task strategies and behavioural engagement, reflection, motivational strategies, self-assessment and monitoring. Many

researchers have suggested that the self-regulated learning model is a framework that encompasses various aspects of academic learning, such as metacognitive strategies, behavioural engagement, self-assessment, and acquisition of skills, knowledge, and motivation (Pajares, 1996; Pintrich, 2004).

People are different in their abilities; however, everyone can benefit from ways of increasing their levels of behavioural engagement and their motivation to acquire skills and knowledge. The significant relationship between the development of self-efficacy and self-regulated learning is further examined in the literature. Research closely relates self-efficacy to students' ability to use metacognitive strategies, to set goals and to reflect on their methods and outcomes (Paris & Paris, 2001; Schunk, 1991; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). The higher a student's self-efficacy, the higher their motivation and eventually the greater their ability to set goals. Research presents a stable and consistent relationship between self-efficacy, behavioural, cognitive, and metacognitive engagement and, eventually, academic achievement (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Schunk & Usher, 2011). It follows that when students are engaged and self-regulated, the more they learn, the better they perform, and the higher the self-efficacy and motivation levels they develop. Students who believe in their ability find the task "easy" and they can control their efforts and overcome difficulties and distractions because they have higher motivation levels. Therefore, self-efficacy beliefs and self-regulation strategies have been linked together in research on academic performance and achievement. Students who underachieve are found to have low motivation and engagement levels combined with lack of confidence in their ability to control their behaviour and thus rarely succeed in engagement for completing a learning task.

The self-regulated learning model proposes that, when students have control of their motivation, meta-cognition, behaviour and cognition, they can succeed in self-regulated learning and achievement. Recent research argues that self-regulated

learning has been influenced by social media (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; McLoughlin & Lee, 2010). The literature suggests that social media impacts on students' self-efficacy and self-regulated learning when studying. The personal control to adapt combined with the ability to be exposed to performance standards in social media facilitate complex metacognitive, cognitive, behavioural, monitoring and affective processes involved in self-regulated learning (Rahimi, Berg, & Veen, 2015). Loyens et al. (2008, p.417) suggest that, "SRL [self-regulated learning] models start from the idea that students are able to make use of standards to direct their learning and to set their own goals (i.e., they have control)". This personal control provided by technology generally is just as effective as one-to-one support and better for students' practice and action (Henderson, 1986).

The model of self-regulated learning has been adopted in teaching students how to increase their motivation levels and engagement, and eventually appreciate achievement through processes of reflection, goal setting, self-evaluation, self-monitoring, help seeking and time management (Nussbaumer et al., 2015). In addition, some European countries and China have recently incorporated self-regulated learning as a strategy in education to develop responsible, lifelong and thinking learners. Self-regulated learning assists students to raise their motivation levels independently, to be able to engage in education and plan their efforts towards achievement and to reflect on their methods to achieve progress (ROLE, 2017).

### **3.3. Synthesis of self-directed learning, self-efficacy and self-regulated learning theories and their relation to students' engagement in independent learning and personal development in this research**

This research's focus on students' attitudes, motivations and difficulties under current technological influences on the learner experience leads to the need to import a theoretical lens to support understanding of issues in such a new landscape of

education. My understanding of how students use social media in their independent learning and personal development was linked to both self-directed and self-regulated learning including the personal self-efficacy. To illustrate the understanding of independent learning and personal development in the light of both self-directed and self-regulated learning, I will give a simple example. In the formal educational context when a student is given a task for which she needs to specify how to learn and to choose the sources then this independent learning, which is related to critical thinking and making choices, is understood from self-directed learning theory. However, when the student is working in their self-study and practising on examination material this independent learning could be linked more to realising achievements and self-regulated learning. This example can apply equally to social media uses in independent learning for informal learning situations. Nevertheless, both theories intertwine significantly in the learner's daily experiences of using social media for independent learning and personal development.

Thus the assumptions underlying the three theories provide a better understanding of Saudi university students' lived experiences and their daily uses of social media in their lives and learning in this research. The abovementioned theoretical lens signifies the research focus on students' engagement in independent learning and personal development in higher education as influenced by social media. Thus it imports a focus on the learner motivations and difficulties rather than producing an account to describe social media practices when examining these uses.

Additionally, these three theories share the same roots in social psychology and the humanist experiential model of education. They have been widely applied in the literature to gain insight into the influence of social media on students' engagement. There are varied dimensions and degrees of complexity to understanding engagement in independent learning and personal development in education under the influence of social media. There is no single theory can offer a comprehensive

understanding of the topic concerning students' attitudes, perceptions, and difficulties of engagement in the specified context of this research. The three theories contribute to the research aim, which focusses on the learner rather than on the learning process. Thus, the emphasis of this research on students' engagement and non-engagement in independent learning and personal development from social media use required obtaining detailed accounts of the personal and social factors involved from these relevant theories.

In terms of self-directed learning theory, the primary assumption is that learners are purposive and self-motivated when selecting and using a media tool. In this research, self-directed learning theory assists in identifying the motivations and drivers for Saudi university students' engagement in personal learning and identity development from their uses and experiences. Self-efficacy theory assists in capturing the roles of students' attitudes and self-evaluation processes on students' development. This also permits an understanding of how students utilise opportunities in social media to make self-change, and how their use of social media impacts their development and alters their attitudes and levels of motivation and engagement. Self-regulated learning theory focusses on self-assessment and evaluation processes, particularly in the academic context, and their role in increasing students' engagement in the social environment, and eventually, they present an explanation of achievement or difficulties. Furthermore, these three theories are essential in the perspective of higher education students' preparation and adult education generally. According to Ecclestone (2009), improving students' self-efficacy, performance, and self-directed learning are the main aims for preparing university students for being active members in workplaces and societies.

All three theories assume the rational and purposive role of students and their critical thinking and use of learning strategies. Self-directed learning theory focusses on the broader role of learners' autonomy and freedom in the selection and decision-making

of what will be learned, and critical evaluation of the learning materials selected (Loyens et al., 2008). Nevertheless, self-efficacy and self-regulated learning theories focus on self-evaluation processes in acquiring knowledge, skill and confidence, and the role of social media as influential on these self-evaluation and self-efficacy processes (Loyens et al., 2008). The self-regulated learning model encompasses the different issues and attitudes related to understanding students' difficulties and learning skills. Consequently, combining the three theories provides a comprehensive approach to this research by enabling an investigation of the factors influencing students' engagement and non-engagement in independent learning and personal development, including students' attitudes and difficulties.

### **3.4 Summary**

The literature suggests that there are several and complex factors and challenges for students' engagement in independent learning and personal development in the current landscape of education, as influenced by social media; yet still little is known about them. This research attempts to explore and investigate these new trends and challenges in students' engagement and non-engagement in personal development from the students' lived experiences of using social media and their voices within a Saudi educational and cultural context. A humanist approach is deemed appropriate for a study of this nature, which focuses on the learner rather than on the learning experience. The personal and social factors influencing students' engagement and non-engagement are investigated through three experiential learning theories that centre on the learner's role in the learning environment. Female Saudi students' attitudes and difficulties, along with the influences of social media on their engagement in the environment, are discussed through the prism of these theories.



## Chapter Four: Literature Review

### 4.0 Introduction

Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, have become widely popular and used in independent learning and personal development. Despite the vast variety of platforms, the term 'social media' generally refers to the information and communication technology associated with so-called "web 2.0 technology" tools that emerged in approximately 2003, and significantly changed the former conventional Internet browser or web 1.0 tools (Anderson, 2007; Boyd & Ellison 2008; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Web 2.0 tools support the projecting of the personal appearance of the user, through a personal profile or an account, besides supporting many-to-many interaction features. By this means, web 2.0 has extended the sharing of experiences amongst large numbers of people on the network. Hence, web 2.0 tools, which replaced the web 1.0 Internet, are referred to in this research as social media.

This enormous variety of social media platforms supports the same principle of sharing and reflection of the users' experiences in the form of digital media combined with flexible mobility on personal devices. Examples of social media platforms that have gained popularity and become social trends include Twitter, Snap Chat, Facebook and YouTube.

These platforms, while appearing distinct in form or trademark, fundamentally support the same web 2.0 technology that allows sharing of digital media in the form of texts, videos, photos, talks, blogs, or live streams and combinations of these (Anderson, 2007; Boyd & Ellison 2008; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). For instance, Twitter and YouTube, although different, both support the same tools that allow space for sharing personal experiences as well as reflection and discussion of these

experiences between its users. Furthermore, there are less visible boundaries that separate different applications and platforms of social media, as they appear as integrated tools on the personal user devices and consent to sharing of media amongst them (Kitsantas & Dabbagh, 2010). Furthermore, there are no restrictions on the learner and how they learn, which means that many diverse forms of social media platforms are usually used to complement each other. For instance, it is common that the person will use different platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube at the same time to convey or receive the same message in various forms. All of these tools are integrated into themselves on personal devices so that the user can move and share contents between different platforms or devices.

Eventually, the focus of this research is on the learner experience and therefore will follow a literature review strategy that refers to social media as a general term that represents integrated technologies (Kitsantas & Dabbagh, 2010).

Eventually, most literature that has focused on specific applications and used terms such as Twitter or Facebook in their title usually add the terms social media and web 2.0 technology in their keywords. Thus, a literature search was carried out using general keywords such as social media or social network sites or web 2.0 technology and higher education. I also used (social media or social network sites or web 2.0 technology) and Saudi Arabia. The search was conducted through electronic databases available on the electronic library of the University of Exeter, including the British Educational Index, PsycINFO, ERIC Plus Text, and Australia Education Index. A selection of related studies that emerged in the search on the topics on the influence of using social media on identity development, self-directed learning, self-regulated learning, academic performance, social engagement, and college adjustment have also been used for this literature review chapter. These studies, some of which are presented in (Appendix A), have been reviewed in terms of methodologies and findings. The discussion of the selected literature is divided into

three main sections based on this research interest. The first section examines the literature related to the opportunities offered in social media for engagement in independent learning and personal development. The second section reviews studies that investigate the influence of social media on personal development and self-directed learning. The third section examines the factors influencing students' use or non-use of social media to support their engagement.

#### **4.1 Opportunities offered in social media for engagement in independent learning and personal development**

Literature that addresses opportunities offered by social media for engagement have discussed these opportunities for both teaching and learning, and generally for engagement in personal, academic and professional development. I analyzed these opportunities as follows.

##### **4.1.1 Accessibility and flexibility of knowledge and production**

Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and WhatsApp, are widely popular as daily lived experiences amongst various groups of people including students and teachers. Greenhow and Lewin (2016) suggest that social media provide easy-to-use all-purpose tools that reconceptualise the meaning of education and development beyond the formal educational systems. Green, Facer, Rudd, Dillon and Humphreys (2005) and McLoughlin and Lee (2007) explain that social media provides learners and teachers with learning and teaching choices that support their engagement in independent learning and personal development beyond the established education frameworks. Similarly, Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2012) describe social media in education as an “on demand” tool for supporting continuous and daily self-development.

The literature indicates that the main properties of social media combined with an increase in the number of personal devices enable immediate, constant and personal access to unlimited forms of knowledge and a variety of people. This makes social media the most effective method to participate in constant communication and gain access to new information and knowledge in any field including engagement in careers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The many-to-many constant, immediate and live interactions are seen as a revolution in how people access and interact with knowledge, and in the ways in which people perceive adult education and continuous development.

Furthermore, researchers widely agree that social media has become infused in all processes of education and personal development in the learners' and teachers' lives. Research also suggests that the easy accessibility to, and flexibility of, social media help to bridge the divide between formal and informal contexts of education, making learning integrated and continuous (Bonk, 2009; Crook & Lewthwaite, 2010; Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). Bonk (2009) and LeNoue et al. (2011) suggest that social media is not only changing education and continuous development processes, but it is also revolutionising these processes, moving them swiftly towards self-directed learning approaches. Through social media, users have ready access to information and people worldwide.

Boyd and Ellison (2008) summarise the main processes involved in using social media. These processes, which especially apply to countries with unlimited access to the web and social media, include personal appearance and self-presentation, producing and consuming media, sharing others' media and experiences, making constant connections and relationships, developing constant access to groups of related people. In these free platforms, people share their life experiences and engage in learning and production of knowledge by themselves, encouraged by

different rewarding structures that support continuous participation (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Social media also supports searchable content or media in a variety of forms such as published materials, designed instructional materials, photographs, discussions, videos, broadcasts of real experiences, members' talks and up-to-date news feeds. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), the contents in social media are designed by other people on the network, thus giving users' access to others' experiences in several fields. Such easy access enables users to save time and effort to gain information they need.

Studies in education indicate that social media presents multi-modal tools that support both teachers and learners personally and professionally and offers career development tools (Visser, Evering, & Barrett, 2014). For instance, social media provides students and teachers with sources of academic knowledge, learning and production that support their self-directed learning. A study by Hrastinski and Aghaee (2012) showed that university students accessed social media for academic information and perceived it as an important source of information for self-studies. Alabdulkareem (2015) also indicates that social media sites provide access to suitable scientific knowledge that have an influence on improving both teaching and learning of science in high-school education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). According to Alsolamy (2017), academics and universities in Saudi Arabia have used social media's constant, multi-purpose and easy access to become – and keep – updated with recent knowledge, research and progress in all fields of life, including academic knowledge. Hence, social media features provide an easy way for academics and students to have access to, and keep abreast of, new scientific knowledge and to publish and share academic information with experts and people in any field.

#### **4.1.2 Access to participatory cultures**

Another important advantage of social media is that it enables the development of participatory communities and groups of students or professionals. These support discussions related to one's lived experiences such as studies or work experiences to be constant, continuous and immediately accessible. Redecker, Ala-Mutka and Punie (2010) and Selwyn (2009). Additionally, Jenkins et al. (2009) believed that social media support the development of participatory cultures where students feel more comfortable of sharing their opinions and being involved in decision making. Consequentially, these properties that support participatory structures have also been utilised by universities and faculty to support students' engagement by providing constant links with college life events, and to engage with them by encouraging participation with opinions, questions or ideas (Al-Khalifa & Garcia, 2013; Alghamdi & Plunkett, 2018). Al-Khalifa (2008) points out that the university's utilisation of Twitter helps students to communicate more effectively and instantaneously, to express their queries and opinions, to make administrative decisions collaboratively and solve problems; in addition, most of the students expressed feeling closer to the faculty and university.

#### **4.1.3 Access to instructional strategies**

Several studies have investigated the role of social media as an instructional strategy either used by the learner or by the teacher. The platforms of social media provide live interaction and contextual learning including educational videos that can be used either inside the class or outside the class to support engagement (Chen & Bryer, 2012). Krutka and Carpenter (2016) suggest that social media presents unique and innovative opportunities for teachers to use creative pedagogies to support different areas of education including linking students to geographical or historical learning, increasing students' opportunities for live cultural negotiations and dialogue,

citizenship education and general awareness of world events, and intercultural learning. Alsolamy (2017) points to the increased utilisation of YouTube videos amongst Saudi faculty in one university to support students' engagement in tasks inside and outside the classroom. Social media supports innovative pedagogies and contextual informal opportunities that encourage students' engagement by exploration and experimentation in learning and teaching science. Furthermore, Alabdulkareem (2015) explains that social media presents opportunities for teachers to change high school students' attitudes towards learning science. Krutka and Carpenter (2016) show that informal interaction in social media increases students' language learning ability and their motivation in learning from native speakers. Research suggests that the properties of social media and the choices that it offers can be used by teachers or students to assist one-to-one support, self-regulated learning and academic performance (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Green et al., 2005).

The integration of social media in students' and teachers' lives has been impacted upon by its promised advantages for personal support and development either for learners or teachers. These include continuous and immediate access to knowledge and people, participatory cultures of learning, instructional strategies that support interactions in learning, innovative and live context pedagogies, and one-to-one support for self-regulated learning. There is no doubt that social media offers opportunities for students' engagement in both self-directed and self-regulated learning. Researchers argue that these properties revolutionise not only the ways in which an individual engages in independent learning and personal development but also the processes of teaching and learning in the educational systems. Teachers and students benefit from increased access to self-directed learning out of the formal context.

## **4.2 Influence of social media on students' engagement in independent learning and personal development**

Various studies have examined the influence of social media on students' engagement in independent learning and personal development. In the sections below, these studies are divided into five groups: social media in young students' lives and relationships; influence of social media on the development of self-efficacy and change of attitudes; use of social media to engage students in the higher education context; influence of social media on self-directed university learners' experiences and perceptions; and influence of social media on self-directed professionals' experiences and perceptions.

### **4.2.1 Social media in young students' lives and relationships**

Some studies point to the significant positive influence of self-presentation in social media on the lives and relationships of young students of high school and university age. These studies focus on young students' use of social media as tools for self-presentation with respect to their personal development, self-image, relationships and friends, and the overall wellbeing state of these young generations. Some of these studies used ethnographic methods, while others have employed a survey for this purpose. For example, Boyd (2007) combined observations of face-to-face and online spaces alongside qualitative interviews with high school students, with the aim of exploring social media influence on their identity development. The findings suggest that high school students develop their confidence in cultural life and self-image during their interactions with friends and relationships through these sites. Similarly, Pempek, Yermolayeva and Calvert (2009) investigated university students' use of social media in their lives through an analysis of their experiences in reflective diaries of their daily use. The study shows that students' use of social media influences their personal development, emotional states and overall wellbeing. The



empathy and emotions from the expressions of feelings and self-presentation in these sites lead students to increase their friendships and relationships, which enhance their emotional status. For instance, Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) suggest that students' ability to self-present on these sites has been associated with their ability to maintain relationships and enjoy the benefits of having friends. They refer to one's ability to form relationships as social capital, i.e., "the resources accumulated through the relationships among people" (p. 1145). To explore the relationship between Facebook usage and students' self-worth, self-image and wellbeing, the authors conducted a quantitative analysis of surveys of university students. They suggest that young students use Facebook as a tool for presenting self, connecting and maintaining a connection with friends and keeping in touch with old friends, and they thus accumulate social resources and benefits from friends. Their study concludes that the social use of Facebook is associated with students' overall psychological wellbeing.

It could be argued from these studies that students try to learn about socialisation styles to gain the confidence they need to engage in their social lives. Steinfield, Ellison and Lampe's study (2008) examines the relationship between university students' use of Facebook, self-esteem and social engagement. They suggest that people will try to develop their confidence and learn about styles of socialisation in Facebook before they are able to form social relationships and have friends in their lives. Furthermore, some studies argue that students will try to gain academic as well social confidence in these sites. Greenhow and Robelia (2009) indicate that students' use of social media demonstrates the learning literacies currently negotiated in education. They explored the use of social media sites amongst 11 high school. There has been a noticeable role of using social media on adolescent students' identity development in terms of shaping their feelings, behaviours and values, and the influence of this on their resilience and confidence. Students used social media

for obtaining emotional and social support, thus allowing them to gain confidence and to accomplish essential learning functions.

Young students in Saudi Arabia seem to be influenced by globalisation and they used these sites in similar ways. Aljasir (2015) explored Saudi universities' uses of Facebook with a sociocultural lens. The findings were analysed in relation to self-disclosure, gratifications obtained and social roles. Participants appreciated the open opportunities for socialisation and cultural negotiations probably because of the cultural limitations on interactions in the Saudi context. The study shows that Saudi university students are similar to other young students around the world in terms of using Facebook for accumulating friends and being in touch with friends all the time. Furthermore, the study shows that social media is most used for befriending and maintaining relationships, followed by entertainment and gaming, expression of emotions and empathy, along with personal and educational purposes such as hobbies and learning languages including study, and joining academic groups. The participants also value Facebook as an outlet that enables them to express their emotions, share their values and opinions of social issues and learn for academic purposes. According to the Saudi university students, social media platforms also bring them many advantages for their careers and self-development.

These studies' findings suggest that social media is a vehicle for the young students' self-presentation and personal development including emotional expression which eventually influences their social relationships and emotional status. Nevertheless, these studies also show that there are individual differences amongst students with respect to their use of social media platforms for self-presentation and the expression of their personal characteristics. Eventually, these differences in self-presentation will determine the benefits and gratifications obtained in students' lives (Aljasir , 2015). Generally, the findings of these studies make it clear that social media plays an important role in young students' self-presentation and social lives in terms of

boosting relationships with friends and personal development. The various platforms allow students to learn fast and more about the appropriate cultural styles of behaviour, communication and socialisation in their personal and social lives.

#### **4.2.2 Influence of social media on the development of self-efficacy and change of attitudes**

In the context of the theoretical framework discussed (see Chapter 3) people are purposive, reflective and critical when using social media to positively influence their lives. Bandura (1977) suggests that people will try to develop their self-efficacies and confidence in any domain of life to confront the obstacles they face whenever they have the control and persistence to do so. He identifies four sources of self-efficacy: performance accomplishments of experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. Accordingly, some studies show that social media provides sources for the development of self-efficacy and eventually change of attitudes when used by reflective learners for experiential and self-regulated learning. For instance, Argyris and Xu (2016) argue that social media provide with the sources of self-efficacy. However, the main important issue of the theory of self-efficacy is that the benefits on the development of one's confidence or change in attitude and overcoming difficulties are credit to the experiential learning, control and reflection processes of the learner (see Chapter3). Several studies investigate the role of social media in changing learners' attitudes in the context of SCT and self-efficacy. Hall and Hall (2010) explored the relationship between self-efficacy and the use of social media tools in the context of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). They argued that social media support students control and achievements and make the students feel more positive in terms of the performance they achieve, which support the development of their engagement, and eventually adding more to their self-efficacy.

Argyris and Xu (2016) claim that quantitative and qualitative research in the field of social media has adopted a technology-deterministic lens that focuses on the technology influence but yielded no research conclusions. They identify technology determinative lens as the belief that technology has either positive or negative influences or the belief that technology comes first before learning. This approach fails to properly address the peculiarity of the users and the roles of their contexts in research. They suggest that self-efficacy theory provide a suitable lens for understanding social media use. This means any positive or negative influence of technology is the result of the learning process underlying technology use and is not result from the technology itself. Everyone can have significantly different outcomes from using these universal tools based on different situations. Their survey findings on 250 university students support that Facebook provides sources for students' self-efficacy and change of attitudes for career development.

Similarly, Hu, Gu and Zhang (2017) suggest that social media use involves both informational and social processes of learning. Therefore, they contend that SCT presents a comprehensive framework for understanding development from both uses. Hu et al. (2017) carried out a longitudinal survey in China to explore the relationships between social media usage, self-efficacy and cultural intelligence. Their findings indicate that students' learning in social media is linked to their ability of reflection, openness and intercultural awareness. Their participants therefore associated the development of their self-efficacy with an increase in cultural intelligence.

Similar findings with respect to development of confidence and its relation to openness and intercultural intelligence have been reported in studies in Saudi Arabia. Social media and online communities influence offline communities and lead to changes in people's attitudes. AlSaggaf (2004) suggests that online communities have changed Saudi people's attitudes in both positive and negative ways. On the

positive side, people have become self-confident with increased perception of individual differences within their culture and an open-minded attitude. On the negative side, social media has influenced cultural beliefs and family ties. A recent study by Alyedreessy et al. (2017) shows that Saudi women perceive that their self-esteem, confidence and social integration have grown as a result of social media's influence on society. The researchers interpret this finding as the influence of social media on social inclusion that impacted on some cultural beliefs and has led to a change in social attitudes towards women.

Similar to the findings discussed in the section one of this review about students use of social media for improving confidence for improving styles of behaviour and social engagement. Several studies have shown that adjustment to university life can be a particularly challenging experience. Eventually, students can turn to social media to gain confidence and overcome difficulties in the transitional phase. Madge, Meek, Wellens and Hooley (2009) conducted an online survey with university students. Their study shows that students' use of social media increases before their first day. This increased usage helps them to overcome difficulties of adjusting to the university. The university students reported that the main purpose of using social media was to develop their own confidence through exploring information about other students on campus and to combat their feelings of isolation and other obstacles on their first day. Students perceived that the most important reason to use Facebook was to find friends in order to facilitate their difficult transition, and to address the other academic difficulties they faced. However, Madge et al. (2009) found that only 50% of university students used social media to communicate and explore the benefits of friendships. The findings were attributed to the impact of contextual factors and the various learning processes involved and used by learners.

Finally, through their ethnographic observation of higher education classrooms and interviews with students, Hemmi et al. (2009) show that the use of social media can

lead to a change in students' activity associated with increased confidence and academic production. They observe that students have more control and confidence in organising their participation, reflecting and sharing their learning experiences, presentations and assignments.

As described in the theoretical framework (chapter 3) literature suggest that self-efficacy is comprehensive for all types of skills and knowledge that include informational and social uses including academic study so it could be used in this research to understand both uses for social and academic purposes and for understanding the process of independent learning and personal development of students.

#### **4.2.3 The formal use of social media in engaging students in higher education contexts**

According to Kuh (2009), motivation levels of students are of key significance in higher education. Kuh (2009) proposes ways of engaging university students to grow their experiences in social life by involving them in co-curricular activities such as seminars, community engagement and service, writing assignments, collaborative projects and professional learning. Chickering and Gamson identify seven dimensions that can significantly influence students' motivation and involvement levels and eventually their success (1987, cited in Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011). These are: (1) student/faculty contact; (2) cooperation among students; (3) active learning; (4) prompt feedback; (5) emphasising time on task; (6) communicating high expectations; and (7) respecting diversity. According to Junco et al. (2011), social media has been employed by faculty within these seven dimensions to increase students' motivation levels and engagement in both academic and co-curricular engagement to ensure the students' psychosocial development and academic perseverance.

The advances in social media have been linked directly to supporting students' engagement and motivation levels in global higher education. McLoughlin and Lee (2010) suggest that social media generally supports students' engagement in both self-directed and self-regulated learning that significantly influences and supports the intended educational outcomes in higher education. Junco et al. (2011) also claim that there have been changes in practices in higher education with respect to faculty members using social media more and more to engage and motivate the students. The perceived benefits of social media's immediacy and accessibility make it the most effective way to link students to academic life and keep them informed of learning tasks.

However, in spite of these reported theoretical benefits of social media on students' engagement and self-regulated learning, studies have failed to fully explore the effect of social media usage on students' engagement and achievement (Matzat & Vrieling, 2016). Researchers conclude that social media use alone cannot determine students' social engagement or performance, as many other contextual, personal and social, organisational factors are also involved in determining student engagement (Argyris & Xu, 2016; Junco et al., 2011; Madge et al., 2009).

Due to the influence of a multitude of networks and attitudes, it is not straightforward to identify the relationship between using social media and student engagement or attitudes, even when universities use policies for student' engagement on a regular basis. Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2015) indicate that some universities utilise a strategy for engaging students through personal support over their study period. They examined the relationship between social media use and adjustment to university in two universities: one used social media support as a strategic plan for student engagement whilst the other did not have such a plan. The findings from the survey with the students in the two universities suggest that students' high use of social media predicted low adjustment with no influence of university plan. Junco

(2012) study also report on conflicting findings with respect to students' attitudes and experiences in social media.

To address this complexity in university students' attitudes and uses of social media in higher education research, studies have sought experimental methods to investigate how universities' formal use of social media alone influenced students' levels of engagement. Examples of these studies include DeAndrea et al. (2012), who propose a specifically designed social media site as an intervention aimed at altering students' attitudes and perceptions towards university adjustments prior to their first semester.

Similarly, Junco et al. (2011) conducted experimental study to investigate the use of Twitter by faculty to engage students in both academic and co-curricular activities for supporting students' engagement in personal development. Engagement was quantified by using a 19-item scale based on the National Survey of Student Engagement. There were significant increase in medical students' engagement and semester GPA for the experimental group compared to the control one. In KSA, Al-Fahad (2009) also claims that offering faculty continuous support throughout technology in one Saudi University indicated that mobile support influenced students' engagement and attitudes towards study and satisfaction. Al-Fahad (2009) concludes that supporting students' access and engagement when they are at home and out of campus is an important strategy for the university to increase students' retention.

Through a mixed methods approach consisting of surveys and interviews, Alghamdi and Plunkett (2018) explored the attitudes of 313 male and 293 female Saudi postgraduate students. The findings show that female students perceived more positive than negative impacts associated with their academic use of social media. Participants stated in the interviews that social engagement in relationships through



these sites had the most influence on their academic lives and engagement. The authors pointed to greater involvement perceived amongst females in academic life from social media use, which they attributed to the social restrictions on some females in Saudi society.

#### **4.2.4 Influence of social media on university self-directed learners' experiences and perceptions**

Some studies have an interest in how social media and technologies have exerted remarkable changes in university learners' experiences and perceptions. In higher education, particularly, this influence can be visibly seen in the learner experience because the learners' role in managing their own learning is a central part of the curriculum that is closely related to academic success. According to Deepwell and Malik (2008), university students are challenged with requirements that require more freedom and chances to learn independently, which is known as self-study time, an intended outcome in higher education. Furthermore, technologies and networks make students' learning and socialising with friends for asking questions and queries and the ability to get support to overcome obstacles in their studies, which turn into a continuous process at home and on campus.

Consequentially, several studies have investigated students' use of technologies and social media to support their self-directed learning and independent study. Conole, de Laat, Dillon, and Darby (2008) conducted case studies where the learners' experiences were investigated through in-depth interviews and log diaries to examine and describe how they shaped their activities using technology. They concluded that students were immersed in learning activities where they "select and appropriate technologies to their own personal learning needs" (p.1).

Some studies have looked at organisational and pedagogical factors influencing students' engagement. Hemmi et al. 's (2009) ethnographic study shows increased

student engagement in self-directed learning through technologies and social media and highlights the influence of this on boosting students' confidence and motivation in higher education. They argue that there is a need to understand the implications for changing the roles of teachers to meet the students' evolving needs. They claim that there is an increased mismatch between self-directed students' practices with policy and faculty organisation. Deepwell and Malik (2008) further investigated self-directed learners' needs when they surveyed 250 students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and explored issues related to their engagement. The study, which also used focus groups and follow-up in-depth interviews, found that students' used technology to facilitate their engagement in studies and their transition processes. However, students demanded guidance and feedback on what and how to choose educational support when using technology for active independent learning.

Hrastinski and Aghaee's (2012) study examined how campus students understood the use of social media in supporting their studies and the perceived benefits and limitations of their use. Their findings underline the pivotal role of the teacher in supporting students' commitment and use of social media to support learning with regard to the variety of student experiences and attitudes.

There has been a lack of studies that investigated the needs and motives of self-directed learners from their use of social media or the factors that influenced university self-directed learners' use. I found only one study that explores factors that influenced university self-directed learners' use. Bonk et al. (2015) investigated the factors that influenced the motivations for committing to a continuous university development by exploring the self-directed learners in an open online module using a survey and follow-up interviews. The study found that critical factors in self-directed learners' engagement were linked to their determination for self-improvement, freedom of learning choice, and fun learning. The interview findings further showed

the importance of students' internal motivation to advance their careers. They also found that learning a foreign language was one of the most important reasons for committing to self-directed learning. Respondents also showed a preference for free sites and claimed that self-improvement, rather than gaining a certificate, motivated their learning the most. The study concluded that having internal motivations for self-directed learning enhanced one's ability to commit to personal development.

Research concerning university self-directed learners' motives in social media is limited. However, further research has been undertaken to understand the motivations underlying social media use for personal development amongst other groups of self-directed learners, such as teachers and professionals.

#### **4.2.5 Influence of social media on self-directed professionals' experiences and perceptions**

Several studies point to changes in professional experiences and perceptions influenced by social media. The literature presents social media as a means of pursuing self-directed learning, professional development, and continuous personal development. There is no single way to define how and why professionals use social media for personal or professional development; however, studies have indicated strong personal motives with perceived benefits and achievements (McLoughlin, 2016). According to Eraut (2002), the personal factor with other factors in the working and organisational environment are important in developing an understanding of the issues and motives related to professional engagement.

Research has investigated professionals' experiences by indicating the motivations underlying their use of social media, with a focus on the reasons behind professionals' engagement in development. It is believed that immediate access to information and people enables professionals and academics to reflect on their experiences and practices and to formulate styles of training that are related to

solving obstacles and practical problems in their practice and to boost their confidence and motivation. In addition, social media allows professionals to maintain continuous access to updated knowledge and new trends in their practice and enables their brainstorming of ideas beyond their own limitations for better reflection and practice.

Parboosingh (2002) argues that networks foster reflection through immediate access. This increases professionals' ability to learn from their own experiences by enabling integration between learning and practice. Thus, their main value is in learning from experience. Broadly, Parboosingh (2002) indicates that the use of the Internet and networks gives immediate access followed by actions and achievements. Here, professionals have the opportunity to reflect on, evaluate, and enhance, their practice by interacting with peers and mentors to solve problems, brainstorm ideas, validate and share information. This creates positive attitudes that influence the processes of decision-making and professional judgment.

Similarly, Visser, Evering and Barrett (2014) suggest that ideal professional development needs to foster both learning and practice together as experiential learning. Their mixed-methods study explored K–12 teachers' usage of Twitter through a self-report survey. The results indicate that teachers highly valued Twitter as a tool of self-directed professional development. The participants reported that they were self-motivated to use Twitter for professional purposes. The most commonly perceived benefits were the constant access to updated professional knowledge and the increased meaningful relationships with other teachers. This increased their motivation in their teaching practice, and their ability to seek professional development suitable for their specific practice needs.

McPherson, Budge and Lemon (2015) reflect on their own experiences as academics and the influence of Twitter on their academic reflection and

development. Their findings show that using social media engages them with networks of academics, locally and globally, maintains a constant information flow that updates their academic knowledge, inspires their academic thinking and motivates their academic practices and reflection on their experience.

Carpenter and Krutka (2014, 2015) conducted a self-report survey of K–16 educators, which yielded both quantitative and qualitative data on reasons for educators' use of Twitter. Multifaceted uses of Twitter in educators' practice were reported. The most rated features amongst respondents were the personal and instant nature of Twitter interactions. Twitter was also credited with supplying opportunities to access novel ideas and maintain contact with people to keep up with new trends in education. Educators found that Twitter supported the expansion of their knowledge beyond their own schools and districts and beyond like-minded people, so they could engage in diverse perspectives and ideas. Finally, participants described Twitter as having superior advantages for their practice over traditional professional development practices because it immediately resonated with their practice and made them more confident and motivated.

Eraut (2002) argues that informal and individual learning practices when left to the learner without curriculum can turn to uninformed and distorted practices that lead to mismatches in the working environment. Also, there is always a need for organisational curriculum and policy to organise and cultivate these practices.

Similarly, McLoughlin (2016) points to the increasing belief that professional development in this age could be achieved effectively through experiential learning, utilising networks and social media. The influence of this in workplace environments should allow for more room for practical meetings that enable peer conversations to boost organised engagement in professional learning. McLoughlin (2016) indicates that some professionals and students display a deep personal motivation to use these tools for professional and personal development as experiential learning,

however, these practices have rarely been addressed or motivated throughout policy organisation, and the opportunities they offer for effective development remain underestimated and unorganised.

The literature shows that professionals have a strong motivation to use social media to benefit their practice. The perceived boost in confidence gained from the ability to make learning personal to one's needs to solve immediate practical problems and overcome obstacles in their practice is the most reported motivation amongst professionals. Nevertheless, the process of successful engagement in personal and professional development does not involve the individual use of social media alone, as it entails experiential and reflective learning that is increased by collective involvement, access, contribution and achievement (McLoughlin 2016; Parboosingh 2002)

### **4.3 Learners' experiences in higher education**

It is widely agreed that technologies have the capability to move traditional education into a learner-centred model. The recent development of social media and its influences on learning and development beyond the formal context of education have moved attention to the learners, and their uses of social media to support their engagement in the educational process. These experiences and behaviours of students outside the formal context of education have gained importance by being linked to student success and performance in higher education. Studies investigating university students' experiences of engagement in independent learning and personal development are reviewed in this section.

#### **4.3.1 Variations and complexity in students' experiences of engagement**

Generations born after 1982 have been influenced by networks and globalisation and have been the subject of literature debate that refers to them with labels such as

millennials, digital natives, net generations, y generation (Jones & Shao, 2011) and recently z generation. Prensky (2001) claims that members of this age category share a social era that is recognised by fast and easy-to-use tools for accessing digital information and improving productivity. These have influenced their development. It is claimed that accessing and dealing with digital information and design production, which involve the processes of decision-making, early in life, enable the development of cognitive capacities and thinking abilities (Iran-Nejad & Stewart, 2011). Prensky (2001) further claims that other age groups who are labeled as digital immigrants have not received such immediate and easy access to large amount of information or production tools early in their lives. Eventually, they lack the cognitive ability, confidence, and fluency to deal effectively with high volumes of digital information in their lives. The implications of this, according to Prensky (2001), is a potential generational divide in skills and capabilities. For digital natives, using technology tools needs no technical skills and is not separated from other cognitive skills required for processing digital information. Accessing and dealing with digital information and production tools is an integral part of young students' lives and they have developed autonomy in learning experientially throughout these easy-to-learn tools, to do things in their lives with technology quickly, simultaneously and fluently (Prensky, 2001). The autonomy and productivity achieved from using technologies in learning also exhibit some of their confidence and cognitive abilities to receive and manipulate a large amount of information, process random access information, multi-task as in reading, writing and listening whilst taking notes when learning, and to process visual information and graphics effectively (Prensky, 2001).

Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) further believe that generations of the net exhibit social and communicative capacities that make them feel comfortable communicating in different forms; they also tend to be social and like to learn and work in groups. This view supports the argument that these learners "had developed new attitudes,

aptitudes, and approaches to learning” influenced by the use of networks (Jones & Shao, 2011, p.5). It has been noticed that digital native learners prefer digital resources for information, seek photographic representations for information, and feel comfortable communicating and learning online.

Due to the fast growth of social media tools, many researchers believe that networks generally change their users' attitudes, regardless of their age, and enrich their life experiences that become increasingly integrated with digital information (Prensky, 2009). In particular, students who have spent a significant amount of their lifetime in global networks have accumulated life experiences from a very young age. This trait can be observed in their ability and performance in utilising these user-friendly tools for customisation of their lives, for the design and creation of media of their own and for presentation of their skills to the global world (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007).

In the academic context, learners of today have exhibited noticeably increased confidence with academic production and with the display of their own designed academic material (Carr et al., 2008; Hemmi et al., 2009). The Europe-wide Mediapro project reported “wide evidence of self-regulation by young people”, suggesting that young people are more productive and skilled than is sometimes assumed in education (Mediapro 2006, p.14, cited in Selwyn, 2007).

However, many researchers in education criticise the superficial generalisation of learners to be self-directed and critical based on the use of technologies alone, indicating that more factors are involved in engagement in personal development (Bennett & Maton, 2010; Jones, Ramanau, Cross, & Healing, 2010; Rhona Sharpe, Beetham, & De Freitas, 2010). For instance, empirical research on university learners concluded that even digital natives who are born in the digital age have different and variations amongst them with respect to using technologies (Bennett &



Maton, 2010; Kennedy, Judd, Churchward, Gray, & Krause, 2008; Rohna Sharpe, Beetham, & Freitas, 2010).

Furthermore, both quantitative and qualitative research conducted on the influence of social media on students' engagement in university or in schools have not reached conclusions with respect to the various purposes of use and conflicting attitudes reported amongst learner experiences (Crook, 2012; Junco, 2012; Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009; Matzat & Vrieling, 2016; Stirling, 2016).

In addition to the complexity of learning experiences with technologies, recent research suggests that social media can negatively impact on university students' engagement and development. Students can use social media tools for different purposes. However, according to Kop and Fournier (2011), even learners who are self-directed might be exposed to risks in social media that can have negative influences on their engagement. Several studies in different cultures, including the KSA, highlight some of the negative influences of social media on academic performance and attainment of university students (Alwagait, Shahzad, & Alim, 2015; Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010).

Researchers argue that experiences of learning with technologies and social media are not simple to evaluate with respect to variation and conflicts of learners' attitudes based on different individual uses and past experiences of engagement in development. Furthermore, recent research has shown that social media can have a negative influence on students' engagement and academic performance.

#### **4.3.2 Factors related to students' engagement**

There is no conclusion about the negative or positive influences of social media use on students' engagement in independent learning or personal development (Matzat & Vrieling, 2016). Every individual can use social media tools in different ways and

for different purposes based on their past experiences. Furthermore, research suggests that social media platforms are popular and easy- to-use individual tools that can be employed to suit the individual needs for engagement in personal development of their own. Meaning that, their use is shaped by personal and other social and educational factors in the given context (Crook, 2012; Madge et al., 2009). Some of the factors influencing variations of students' engagement and experiences are discussed below.

### **Students' attitudes (progressive model)**

Much research relies on attitudes to develop an understanding of students' uses of technologies and social media and its influences on them. Attitudes, whether positive or negative, also help in understanding the influences of students' past experiences, including levels of awareness and skills (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Beetham and Sharpe (2010) propose a framework of learners' development in higher education that relies on understanding students' engagement in development from their uses, behaviours, and attitudes. Figure (4.1) illustrates the levels that describe learner development that emerges from research on learners' experience in higher education. This starts from access and awareness (I have), which then develops to skills (I can) then through continuous use it becomes practices (I do), and finally, these skills and practices become part of their identity (I am). The authors suggest that the framework also presents an understanding of individuals' motivations to gain new skills by the challenges related to presenting themselves and developing their own identity at the top level (see Figure 4.1).

The authors present learners' perceptions, behaviours, and experiences of learning using technologies as statements and attitudes that have emerged from their research on the learners' experiences in higher education. As shown on (Figure 4.1), the authors designate the learners' experience in attitudes such as "I have," "I can," "I do," "I am." These attitudes reflect one's past experiences of use as integrated, not

disconnected, from one's organisation, life and skills. They also suggest it offers an understanding of the learning skills or the learning literacy of the present day.

Consequentially, the authors introduced the main barrier to accessing continuous development, and education in the current age is the individual's access combined with awareness as described at the bottom level (see figure 4.1). In order to engage in personal development according to this framework, students need both access and awareness (Beetham & Sharpe, 2010).

**Figure 4.1 Framework of learner development in higher education**



Source: Beetham & Sharpe (2010)

Ultimately, learning how to learn and self-awareness are the main barriers to employing technologies and social media in personal development. According to (Kitsantas & Dabbagh, 2010), learners need to be explicitly informed about how to learn as a fundamental element in raising their commitment and motivation levels for learning using technologies in this age. Krutka and Carpenter (2016) also suggest that boosting learners' awareness requires support about responding to questions such as what, when, why, and how they use social media can significantly influence

students' motivation. Similarly, Westerman, Daniel and Bowman (2016) who analysed students' attitudes using the self-efficacy theory suggest that once students become self-aware and engage positively in the rewards of social media, they will quickly gain confidence and change their attitudes into higher development goals that eventually engage them in endless development. Likewise, Beetham & Sharpe's (2010) learner development framework, as shown in (Figure 4.1), also suggests that the top-level represents students, teachers, or individuals who hold positive feelings and attitudes towards their personal development and use. Individuals in the top-level are described as confident and more likely to be engaged, self-aware, self-motivated, and successful in their continuous development of learning or teaching practices — conversely, to those who hold on to negative predispositions and experiences in the lower levels of development. Sequentially, the framework offers answers to the question about what makes individuals vary in their willingness to use social media for self-development. For instance, they might lack awareness, attitudes, or practices.

The authors also suggest that other researchers can use the framework for different purposes to understand personal and continuous development for different groups from their stories, attitudes, and experiences of adopting technologies and social media for personal development.

### **Personal characteristics**

Given the reported disparity among students in terms of personal development, it is important to take into consideration their personal characteristics and learning choices. Early adoption of social media as a tool for engagement and development could explain why some people progress while others lag behind. Boyd's (2007) study suggests that safety concerns from family members influence students' access and the time spent on useful activities. Excessive safety concerns constitute a barrier

for students' practice of critical judgment, which is an opportunity for development in these networks (Boyd, 2007). According to Aljasir (2015), some female students in KSA may not be early adopters or may not use these tools for presenting themselves because of safety and other family concerns, including other cultural concerns such as privacy. Greenhow and Robelia (2009) also suggest that cultural background and economic status can become sources of negative attitudes and lack of confidence based on a record of lack of experience and access to learning opportunities. In the Saudi context, a difference between male and female use of social media has been reported in different studies. Al-Fahad (2009) and Alghamdi and Plunkett (2018) indicate that female students perceive the influence of using social media on their development more positively than their male counterparts. Alwagait et al. (2015) indicate that male Saudi students perceive fewer benefits on their development from their use of social media and more difficulties from its excessive use for watching football and movies.

Any successful learning experience needs adequate social and self-presentation skills. Students may also vary in their use and perceived benefits based on their personality. For instance, studies have shown that personality traits such as extraversion, emotional stability, self-esteem and openness to experience are positively related to the use of social applications (Correa, Hinsley, & De Zuniga, 2010). This is supported by Bonk et al.'s (2015) study findings, which suggest that personal values like curiosity, interest and internal need for self-improvement play a large role in the achievements of self-directed learners, and that these appear in their perceived self-change, career development and language learning. A study conducted by Westerman et al. (2016) on university students shows the strong influence of personal characteristics such as positivity and past experiences on students' positive attitudes and engagement.

The above points suggest that demographic aspects and personal characteristics are important personal factors to be considered in investigating issues related to students' engagement in independent learning and personal development from their use of social media. Studies have shown the influence of age, early adoption, gender, family safety concern, cultural background, and other personality characteristics such as positivity, extraversion, emotional stability, self-esteem and openness and values on positive students' engagement.

### **Self-regulation**

A self-regulated learner is able to create the necessary balance through taking control of their learning by observing their own cognitive, motivational, emotional, persistent and social aspects of their learning, and eventually leading to their achievement. Njiru's (2007) study examined this factor and suggested that university students could be classified into three levels of self-regulation ability: high, modest and low. Academic learning, which is rich in technologies and social media, requires high self-regulation abilities and organisation. Nijru's research suggests that university students need high levels of self-regulation ability in the dimensions of motivation, academic goals, self-learning beliefs, task management, volition and self-evaluation. These issues should be considered by universities and teachers. Tabak and Nguyen (2013) suggest also that learners' personal characteristics have a significant influence on their ability to cope with self-regulated learning in open environments. Students who are self-regulated demonstrate learner consciousness, general self-efficacy, and openness to experience and risk.

There are differences amongst students in self-regulation, which influence their experiences of engagement when using social media. As an example, Junco (2012) examined the relationship between time spent on Facebook in different activities including preparing for classroom study, participating in learning activities and collecting and sharing information, on the College Grade Point Average (GPA) using

a large sample (n = 1839). The findings showed that time spent on Facebook was significantly negatively related to students' GPA. Kirschner and Karpinski's (2010) study confirmed that the time spent on Facebook was negatively correlated to student outcome as reported by their GPA. The students easily became distracted from their learning goals and engaged in texting or other activities. It could be argued that it becomes more difficult for students to stay engaged in learning when they have personal devices in hand. When these students found they had not learned well, they believed they lacked the capacity to succeed and therefore experienced lower levels of confidence and developed negative attitudes towards engagement (Junco, 2012).

This agrees with Westerman et al.'s (2016) exploration of the sources of negative attitudes in social media. The authors concluded that students may not have been aware of the influence of their social media behaviour on their learning, and that this lack of awareness can have a prominent impact on their learning and attitudes. The study highlights the importance of educators in understanding the use of social media in order to support their students' awareness in and out of the classroom and to increase their engagement.

Social media can distract and negatively influence students' development and academic success. Alwagait et al.'s (2015) survey of male Saudi university students indicated that their excessive use of social media for football, movies and gaming impacted on their time management and academic performance. They proposed finding ways to help students establish a balance between educational and leisure uses of social media by improving their time management.

The university students current need to have equilibrium between different aspects of life and study and to develop students' organisational skills has been highlighted in the literature (Stirling, 2016). A careful balance must be obtained between control and exploration if advantages are to be gained from social media and networks.

When students lack a strong sense of confidence and self-goals, it is likely that they will experience problems of disorientation with relation to the overabundance of information and choices, which would result in wasting time without specific goals, and eventually, the development of negative attitudes (Yurttas, Karademir, & Cicek, 2011).

Moreover, studies have shown that students are more likely to have different educational needs based on current technological changes. However, these students do not receive sufficient equipment or feedback (Deepwell & Malik, 2008). In particular, students who lack responsibility of their own learning and self-regulation are more likely to experience increased learning difficulties and social media risks.

### **Social media risks**

There have been many educational initiatives in different cultures to inform students of the risks involved in using social media. Cranmer, Selwyn and Potter (2009) explain the need to raise students' awareness of the risk in social media, such as cyber safety, cyber ethics, attention shift, social disconnection and media credibility.

It is widely agreed that social media can have a direct and destructive impact which can negatively influence students' personal development and require educational intervention (Yust, 2014). In the KSA context, Alharbi's (2017) study pointed to increased concerns about the openness and globalisation of social media and its negative influence on students' identities. According to Alabdulkareem (2015), some schools in KSA have eliminated the use of social media due to the risks associated with it. In contrast, studies in other cultures have shown that students' awareness of risk did not necessarily prevent the risk, showing that the process was more complicated (Westerman et al., 2016). Cranmer et al. (2009) further note that the constant stating of social media's negative influence in education does not address the problem as it could conceal the lack of student support for the development of



critical thinking and learning skills. Westerman et al. (2016) also emphasise students' need for pedagogical support and dialogue about how to use social media.

Furthermore, Krutka and Carpenter (2016) agree that overestimating social media risk would make teachers less motivated to improve themselves, making them less able to support students or to identify their learning problems. This would in turn impact on the development of the new learning literacy in which teachers need to present clear answers to questions of why, when, what, how, with whom. Similarly, Westerman et al. (2016) explain that teachers should model the positive use of social media to support students' engagement in the rewards of social media. If students lack teacher support for their self-directed learning, then they are more likely to encounter the risks – instead of the opportunities – involved in the use of social media. Alabdulkareem (2015) also identifies barriers to social media use in KSA, such as the negative attitudes of high school teachers who see social media as posing a threat to education, instead of complementing other educational resources.

### **Organisational and educational factors in the setting**

Contextual factors in the educational setting, such as the university environment including the curriculum and faculty, play a significant role in students' engagement in independent learning and personal development. According to Greenhow and Robelia (2009), the curriculum has not properly supported students' skills and learning literacies that are needed for engagement in personal development and technology usage to meet current students' needs.

The literature shows that students in the context of KSA have also experienced difficulties in their engagement in independent learning and their academic performance has been influenced negatively by social media (Alwagait et al., 2015). In the Saudi higher education sector, educators have still not responded to their new roles as learning facilitators and motivators supporting students' skills and assisting

their engagement. Al-Shehri's (2010) study of educators suggested the prevalence of a narrow pedagogical vision and lack of integration in the curriculum that influence the education in terms of supporting self-directed learners needs. Deepwell and Malik (2008) also indicate that undergraduate and postgraduate students express the need for significant input and supervision from their teachers in facilitating and guiding their self-directed learning. A study by Hrastinski and Aghaee (2012) investigated students' use of social media to support their learning. The authors identified the students' needs for the teachers to support them in their learning engagement and underlined the pivotal role of the teacher in the learning process. The lack of integration in the curriculum on the structural level makes teachers less receptive and less responsible with respect to their changing roles in supporting students' independent learning skills (Crook, 2008). Unfortunately, this situation could have a bigger impact on students who struggle because they cannot be easily identified given the complexity of practices and experiences, and eventually their needs to learn independently will not be satisfied. Furthermore, under the influence of social media risk, this could have negative impact on those students personal and academic development. A greater focus on the individual is needed in order to support students' engagement in independent learning, and to minimise the reported differences in the development and attitudes of learners (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; LeNoue, Hall, & Eighmy, 2011; McLoughlin & Lee, 2010). The formal pedagogical vision needs to be stretched to focus on the learner, and to increase adaptation to students' different needs and skills (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016; Hemmi, Bayne, & Land, 2009; Selwyn, 2007).

It is widely agreed that students have a range of strategies when they learn; they do not all learn in the same way. This means that there is a need to focus on each learner's needs and the challenges that face self-directed learners within a learner-centred approach to education.

## **Social factors**

The concept of social inclusion has emerged as an important indicator of the quality of higher education at a structural level resulting from the influence of globalisation and information networks (Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler, & Bereded-Samuel, 2010).

Social inclusion has an important role in global economic growth that is based on human skills and knowledge production with an assumption that equity and access for disadvantaged groups follow from the effects of supporting and sharing resources and knowledge (Gidley et al., 2010). The shift of focus from the teacher to the learner on the pedagogical and classroom levels has been seen to increase the demand on students' motivation, with an increased need for supporting peer influence and sharing of experiences in the formal education (Junco et al., 2011).

It is true that social media supports the development of participatory cultures where students can take advantage of each other's experiences. Participatory cultures enable the sharing of one's lived experiences, such as studies or work experiences, to become constant, continuous and immediately accessible (Jenkins et al., 2009). Members of networks are expected to be self-motivated to share experiences based on common interests in any domain of knowledge or skill. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) note that the attitudes and interests of members in sharing knowledge have been encouraged in social media sites with suitable reward structures.

This suggests that within the formal educational organizations there is need to support the sharing of experiences and to remove the social issues that might be barriers of the exchanging of knowledge. Social factors in university students' informal communities such as social inclusion, immediate social feedback and constant emotional support of peers were reported to have the most influence on students' development (Redecker et al., 2010). Selwyn's (2009) study shows that students get several benefits and emotional support from their peers in informal class conversations on Facebook. Selwyn (2009) also observes that students learn their

roles as students from their active peers, and that disadvantaged students benefit the most from learning from the experiences of other classmates on Facebook.

Furthermore, the influence of social inclusion via Facebook has been shown to increase the strength of classroom relationships, feelings of responsibility, peer learning, persistence, and peer support. Voorn and Kommers's (2013) study indicates that introverted and vulnerable students learn from other students who are more active and extroverted in social media conversations and get more benefits from their peers' influence and support.

Participatory informal communities have sometimes been criticised for their inability to achieve the required mutual exchange of experiences that would influence development. According to Tu (2002, cited in Alsolamy, 2017), several barriers might influence the contributors' motivations to share their experiences. These include egos, personal attacks from others, poor interpersonal relationships, lack of a sense of belonging, and lack of trust amongst members or lack of confidence in knowledge. This is supported by Boyd's (2007) study in educational settings, which found that while social media tools had the potential to connect students' groups, there was always a need for educational intervention to facilitate naturally occurred exclusions amongst students. In the context of KSA, Alibrahim's (2014) study on university students' use of formal social networks indicates the need for pedagogical supervision or intervention regarding student groups to increase students' mutual exchange and facilitate students' cooperation.

When the informal practices of engagement in independent learning and personal development are not supervised organisationally, it is expected that a lot of variations and differences in experiences can occur, potentially obstructing cooperation amongst students. Students can have different skills, orientation and purposes when there is no formal curriculum for guiding these emergent informal engagement practices amongst students or teachers. According to Eraut (2002), if informal

learning practices are left to personal motivations, they are often uninformed or distorted in the absence of organisational curriculum.

In the university and educational context an inclusive curriculum can be a solution for supporting engagement for all students in the presence of such variations and individual differences amongst students. Kurt (2018) defined an inclusive curriculum as a formal curriculum that acknowledges possible differences among learners due to gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, previous experiences, abilities, skills, etc., with the goal of increasing student engagement and participation.

Inclusive education provides equal access and learning opportunities that suit the diverse needs of students in terms of subject content coverage, pace of learning, assessment methods, and pedagogies and teaching methods, wherein all learners have an equal opportunity to learn regardless of their differences and skills.

Consequently, Kurt (2018) defined inclusive teaching as the teaching that ensures that all students have equal access to learning resources, skills and materials, and where the teacher ensures that all students are aware of the learning methods and what is required of them. This includes recognition of students' differences, allowing students to pace their learning independently or providing additional assistance, and continuous personal support. Inclusive strategies do not rely on a 'one size fits all' approach, which means that teachers must employ carefully designed educational strategies, typically facilitated through the use of technologies and networks (Kurt, 2018).

According to Kurt (2010) while inclusive strategies are principle keys in education generally, they can be achieved effectively throughout the use of technologies. For instance, in the university context the use of Learning Management System (LMS) support the ability of teacher to meet different needs if it was used based on pedagogical principles of inclusion. This applies to all technologies including emails and social media. LMS refer to a system utilised in the higher educational context to

facilitate students' individual learning and the personal support of the teacher with respect to study materials. It facilitates inclusive teaching strategies to provide access for different forms of resources for courses and assessment methods along with monitoring of progress for each student.

Accordingly, studies of (Junco et al., 2011; Schroeder, Minocha, & Schneider, 2010) have suggested strategies that faculty could use to encourage students' engagement in independent learning and personal development under current social media influences. These involve pedagogies that support students' understanding of each other, relationships and integration, sharing of experiences, teacher-students relationship and continuous feedback. A pedagogical push for motivating students' engagement in independent learning and personal development is needed for increasing co-operation. The literature shows that supporting students' sharing of experiences in the class and supporting their relationships in addition to providing students with continuous teacher support is a requirement to increase students' excitement for engagement in self-direction when they are out of the class.

#### **4.4 Exploring the gap in the literature and the research questions**

This literature review, based on studies related to experiences in social media, has covered different aspects of students' engagement in independent learning and personal development in higher education. I have focused this review on the main issues related to university students' engagement and the factors related to the learners rather than on the learning process. As shown, with respect to recent evolving of social media, only a few studies have addressed factors related to the learners' engagement, such as their attitudes, difficulties and contextual issues surrounding their engagement. Very little attention has been given to the personal, situational or social factors related to learner engagement. Indeed, the focus of most

reviewed research has been on the role and influence of social media as tool on the process of learning and development.

There has been gap in the literature with respect to issues related to the university learner such as their attitudes, motivations and difficulties for engagement in independent learning and personal development from their use of social media. Furthermore, research on the issues, motivations and difficulties related to students' engagement in independent learning and personal development is very limited. All the discussions on university self-directed learners' perceptions presented in this chapter are derived from the literature on social media's role as tool in the process of development. Most of the literature that explores the motives of self-directed learners derives from professional and continuous development groups and does not address difficulties or contextual organisational or social barriers of either students or professionals.

Both qualitative and quantitative research has pointed to the diversity in students' attitudes and experiences with respect to engagement in personal learning and performance. Some students, influenced by social media, experience difficulties in engagement and self-directed learning in different cultural contexts, including the KSA (Alwagait et al., 2015; Junco, 2012; Madge et al., 2009; Stirling, 2016). Thus, the present research builds on previous research findings and uses this diversity in students' experiences and attitudes positively to fill a gap and to uncover issues, attitudes and difficulties of engagement and non-engagement in independent learning and personal development. It examines the reasons why successful engagement in independent learning and personal development has occurred, focusing on the students' lived experiences as drivers and motivations for engagement. It also investigates the reason why some students find it difficult to engage, i.e., the barriers to students' engagement.

This research explores undergraduate students' lived experiences of using social media to support their engagement in independent learning and personal development, in a context in KSA higher education, to answer the following research questions that fill a gap in the literature:

- RQ1: What motivations to, and drivers for engagement in independent learning and personal development do students describe from their lived experiences of using social media?
  - RQ1.1: Why do some students engage in independent learning and personal development, from their lived experience of using social media?
  - RQ1.2: How do students describe drivers that support their engagement, from their lived experiences of using social media?
- RQ2: What barriers to, and difficulties for, engagement in independent learning and personal development do students describe from their lived experiences of using social media?
  - RQ2.1: Why do some students not succeed to engage in independent learning and personal development, from their lived experience of using social media?
  - RQ2.2: How do students describe difficulties and barriers that hinder their engagement, from their experiences of using social media?
- RQ3: How do students perceive the benefits of using social media in supporting their engagement in independent and personal development?
- RQ4: What educational issues in this context arise from the students' experiences and perceptions?



## **Chapter 5: Methodology**

### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents a description of the research methodology adopted. It describes the relevant philosophical issues with respect to the ontological and epistemological stance of the research. This includes a justification for the research paradigm along with the research methodology design that has informed the sampling and data collection methods and processes. An account of the data collection procedure in the setting with a description of the process of data analysis, the trustworthiness of the research and the ethical issues are presented.

### **5.1 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

Ernest (1994) defines methodology as “a theory of which methods and technique are appropriate and valid to use to generate and justify knowledge, given the epistemology” (p. 21). This research adopted the methodology of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). “IPA is a method for exploring how participants make sense of their own experiences” (Mayes, 2006, p. 6). Its focus is frequently on understanding phenomena from the nature of personal experiences around a significant event in their life. Hence, the interest of this research lies in capturing the meanings of engagement in independent learning and personal development in the present day, focused on students’ learning and personal development experiences around their use of social media.

According to Smith and Osborn (2003), an IPA study inquiry focusses on the reality that is defined from personal judgments, attitudes, feelings, reflections and thoughts, as the main source for understanding in research. Smith and Osborn (2003, p. 53) indicate that the research is phenomenological when it is “concerned with an individual’s personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an

attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself'. Thus, this IPA research focus is on how participants make sense of their own learning behaviours and personal uses of social media as part in their lived experience of engagement in independent learning and personal development. I am not concerned about presenting an account relating to the events, actions or practices or the uses of social media in independent learning and personal development. Employing IPA means that this research's objectives focus on how the participants give value and meaning to their own personal experiences and why. Hence this research's primary focus is on understanding the phenomena of engagement in independent learning and personal development in its essence. The research questions, which are related to students' drivers and difficulties of engagement, are answered from how the participants themselves interpret, give value and judge their own personal learning experiences and uses.

IPA methodology has been used in the context of health psychology as a rigorous scientific experiential qualitative methodology (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It is a qualitative methodology that allows for the understanding of complex personal experiences and attitudes within a research aim that relies on understanding the psychological world of the participant, as well as the social world. This is achieved by allowing an active role for the researcher to construct knowledge, as well as by maintaining a focus on understanding the participants' interpretations in terms of understanding how and why different participants may experience the same thing in different ways.

The use of IPA is growing in different disciplines, including education, as a contemporary qualitative approach. According to Kirn, Godwin, Cass, Ross and Huff (2017), in its essence, in education at least, IPA is not different or less rigorous from other qualitative interpretive research approaches in terms of its focus on the experience and the context; nevertheless, it enables nuanced insights to be gained in

the research. It has been reported to be a comprehensive, accessible and flexible qualitative methodology for understanding the complexity of the meanings of the personal experiences (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011). For instance, Carpenter (2009) suggested that the unique stance of the researcher in IPA, one that allows researcher bracketing and interpretation simultaneously, has the effect of revealing the implicit difficulties and attitudes of the participants, of which even the participants themselves might not be aware.

I utilised IPA methodology in this research because it is a comprehensive, accessible, qualitative methodology that would illuminate the complexity of contemporary university students' experiences and attitudes. IPA was also used in this research because it acknowledges how the researcher interprets these individual and personal experiences to gain meaningful educational insights. Utilizing IPA methodology gives a greater chance for issues, attitudes, motivations and difficulties in this research to emerge from the students' different stories of success and failure. It illuminates the similarities and differences in the students' experiences, which have been noted in the literature, by answering questions related to students' engagement and non-engagement or how and why the students may experience the same thing in different ways.

IPA methodology further allowed me to explore the personal experiences as lived by participants, by examining the meanings of their actions and its influences on them or, "the subjective meanings of events/experiences/states of the individual participants themselves" (Smith & Osborn, 2004, p. 229). It also "recognizes that different people perceive the world in very different ways, dependent on their personalities, prior life experiences and motivations" (Smith & Osborn, 2004, p. 229). By this, IPA also builds on the differences in the experiences as well as on the commonalities. This was of value in this research, with respect to dealing with the differing experience and attitudes of students.

IPA is often linked to other interpretive phenomenological methodologies as a qualitative research methodology that has its roots in the European phenomenology and hermeneutics philosophy developed by Husserl (1859-1938) and Heidegger (1889-1976) during the twentieth century (Lavery, 2003). This approach to research methodology combines phenomenology (the study of being through experience) and hermeneutics (the study of interpretation of an experience). Phenomenology focuses on the study of the experience as lived by a person as a personal account and individual truth. Hermeneutics, on the other hand, focuses on how participants assign meaning to their experiences and the factors influencing this, as “situated meaning(s) of a human in the world” (Lavery, 2003, p. 7). In order for the researcher to understand a personal truth or experience, interpretive phenomenology further acknowledges that the world, including our understanding of ourselves, is socially constructed: “we are constructed by the world while at the same time we are constructing this world from our own background and experiences” (Lavery, 2003, p.8). The interpretive phenomenology methodology studies the nature and meaning of the essentials of a phenomenon, such as in this research, the students’ engagement in independent learning and personal development. This methodology leans on the constructions, reflections, behaviours and thoughts of students who have experienced the phenomenon themselves and the meanings it holds for them, wherein I then interpret these meanings in the socially constructed world.

IPA is an inductive methodology that is designed to use open-ended qualitative methods, and utilised for research that seeks holistic and exploratory objectives, particularly for understanding novel phenomena such as in contemporary learning and development experiences (Mayes, 2006). The process of interpretation in IPA starts from understanding the detailed accounts of the individual participants and their own personal stories and interpretations, before it moves to build on these

individual interpretations. The final research insights are based on identifying their relevance to the wider context of the experiences.

The methodological approach of IPA, according to Mayes (2006), is influenced by two main stances. First, the phenomenological stance “assumes that participants are experts in their own experiences and can offer researchers an understanding of their feelings, intentions, motivations, and attitudes” (Mayes, 2006, p. 6). Hence, when employing these methods, the researcher focuses on how the participants give value and meaning to their experiences and why, in order to understand how they interpret their experiences and the factors influencing their experiences. Acknowledging that the researcher’s personal expertise is important for understanding and dealing with personal experiences, however, the researcher needs to start by bracketing their own preconceptions so that they can elicit the experiences, attitudes and feelings of their participants and see events from the participants’ eyes and emotions. This stance influences the use of methods that are heavily based on reflective and open questions that encourage participants’ inner thoughts about their experiences to emerge. According to Creanor, Trinder, Gowan and Howells (2006, p. 4), methods in IPA are designed to support participants’ reflection and to “encourage(s) participants to provide their own detailed narrative, interpreting their understanding of their experiences firstly for themselves and subsequently for the researcher”. In this way, methods are designed to be open-ended questions in order to discover things from the participants’ reflections. However, at the same time, the researcher uses their expertise and knowledge of the subject to allow for more reflection and clarification of meaning from the participants.

According to Mayes (2006), the second stance in this methodology is interpretive. Meaning that the participant’s sense of their experience is historically and socially constructed. In fact, it is a double interpretation process. The researcher first tries to understand how the participant interprets their experience, before engaging in critical

analysis to interpret the participant's experiences in their personal and social contexts. Therefore, in IPA methodology: "The researchers bring their own expertise to bear on the reflective process of achieving meaning. The interpretations can be drawn from a range of theoretical positions but they should emerge as interpretations of the participant's account, rather than emerging from prior hypotheses" (Mayes, 2006, p. 7). This approach is generally inductive; however, the researcher cannot reach the meaning without critical interpretation, which starts later in the analysis when they use expertise and literature to understand participants' constructions of their experiences, acknowledging that participants' meanings are influenced by many personal factors, including the social context.

The methodology selects only a small sample of participants, who have undergone the same experience such as the live experience of using social media in personal development and independent learning in this research (Mayes, 2006). However, these participants need to present different situations of the phenomenon to allow for an understanding of the complete picture from different participants' constructions. Consequentially, this research objectives and the answering of its questions relies primarily on how participants interpret and talk about their experiences and actions. This is because the IPA study inquiry focuses on reality that is defined only from different personal judgments, attitudes, feelings, reflections and thoughts. Therefore, participants' different attitudes and thoughts are the main source of knowledge by which understanding of the process of engagement in development is achieved in this research (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The answering of this research questions depends on interpreting how participants give value to their experiences, acknowledging that each participant's judgment will be influenced by personal and social factors. Thus, the methodological focus is on how participants make sense of their actions and uses of social media to engage in independent learning and personal development and is not concerned about producing an objective account of

describing the actions or practices or the uses of social media in personal development.

The phenomena under investigation in this research can be understood only through accessing meanings from the eyes of participants through their thoughts, attitudes and feelings, and the meanings they hold against the background of their lived experiences and actions. IPA has been used in this research because the phenomena of engagement and non-engagement cannot be observed from the outside; rather understanding is achieved from students' inner thoughts and reflections on their actions. The purpose of this research is to understand the engagement and non-engagement in independent learning and personal development from the different interpretations, inner thoughts, attitudes and stories of participants around their personal use of social media. This is aimed to give greater significance to interpretation and understanding of the factors related to the participants' experience, rather than simply to description.

## **5.2. Philosophical underpinning**

It is important to identify and be aware of the philosophical underpinning that will inevitably shape how I conduct and think about this research. Consequently, a philosophical stance, as a way of making sense of the world, assists in being consistent in terms of how the inquiry matches methodology and methods, holding clear assumptions about them (Crotty, 2009). Paradigms help in this alignment presenting ontological, epistemological and methodological beliefs (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The interpretive paradigm's assumptions and beliefs fit research that aims to answer its questions by the study of participants' attitudes and voices within social organizations (Walsham, 1993). Consequently, the assumptions of this IPA research fall within the parameters of the interpretive philosophical stance, as follows.

### **5.2.1 Ontological assumption**

The ontological assumption defines what is believed to be real and the nature of existence (Crotty, 2009). The discussion of what is real can be linked to two main aspects of ontology that are often defined in research: subjectivism (relativism) and objectivism (realism). The interpretive paradigm is believed to rely on the subjective reality of the person in the world whereby the individual's knowledge is linked to their environment.

Subjectivism is a research stance that postulates that social worlds are formed and exist by people's actions and interactions; this applies equally in the research process in that the understandings of phenomena emerge from the actions and perceptions of participants and the researchers (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). This is the opposite to objectivism, a stance in research that was used originally in natural science. This stance detaches social worlds from people's minds, assuming that the meanings of the social world existed before its actors. This applies equally to research which tries to find a pre-existing reality that is external to both the participants and the researchers (Saunders et al., 2009). Some argue that social meanings can be described as facts just as in natural science, whereas others suggest it is to be described as human and context constructed (Ernest, 1994).

Interpretive research maintains that the description of human phenomena is subjective and relative from one person to another and bounded in the specific context (Crotty, 2009; Ernest, 1994; Esterberg, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 1994, 2005). Accordingly, the ontological stance of this research does not aim at generalization, rather it aims to discover the multiple realities of humans and how people experience the same thing in different ways. This stance identifies that meanings in the social world are indirectly constructed by humans themselves and are constantly emerging from their actions and interactions in the world around them (Bryman, 2008; Bur,



2003; Crotty, 2009; Radnor, 2002). Additionally, their behaviours are seen also to represent how they interpret the world (Bryman, 2008). In any context where humans participate, they construct and create the social world and meanings around them, being active actors in creating what is real (O'Reilly, 2009; Radnor, 2002). This general stance of reality as a human construction applies equally to the research. Consequently, I assume that humans are subjects in the world and they have different roles in creating the social reality around them.

Interpretive research seeks truth about social worlds from multiple individual truths and from different subjective accounts of events (Bryman, 2008). All participants' subjective accounts can be incorporated and used to create a description of the complete picture of the phenomenon under investigation. "Research, therefore, is often focused upon people's perceptions of reality where one lot of perceptions is as good as another" (Pring, 2000, p. 60).

Significantly, this IPA research relies on participants' subjective realities and multiple truths of their own. Young students in higher education now have more control over their independent learning and personal development, facilitated by personal devices and social media. Their experiences, attitudes, behaviours and subjective meanings are important realities that can illuminate my understanding of the issues related to students' engagement and non-engagement in higher education in this context which is also relevant to improving and understanding the educational practices. According to Creanor et.al. (2006), IPA methodology is used when educational research inquiry involves an understanding related to how participants perceive and interpret their actions and the influences of these actions on them. As such, this case of subjective reality is important in improving knowledge in education in accordance with Pring's suggestion that "research must focus upon the 'subjective meanings' of learners to improve educational practice" (Pring, 2000, p.56).

Through examining these different subjective experiences and attitudes in this research I have been able to form deep insights into the realities of students' engagement in independent learning and personal development in this specific research context. It has allowed discovery of issues with respect to students' learning difficulties and the circumstances under which students have positive or negative attitudes. These subjective truths are combined together to support a complete and holistic understanding of the phenomena of students' engagement.

### **5.2.2 Epistemological assumptions**

Epistemology is concerned with how information and knowledge are achieved and presented and the extent to which this knowledge is valid (Grix, 2002). It presents descriptions of the knowledge acquisition procedure and the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the participants, including the role of the subjectivity and values of both in this process (Morehouse, 2012). Eventually, epistemology is concerned with aspects related to the knowledge gathering process in research (Grix, 2002, p. 177).

According to Klein and Myers (1999), knowledge in interpretive research is represented and acquired only through human constructions such as meanings, words, texts, thoughts, and language by means of interaction. This interaction plays a central role in knowledge gathering whereby the participants' and the researcher's subjectivity, values, and multiple relative truths are implicated in the construction of the knowledge. There is important role for the researcher in constructing knowledge in research supported by using open methods that enable interaction, such as interviews and self-reflective reports. According to Crotty (2009), the assumption is that the meanings of the social world are not located away from participants' and researchers' minds but that they can co-construct insights that illuminate understanding based on their experiences. Hence, these meanings need to be

gathered from the inside, from their inner thoughts and acquired through active engagement and interaction (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Eventually, the presentation of findings in interpretive research is in the form of meanings and descriptions of the phenomena under investigation that have been developed from the participants' and researcher's interpretations and constructions (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

The methods are aimed at exploring new issues that have not been framed by specific assumptions, utilizing an inductive process. This process in interpretive research allows the theory to manifest itself from the particular experiences.

Eventually, the open-ended approach of the qualitative methods that assist interaction and the discovery of new issues from the words and meanings of the participants is employed in interpretive research (Bryman, 2008; Neuman, 2011).

The opposite of this approach is adopted by positivist researchers, who start with a hypothesis or theory and then seek to test it from the participants' experiences, regardless of the personal, social and historical contexts of the experiences.

The interpretive research approach maintains that both the researcher and participants cannot have a value-neutral position; rather their values, past experiences, and subjectivity are always implicated in the phenomenon being studied (Bryman, 2008; Wellington, 2000). Eventually, interpretive research takes into account the researcher's experiences and reflexivity along with the interpretations of multiple voices when evaluating the meanings constructed (Seale, 1999; Watt, 2007). Subjective knowledge in interpretive research is accepted research knowledge because the researchers take care in obtaining data to inform themselves about the reality and they think carefully about their methods to eliminate any biased conclusions (Mack, 2010; Watt, 2007).

In the present research, the reality of students' contemporary learning experiences in higher education is complex, personal and distributed across multiple learning contexts, such as formal, informal, online and offline. Therefore, this reality is difficult to observe from the outside or to be abstracted to yes and no questions. It could only be acquired, understood and presented from students' internal and inner thoughts, meanings, stories and experiences and could be achieved only through means of interaction. Furthermore, issues related to contemporary learning experiences are novel, and this supports the approach of exploring to understanding the new issues emerging from particular experiences. This also justify the need to use IPA methodology with qualitative open-ended methods, such as interviews and reflective diaries, such method centre on eliciting students' opinions, attitudes, feelings, experiences and inner thoughts. I had an important role in achieving knowledge through proper relationships and interactions; my previous experience in the research context and with the participants' culture facilitated the necessary interaction for co-constructing knowledge and supported my interpretations of the students' experiences in the context.

## **5.3 Research Design**

### **5.3.1 The setting**

Educational research design is usually applied within educational settings. A college subordinated from one university in KSA was selected as the context to explore the students' personal lived experiences of engagement. It could be argued that the undergraduate students across the Saudi higher education system have similar demographic and social characteristics, and to some extent similar organizational and educational environments. This college was chosen for several reasons:

- The college has made increasing efforts to engage students in personal and academic development over recent years. This is apparent in its utilisation of

Learning Management System (LMS) and social media to increase student engagement in academic and social activities. The college has several social media accounts, particularly on Twitter, YouTube and Snapchat, aimed at communicating with the students and increasing their participation.

- The main aim of this education college, as declared on their website, is to provide learning that can be transferred easily to students' practice of education after graduating as qualified teachers with the necessary skills. All enrolled students are required to complete a course of internship to apply practically in the school setting what they have learned. The internship spans two semesters in their final year, where their practice is evaluated before they are granted a degree.
- Finally, the student population of this college is all female, making it accessible to me with respect to cultural factors, as I cannot interact with male students using face-to-face interviews in this context.

### **5.3.2 The participants**

All students in this college are females registered full time in five majors, namely: special education, pre-school education, English language, mathematics, ICT and science. The participants generally shared common background and demographic characteristics. All were of Saudi nationality and shared the same language and culture. Their age range was 18 to 23 years. Detailed tables of research participants' demographics are presented in Appendix F.

Only a small sample of participants is needed for IPA research. There can be different kinds of non-probability sampling for qualitative research, such as convenience, purposive and snowball sampling (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Lincoln and Guba (1985) reported that purposive sampling brings a wider range of perspectives

to emerge from the data compared to the other kinds of sampling, which are more likely to bring similar experiences that may not be adequate to cover the local conditions. I employed purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of students who fit this research objective of exploring engagement in independent learning and personal development. This also increases confidence in the findings and enriches the data obtained by covering a broad range of student characteristics.

I chose the participants purposefully by identifying some of the personal characteristics for selection to ensure breadth of the obtained experiences. Students were selected to present different academic specializations, cultural backgrounds, year of study and experience. For instance, some were recommended based on their experience of engagement in the college co-curricular activities (see Appendix F). Upon receiving the ethical clearances, I contacted tutors from each of the specialist departments in the college with my research objectives and selection criteria. I received a suggested list of student names and emails addresses, based on the tutors' recommendations from each specialism, and according to the sampling criteria assigned. Each of the suggested participants was contacted by e-mail with an invitation to participate voluntarily, along with information sheets about the aims and objectives of the research. In this process, 46 students from different disciplines were contacted of whom only 32 agreed to participate. Of these, 20 participants were chosen to be contacted for individual interviews, and reflective diaries. The remaining 12 were contacted to participate in the focus groups. I needed two different samples of students, one for in-depth-interviews and reflective diaries and the other for the focus groups. This made a total number of 32 who agreed to participate voluntarily in individual interviews, reflective diary reports and focus groups (See Table 5.1). This large number for qualitative research was justified because I utilised two samples, one for the diaries and in-depth interviews, and the other for the focus groups. Ritchie, Lewis, and Elam (2003, p. 84) suggest that in qualitative multi-method

research “it is sometimes necessary to have more than one sample within a study”. In addition, the choice of 20 participants for in-depth interviews was aimed to increase the coverage of the subject from a wide range of different experiences. Usually, in qualitative research, 20 participants are sufficient for in-depth interviews to reach a saturation point where no new data can emerge.

**Table 5.1: Research samples in different methods of research**

	Sample 1	Sample 2
	<b>In-depth interviews</b>	<b>Focus groups</b>
	<b>Reflective diaries</b>	
Number of participants	20 students	12 students
Total number	32 students	

### 5.3.3 The methods

Methods that support the generation of qualitative and detailed data for interpretive research need to be designed as open-ended questions that support the discovery of new issues (Hoepfl, 1997). Creswell (2013) indicates that using different methods for collecting qualitative data supports the complex understanding of the experiences by looking to the meaning from different angles. I utilized three open-ended methods to collect qualitative data: individual interviews, focus groups and students’ reflective reports, as follows.

#### **In-depth interview method**

Interviews were utilized in this research to give me the chance to listen to the participants’ interpretations and to understand how they felt about their experiences. In IPA, in-depth semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to understand situations through the participants’ eyes (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The objective of in-depth interviews in this research was not to obtain information about how students used social media or what happened, but to effectively elicit the participants’ feelings

and attitudes and to learn why each participant gave different value to their experience.

According to Creanor et al. (2006), participants' interpretations of their own actions and feelings are the main focus of data collection in IPA research. Since the research interest is in how participants understand and feel about their experience, less attention is paid to descriptions of events or behaviours. Hence, the interview questions are generally open and broad with the aim of extending participants' reflection and the researcher's understanding of what the participant said and why.

Generally, the interview method encourages interviewees to reflect on their actions and allows the researcher to explain and construct mutually shared understandings. Kvale (1996) defines the research interview as a conversation that has a predefined structure and purpose aimed at obtaining knowledge. Interviews can be seen as located within a continuum between structured and unstructured (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Wellington, 2000). The semi-structured in-depth interview has a flexible structure, between the ends of this spectrum, with predefined questions to assist the research interaction, but which are at the same time, open-ended and allow for different questions to be asked for in-depth exploration of each participant's experiences (Groenewald, 2004). This gives control to the researcher whilst there is also the opportunity for each participant to describe their own experiences within the limits of the subjects under investigation.

The semi-structured face-to-face interview method is the most commonly utilized in IPA because it enables the researcher to interact and to deal with different variations and ranges of participants experiences, and to listen carefully to each of them whilst bracketing prior assumptions and judgments (Smith & Osborn, 2003). At the same time, it supports the researcher's interaction to clarify the participant's interpretations and views of their own experiences and actions, and to probe for in-depth details.



However, disadvantages of in-depth interviews are that they take a long time to conduct and produce a large amount of data for analysis.

The in-depth interview is used as the main method to collect data in any interpretive research; however, they can be also a time consuming process in terms of conducting and analyzing.

### **Focus group interview method**

The focus group is a research method that obtains data from the interactions of a group on issues specified by the researcher. It is different from the individual in-depth interview method in that the participants in the focus group are stimulated by others to express and state their opinions, which enriches the discussion. Another feature is that it provides a wide range of views and coverage of the issues in a relatively short time and allows for phenomenological different interpretations and motivations, along with feelings, to emerge (Mayes, 2006). Smith and Osborn (2003) suggest that, when the participants share the same experience, it is more likely that focus groups will invoke personal experiences.

The purpose of using the focus group in this research was to aid the understanding of students' meanings, utilizing the interaction within the group. Morgan (1996) suggests that focus groups can be used in multi-method research to support other qualitative methods. Additionally, focus groups allow the researcher to understand and notice how participants develop their views and attitudes, are useful in understanding the value participants give to their experiences, and for seeing how participants weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of issues (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). It could be argued that focus groups are a practical method in a university context to look at students' learning experiences. Focus groups have been adopted in IPA research on learners' experiences with students in higher education to develop an understanding of participants' feelings, attitudes, views and opinions

within the social context of a group discussion (Mayes, 2006). They are particularly useful in giving value and weighing up opportunities, advantages and disadvantages and noting personal differences in opinions and attitudes.

In this research, the focus group social context and discussions developed my understanding of the students' different views on their personal development and academic learning, and the different impacts of social media upon each of them. It also provided an understanding of students' agreements and disagreements, and to grasp how knowledge was constructed and unfolded through group interaction. The main disadvantages of the focus group method are that it needs time for preparation and organization with participants. Focus groups are also time-consuming in reference to transcription and analysis.

### **Students' reflective diary reports**

The reflective diary was utilized in this research to gather students' reflections and inner thoughts and feelings about their independent learning and use of social media in their own personal development. This method is often used in researching learners' experience around technologies for many purposes. The objective of utilizing the reflective diary report in this research was to give space for reflection by which it is possible to hear the participants' voices on their daily actions and feelings and their inner thoughts, in their own time. Wellington (2000) suggests that reflective reports can be an effective way to collect qualitative data and advises its use with young people who are usually more open in private disclosure in a diary method than in interviews. In this research, the diary reflective method was a device to assist participants to freely generate ideas around their daily use of social media and its impact from interpretations of their learning experiences in their own voice. This is in accordance with Bartlett's (2015) argument that the distance between the researcher and the participant in diaries facilitates the participant's voice as they become free to choose what, and how the diaries are written. This allows the participant to reflect

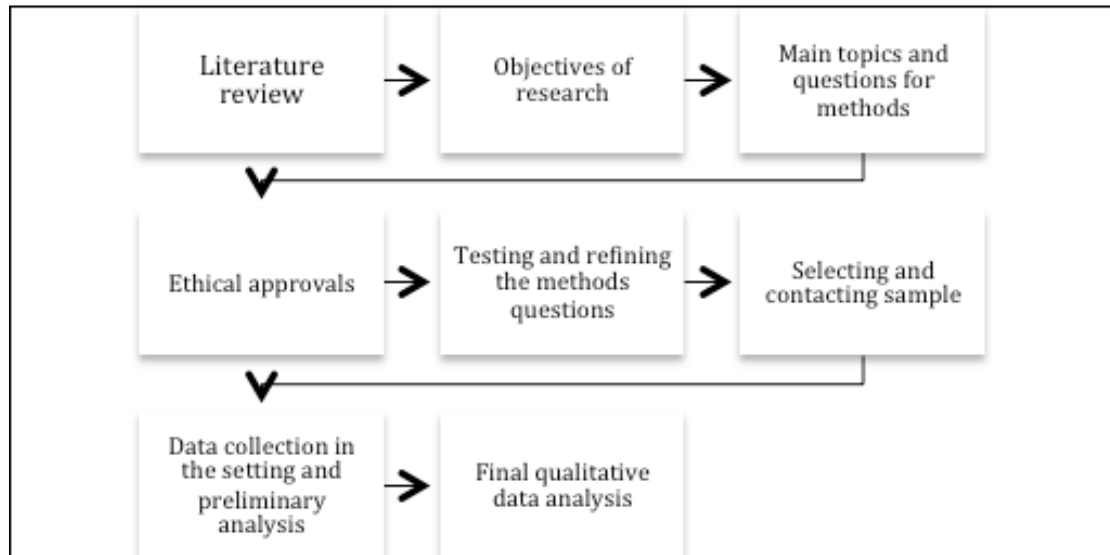
without fear of judgment. Although diaries have been used widely in research as a participant observation device, the use of the reflective diary in this research stemmed from the IPA stance that emphasizes participants' feelings and interpretations over what actually happens, as the description of behaviours and uses of social media is not one of this research objectives.

#### **5.3.4 The role of researcher**

My role is significant in selecting and implementing methods and procedures that are appropriate for my research objectives. There are no definite steps to follow in qualitative research as this could vary significantly from one research to another based on the research objectives. Maxwell, (2013) points out that qualitative research design responds to changes when developing the meaning and is not entirely carried out in predetermined or linear steps. The application of open-ended methods allows for the researcher reflexivity to respond to changes in order to develop knowledge and meaning gradually throughout the process of research. Agee's (2009) point out that qualitative research design, including research questions, are iterative and reflective, in all its stages, to support the inductive research process that develops theory from participants' experiences. Eventually, the even the final questions of this research were not be predefined or fixed but have changed many times and developed from the themes that emerged from the analysis of the students' experiences. Gibson and Brown (2009), suggest three things involved in qualitative research design:

- specifying the research's main objectives, topics, and questions;
- choosing the research sites and selecting participants;
- thinking about methods of data collection and how to employ them.

**Figure 5.1 Main processes of research design**



Accordingly, with the iterative process in mind, Figure 5.1 presents the main processes adopted in this research design. I developed the main topics and questions from the research objectives, as stated in Table 5.2. I have used these main topics to develop the questions for each method used in this research. Table 5.3 gives details on the initial topics of the questions and types of data that have been collected in each method. As shown these were similar in each method and focused on eliciting students' perceptions, motivations, attitudes, views, feelings and opinions around several issues related to their actions of using social media in social life and academic life and its influences on their development.

From these central topics and subjects, I developed a set of questions in each method used (see Appendix D). To stay consistent with the IPA methodology, I applied the open-ended questions approach in each method to encourage participant reflection on the main topics.

**Table 5.2: Main initial research topics derived from the research objectives**

Main initial topics	Data types (sub-themes)
1- Usage and awareness (Personal and social life)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purposes, goals, motivations</li> <li>• Attitudes and feelings</li> <li>• Perceptions</li> </ul>
2- Usage and awareness (Academic learning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purposes, goals, motivations</li> <li>• Attitudes and feelings</li> <li>• Perceptions</li> </ul>
3- Overall evaluation of learning and engagement experiences, difficulties, opportunities, needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Views</li> <li>• Opinions</li> <li>• Perceptions</li> </ul>

Eventually, none of the questions used in the three methods had leading statements, and they entirely used short wording to allow for free and open responses to unfolding from the participant. I then translated all the developed questions into Arabic to be informed by the participant culture, which is the same as mine.

**Table 5.3: Types of data collected in each method**

Types of data collected	Reflective diary reports	In-depth interviews	Focus groups
Motivations, attitudes, behaviours and feelings related to students' engagement in personal learning and development from usage in personal and social life.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Motivations, attitudes, behaviours and feelings related to students' engagement in academic development and independent learning from usage in academic and learning.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Opinions and views of overall learning experience: difficulties, opportunities and issues related to students' engagement in personal learning and development in this context.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

The reflective diary questions were prepared as a participant self-report to assist and encourage students' reflections in their own time. I developed some questions to

elicit students' feelings and attitudes around their daily use of social media and its impact on them and to give space for general reflections on their personal use concerning their perceived development (see Appendix D). In the final question, participants were also asked to write an essay about their feelings about how social media influenced their engagement in personal development.

For both individual and focus group interviews, I have prepared a semi-structured interview schedule. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) point out that an interview schedule is an essential guide for directing interviewing in the setting. It aims to support the researcher with a pool of possible topics and questions covering a broad agenda of topics and themes to explore. Hence, I developed a pool of questions for both individual and group interviews that covered the main topics.

The individual interview guide was designed to support my role in the interaction with the participant's personal experiences and was not meant to be followed strictly. It assist me to memorize and control the main subjects and issues to be covered, without limiting openness to allow extending on these issues. Hence, it was a device that supports my interaction with participants as well as documentation and reflection during individual interviews. For instance, the use of an interview guide for individual interviews was adaptable to allow each participant to define her own story and experiences. The guide was used flexibly during the interviews to discard questions that were not relevant to the context of the interviewee, and to add questions that elicited emerging issues as the progress of meaning construction required.

The focus group guide questions were designed to stimulate the group interaction on the central issues to be covered (see Appendix D). Similarly, the group interview guide was designed to assist my control in directing the group interaction without limiting the open reflection of members. Hence the guide is a device that supports my

interaction and documentation to clarify and extend on the issues to be discovered in the students' learning experiences rather than prohibiting or restricting them.

It worth mentioning that as part of the iterative and reflexive process in this research, the questions and topics have changed and developed many times during research. For instance, I start with a preliminary topic guide design for interviews, focus groups, and reflective diaries (see Appendix C) before it reached its final form (see Appendix D). I also have conducted a small study that involved a member check to test my preliminary ideas and questions. In this small study, I have asked two female Saudi colleagues to participate in in-depth interviews and focus groups and to fill the reflective diary from their own experiences in order to get feedback on how they might work with participants.

In addition, during the abovementioned small study, the clarity of the topics and questions wording was given considerable attention to ensure that participants can understand them. I also improved my ideas about the data to be explored from the themes that emerged in this small study. For instance, I changed some questions or words to improve their clarity or replaced them with different questions and wording. I also decided to add some topics to the in-depth interview questions pool; based on feedback I received to enrich my interaction with participants in the setting.

Interpretive research and research methods generally can raise difficulties, some of which can be related to the topic questions, while others are related to the techniques and attitudes of the researcher (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Eventually, testing the methods with colleagues before my main study was useful for identifying some of these challenges. It also helped me to clarify issues further and refine my methods and how to ask questions. For instance, a clear definition of what 'social media' meant was added to remove any ambiguity in participants' understanding. I also changed all the 'why?' questions and replaced them with 'how?' questions to

avoid any judgmental attitude that might put participants in a defensive position that might hinder their unrestricted reflection. I was also able to give an evaluation of the types of topics that can emerge and the time duration for each. It was also a chance to test the quality of the recording device.

Eventually, in the setting, I have employed the final methods guides (see appendix D). As part of the reflective process, there is always a need to clarify meaning from the participants to ensure a shared understanding in interviews. I have implicated questions to clarify the participant's meaning or to summaries what they have said. The continuous testing my preliminary ideas and techniques were of great value in refining my methods before and during data collection in the setting. I also have used the topic guides of the interviews to stay focused on my role in the interaction, which was to build knowledge and to respond to changes, by expanding on the main topics where necessary. I also employed these guides to note and comment on the interesting aspects of the learner's experience and as a reflexive tool to add to, and expand on, the original topics as new issues emerged from the participants.

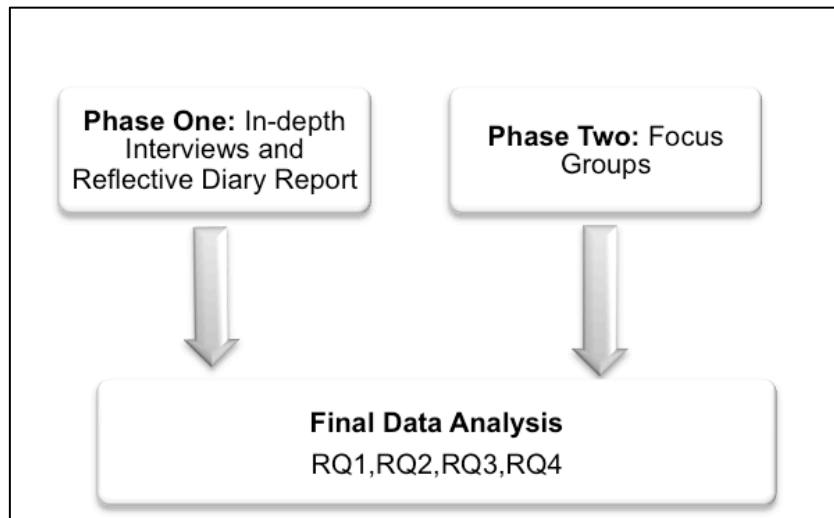
It is widely agreed that the researcher is the main instrument in building meaning in qualitative research. As I explained, I had an essential role in the design and data collection. The flexibility and openness of the qualitative research design have the purpose of exploring new issues and expanding on that expands on the preliminary ideas of the research. Consequently, I was responsible for carefully designing and controlling topics and techniques to continually respond to changes and make modifications throughout the process of knowledge construction until a better understanding of the research subjects is obtained.

#### **5.4 Data collection procedures**

Data gathering procedures and methods were carried in the setting over two phases, as follows.



**Figure 5.2: Methods used in phases of data collection**



#### **5.4.1 In-depth interviews and reflective diary report procedures**

I provided each of the twenty participants in the in-depth interviews, and reflective diaries with detailed information on the primary research objectives, and I asked them to give consent to participate voluntarily. All in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face and recorded using a digital recorder after the participant's consent. The in-depth interviews took place in a small room in the College Library in quite room, and lasted for about an hour. I had ensured that the place was suitable and that no interruptions are expected.

Each of the twenty participants in the in-depth interviews was asked upon their completion of the interview to voluntarily complete a reflective diary report in their own time, and hand it back to me. I handed the participant an empty reflective diary report (see appendix D), and I have explained the main terms in respect to how to answer the reflective diary questions. Twenty completed hand-written diary reports were handed back to me.

The data gathering process in interpretive research can depend on how I establish and maintain a positive relationship with the participants throughout the research

process. So I start with establishing a positive relationship with participants, and I kept this during all research processes and methods.

Face-to-face interviews with students in the setting were used because they were the most suitable for the objectives of this IPA research that focus on the unfolding of personal experiences implicating the feelings, and attitudes of the participant. I started the in-depth interview by an informal conversation to welcome the interviewee and to introduce them to research by explaining the main terms and the expected duration of the interview. The in-depth interviews followed the IPA open-ended interview procedure. Hence, I gave each interviewee the chance to talk and reflect on their personal experiences, and I listened without judgment to what they said to encourage a further reflection. However, I kept the stance of an interpretive researcher to increase my understanding and to probe for more information and asking for clarifications. During the interviews I also kept noticing how the participants talked about their experiences, such as in moments of silence and non-verbal reactions.

During the in-depth interviewing with participants I applied the interview schedule as a guide for directing the interaction without limiting the participant from expanding on the main topics (see appendix D). I also used it to help me clarify on participant meanings and to focus on the interesting ideas of the interview. For instance, I took reflexive comments on each interview schedule, which I used later to help me in the analysis. According to Smith and Osborn (2003), the use of the semi-structured interview schedule assists the IPA interpretive stance and presents a balance of openness and control that helps participants' phenomenological reflection as well as the interpretive researchers' clarification. Hence, the predefined set of questions in the in-depth interview guide was not restrictive; instead, they aimed to be open-ended to support each participant to define their personal experiences and stories. Hence, the guide aid my interaction in different situations, but was never adopted

literally. For instance, I changed the wording and used different questions from the guide to fit each participant's experience situations.

In depth interviewing, I had the chance to understand the participant experiences from their point of view. I noticed how I listened and understood what the interviewee was saying by clarifying the meaning with questions such as 'what does this mean?' And 'give me an example?' I also appreciated how to incorporate listening and observation to identify how participants attached meaning from their verbal cues along with techniques of obtaining in-depth data by asking different types of questions and probing for more information and examples. I frequently ensured that a mutual and shared understanding was reached with participants by summarizing what the interviewee had said to clarify their meaning and request clarification, details or examples by questions such as: 'what does this mean to you?' 'what do you mean by that?', 'can you explain this more?'. Additionally, the interviews were open and flexible, which is consistent with interpretive methodology as it aims to expand on its main topics and add new issues as they emerge from participants' meanings and experiences. For instance, the participants were frequently asked whether they would like to add to their answers or wished to comment further.

A number of advised interviewing techniques were used to facilitate rich conversation and to encourage the students to talk about their experiences, such as listening with interest and interacting with what the students were saying and how they were saying it. There were opportunities to ask for further issues, explanations, and justifications than specified in the guide, which allows for expanding meanings and exploring new issues from the participants.

#### **5.4.2 Focus group procedures**

I carried out two focus group sessions of six students each. Focus group participants were different from those of the in-depth interviews and reflective diaries. I provided

each participant in the group with information on the research questions and objectives, along with informed, voluntary consent to participate in research and for recording. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) suggest that the focus group size should be six or over and that the members of the group previously knew each other. These could be significant factors when seeking group interaction to clarify meanings and enrich the discussion. Hence, students were selected and assigned to the two groups based as far as possible on the similarity of specialization and year group.

Each of the two sessions was held in a small quiet room and lasted for about an hour. I moderated the two sessions in a quiet room that is made for meetings in the library. The recorder was set in the middle between me, and the participants who sat at a round table. I utilized the focus group topic guide (see appendix D), which I had prepared with questions and prompts, to efficiently direct and control the session. It also served to take my notes on the most important and relevant points during the discussions.

The design of a focus group depends on what the researcher intends to get from it. Hence, focus groups can be designed within a range of possibilities, based on the different purposes of research (Morgan, 1996). In this research, the focus group was designed and conducted in accordance with Patton's (1987) description, as follows:

The participants are typically a relatively homogeneous group of people who are asked to reflect on questions asked by the interviewer. Participants get to hear each other's responses and to make additional responses beyond their own initial responses as they hear what other people have to say. It is not necessary for the group to reach any kind of consensus. Nor is it necessary for people to disagree. The object is to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others. (p. 135)

The focus group started with welcoming the students and explaining the purpose of the discussion, along with instructions to help participants engage cooperatively.

These included giving everyone a chance to talk and respecting each other's point of view. Then I defined the main terms used, such as what I meant by 'social media' and explaining that the focus of the research was on their opinions based on their own personal learning experience. I explicitly informed the participants that the research was interested in their own views and voices to encourage students to express their personal opinions freely. To ensure the continuity and diversity of interaction that is important for this method, I adopted some of the strategies advised by Ritchie and Lewis (2003) and Savin-Baden and Major (2013). For instance, I maintained suitable eye contact to encourage participants to express themselves freely but without letting one participant have a dominating influence on the themes, by shifting attention to another participant. I considered listening to students' views without judgment to encourage free expression from all. I also encouraged an open stance without aiming for a consensus so that all participants were encouraged to express their different opinions.

## **5.5 Qualitative data analysis**

Qualitative data analysis involves the researcher's thoughtful engagement with the text data for extracting the essential meanings through an iterative process of theming and relinking different aspects of data before the writing of the final interpretation (Grbich, 2007). Creswell (2013) suggests that having multiple sources for qualitative data supports the process of developing and validating meaning in the analysis by looking from different standpoints. The recorded data obtained from the in-depth interviews and focus groups were transcribed into printed text scripts. Interviews texts were combined with the gathered students' hand-written reflective diary reports and were employed altogether in the final analysis. The detailed steps of qualitative data analysis are described in the following section.

### **5.5.1 Interview transcription**

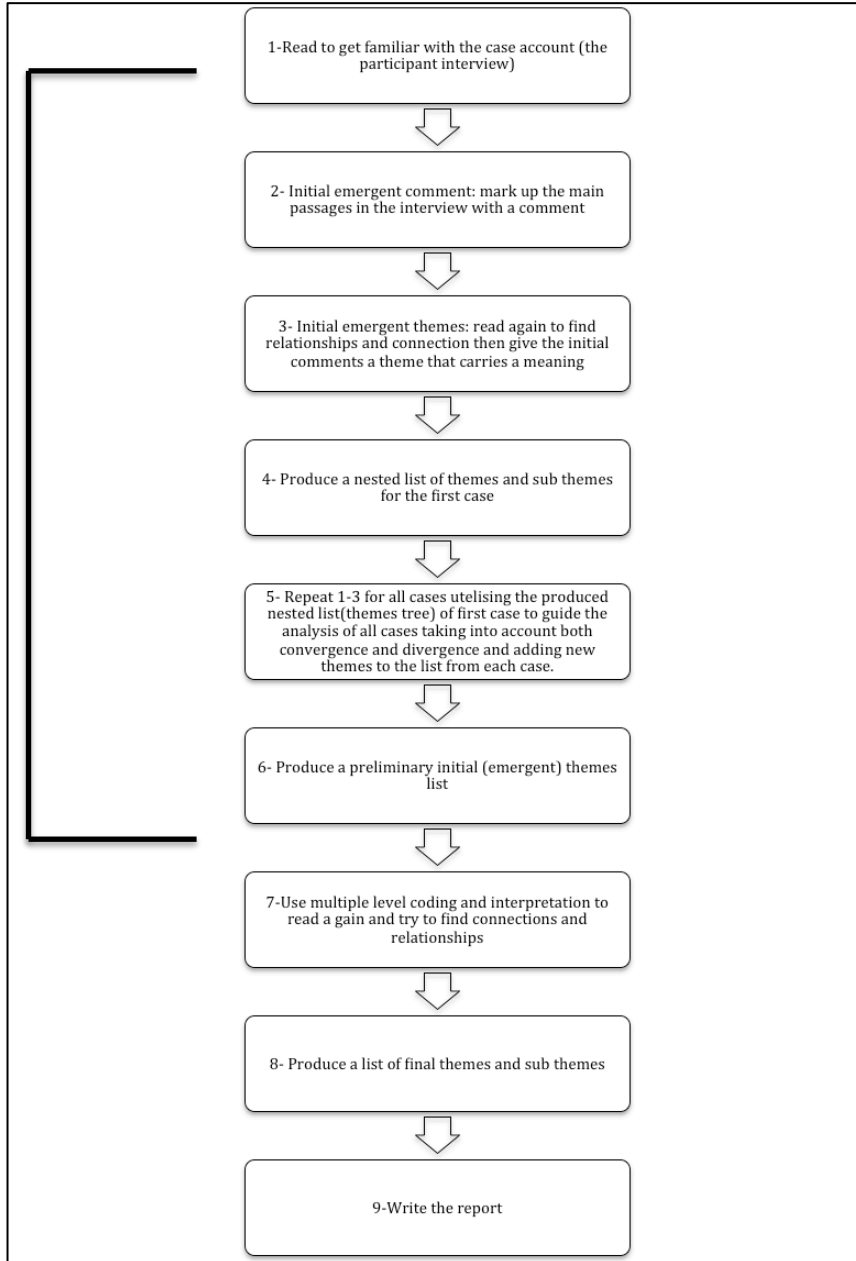
The digital audio recordings of the twenty in-depth interviews and the two focus groups were transcribed verbatim into equivalent text. Verbatim transcription means converting the audio conversation into the literally same written text of the conversation (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Smith and Osborn (2003) indicate that IPA research analysis entails a high level of a detailed description of the participants' use of words that need to keep the identical phrases in the same language used by participants. Transcription of interviews is a time-consuming process. Nevertheless, I needed to engage deeply with the data by listening and re-listening, noticing the silent moments, laughs, and other non-verbal cues and their influence on the meaning. Thus it was a chance for me to engage deeply and get familiar with the personal accounts of the participants. I have uploaded the digital audio files on an analysis program MAX QDA, which supports the convenience of transcription through controlling the speed of speech. So I had the chance to listen to the interviews audios and transcribed them into equivalent texts in Arabic language.

### **5.5.2 IPA analysis process**

The purpose of data analysis in IPA research is to learn something about the participants' psychological experiences and inner thoughts from their personal accounts (Smith & Osborn, 2003). These personal accounts enable finding meaning about what beliefs and constructs the participants are holding against their experiences which are obtained from their direct talk or through the stories that present who they are (Smith & Osborn, 2003). However, the meanings in IPA analysis are not accessible directly and require long commitment with the text before they appear to the surface. It is not a convenient one-step process; instead, it requires several iterative steps and mental engagement for interpretation. Wolcott

(1994) likewise suggested that data analysis involves deep engagement in mental processes directed at generating interpretations and finding relationships.

**Figure 5.3: Iterative steps of IPA data analysis**



Source: adapted from Smith & Osborn (2003)

Another purpose of IPA analysis is that it supports the analysis of complex experiences. Meaning that the particular and psychological experience of each participant is nevertheless sensitive to the social context of the experience. Thus IPA method involves developing meanings that emerge first from the participants' own

voice prior to arriving at the researcher's interpretations in the social world (Smith & Osborn, 2004). In doing this, each participant's case needs to be considered in its own right before moving to other cases. Furthermore, an essential issue is that IPA takes into consideration both differences and similarities across the whole participants' cases. Smith and Osborn (2003) suggest that IPA analysis is flexible and might be appropriated and adapted in different steps based on the subject, number of cases (participants).

I have followed Smith and Osborn (2003) IPA analysis steps as a guide in this research analysis (see Fig 5.3). The analysis steps are explained in detail in the following.

### **5.5.3 IPA analysis steps**

The following section explains in details the IPA analysis process steps adopted in this research.

#### **Initial (emergent) themes**

The analysis of data in this research involved developing meaning from a considerable volume of texts implicating twenty in-depth interviews, two focus groups, and handwritten diaries. Nevertheless, to get familiar with the data, I started by analysing the in-depth interviews for generating the emergent themes. In this step, I start to get my self-familiar with in-depth interview case accounts. Each interview represents a participant case in its own right. I employed MAXQDA in the analysis of the 20 in-depth interviews which served to read each case account while highlighting the significant features and passages in each participant's words with colour and giving them a comment (see Appendix I). Smith and Osborn (2003) suggest starting by focusing on each case account in its own right by suspending the researcher's pre-existing thoughts and interpretations to come later to allow for meaning to emerge. So in this step, I just gave an initial comment or code for any significant



piece of data that emerges directly from the participants' words. The given comment can vary; for instance, it can be a paraphrase of what the participant said or an interpretation of the meaning; alternatively, it can invoke expert terminology. I repeated this process for each of the twenty in-depth interviews giving each case a deep examination without the temptation to ascribe codes from one case to another.

MAXQDA also simplified the organizing and highlighting of segments into their emergent themes across the cases. MAX QDA also supports highlighting coloured segments and paragraphs kept in Arabic using the participants' language while giving them an English label or theme that described them (see Appendix I). This label or theme could sometimes relate to a general feature or a category that pertained to a range of data examples across the cases, which sometimes involved collecting similar examples from other cases. However, in IPA, differences also are taken into account, and each case can carry new emergent themes.

I achieved a preliminary understanding of the main aspects of the meanings of the data by analysing the cases of in-depth interviews in MAXQDA throughout capturing a nested tree of emergent themes. MAXQDA significantly facilitated the cross cases analysis, which involved collecting examples under the rising codes and themes, and it promoted my understanding of the data by capturing the main features in a list of emergent themes and sub-themes (see Appendix H). I completed the rest of the analysis manually on printouts of the in-depth interview scripts, focus group scripts, and handwritten reflective diaries for completing the analysis.

### **Finding relationships amongst emergent themes and sub-themes**

In this step, I have followed Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) who identified a multiple levels coding process to promote a more detailed understanding of complex experiences in the IPA analysis. Hence, I adopted the multiple coding to find relationships and meanings amongst the emergent themes. This process took place

after achieving the preliminary theme tree on MAXQDA and after I had a complete understanding of the main features in the students' experiences as I explained. Theming and developing meaning involves iterative and multi-level processes to find relationships between different aspects through which changes and modifications occur frequently. According to Smith and Osborn (2003), finding relationships and attaching meanings in IPA is not immediately obtainable to the researcher, and it might take a long time before the complex meanings in interviews come to the surface. The more one reads and engages with data, the more chance that insights and hidden relationships unfold. Thus I engaged in re-reading and developing insights in the multiple levels of IPA analysis in the iterative process, which was adopted until reaching a final description of students' experiences. According to Smith and Osborn (2003) and Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), some parts of the data may contain complex meanings and invoke multiple levels of interpretation, while other parts are direct and straightforward. For instance, the third and fourth themes in this research involved only direct theming. Furthermore, they identified that the IPA method is dynamic to suit developing meanings in different research subjects.

The process of multiple levels theming in this research is summarised below.

### ***Descriptive coding level***

At this level of coding, I looked at how participants interpreted their experiences by looking at their feelings before attempting to interpret these feelings in the social world. The aim of descriptive coding, as described in Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), is to identify the participants' words and feelings that emerge widely and frequently in the interview and give them a description. These came to the surface and stood out from the interviews in this research as words that present negative and positive attitudes. Based on Smith and Osborn (2003), I re-read the interviews to find relationships and meanings for the emergent themes and sub-themes on the list. The

negative and positive attitudes were clear from all participants' interviews. Thus, I re-engaged with the critical issues that emerged from each participant's meanings based on their attitudes, words, and feelings to understand why they had this feeling. Then I commented on a description of the feeling.

### ***Linguistic coding level***

The highlighted passages and descriptions from the previous step were further examined in order to find out how the participants interpreted the experiences to themselves and why. This is achieved by looking at the participants' choice of words, emphasis, and metaphors (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). An in-depth examination of the meaning and the interpretation of participants' experiences take place at this level of coding. For instance, the students who had negative attitudes presented feelings of dissatisfaction, anger, and frustration with the educational process. The reasons for students' negative attitudes were identified from their words, either due to personal reasons or to social and contextual barriers. At this level of coding, I also looked at how participants interpreted their experiences by looking at their beliefs, which emerged from their stories or from their choice of language.

### ***Conceptual Coding level***

At this level, the researcher is advised to depart from the participant's words and to give labels based on the researcher's expertise and interpretations from the context or to use terminology from the literature (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In this level, I also used theoretical frameworks in the literature (see Chapter 3) to identify and rename themes into meaningful terms. Many authors have suggested that emergent codes and themes be revised and refined utilizing the literature review and theoretical frameworks to support the researcher's valid interpretations (Anfara & Mertz, 2006; Radnor, 2002).

I have illustrated the multiple coding and interpretation on one English translated in-depth interview by circling the main words emerging from the participants and identifying my comments and conceptual understanding on them as final themes that achieved in a later stage of the analysis process (see Appendix J). I further illustrated detailed examples of the emergent multiple coding levels, and examples of my interpretation from in-depth interviews, focus groups, and reflective diary passages are presented in (see Appendix K).

### **The final theme tree and writing the report**

I utilized the manual printed scripts from the focus groups and the hand-written reflective diary reports, which were coded manually utilizing the same explained steps. Coding and analysing focus groups and hand-written diaries added more codes and hidden features that came to the surface. The group discussions were analysed using participant-based group analysis because “this allows the information of each participant to be retained and for the interactions between individual members to be noted” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 258).

The themes from all data sources were analysed into a final tree of codes, which captured how the data were organized and highlighted the connections, similarities, and differences amongst them (Appendix G). This helped me in making the interpretation remarks explicit in the final report. The interviewees’ voices and words they used were also utilized by integrating direct quotations translated from Arabic to English. This step aims to allow the reader to hear the participants’ voices and views where appropriate by using their own words and even paragraphs. Smith and Osborn (2003) indicate that the writing process extends the meanings that have been obtained and that further issues in the data can be discovered while writing the report.

This research analysis, therefore, followed different steps and underwent several modifications before reaching the final tree of themes and research questions (see Appendix G). According to Wolcott (1994), coding and analysing is not a single step process; it involves iterative mental processes and changes through which the understanding of the data progress and even the questions of the research can change and emerge along this process. Hidden meanings and trends in the data emerge to replace the old ones. Themes and relationships come to the surface and from between the lines through processes of coding, decoding, changing, deleting, reorganising along with the examination of the literature.

## **5.6 Research trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness criteria minimize sources of researcher bias and improve the quality of interpretive research. It entails issues such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. These are corresponding to the internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity criteria used in quantitative methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, interpretive research would look for reflexivity and subjectivity in its trustworthiness.

### **5.6.1 Subjectivity and reflexivity**

Often qualitative research is perceived as a subjective approach to data collection and analysis. Subjectivity is not a limitation; rather, it is implicated in qualitative research quality, whereas this type of research does not support generalization (Wellington, 2000). It is generally accepted that two researchers interpreting the same data end up with different findings based on their experiences (Esterberg, 2002). Hence, in interpretive research, the role and the subjectivity of the researcher are the main instruments in developing meanings and knowledge. Consequently, subjectivity involves the responsibility to carefully build knowledge through a process of reflexivity, which is the core issue in the trustworthiness of qualitative research

(Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). Wellington (2000) defined reflexivity as “introspection and self-examination, i.e. the act of reflecting upon and evaluating one’s own impact on the situation being studied” (p. 200). Savin-Baden and Major (2013) suggest that sources of bias in interpretive research can be avoided when researchers state and reflect on their personal position, experiences, and values they carry to their specific choices of subjects and methods. My background and experience in Saudi higher education, along with my familiarity with the context and culture of the research participants, was an important ground for my choices in directing this research.

In addition to this, it could be argued that the IPA guidelines grant a careful stance for developing meaning that emerges from participants. IPA support bracketing my own personal assumptions and judgments in the whole process of research, such as when collecting, analysing, and interpreting the data. I also have put myself in the participants’ situation in order to interpret meaning from their perspectives and never let my previous knowledge to direct the development of meaning, to increase the chances of growth of new insights. Thus, I was cognizant of the process of bracketing and reflection and avoided any source of bias, in accordance with Maykut and Morehouse’s (1994, p. 123) view that meaning emerges when the researcher is immersed in the participants’ world whilst being “aware of how one’s own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand”. For instance, I allowed each participant to reflect on their own experiences freely and without judgment, whether they had a positive or negative attitude towards the subject matter. I then interpreted and analysed the data in the first stage by hearing each individual participant’s way of making sense of their experience without allowing ideas to be ascribed from other cases. This allowed diverse views to contribute to the larger picture of understanding engagement in development in this research, with all views being incorporated equally in the report.

The role of researcher subjectivity shapes all aspects of interpretive research, including the development of meanings and findings. Thus reflexivity in research also supported the discovery of new issues in this research. England (1994) suggests that reflexivity “induces self-discovery and can lead to insights and new hypotheses about the research questions” (p. 82). Similarly, Maxwell (2013) indicates that reflexivity demonstrates itself in the open process of qualitative research design which needs one’s ability to respond to changes and modifications throughout the progress of knowledge construction. Hence I have designed the research to be open to expand on the initial topics and to respond to changes and emergent issues as they emerge in the participants’ interviews to develop and discover new issues and meanings.

### **5.6.2 Credibility**

Other procedures to minimize my personal influence and bias are obtained through credibility criteria. There are several techniques for increasing credibility in qualitative research; significantly the triangulation of methods is employed broadly (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Wellington (2000) suggested that the use of more than one method in qualitative research increases trust in the accuracy of findings. Triangulation involves the use of three qualitative methods to collect data and analyse them, which ensures that data is crosschecked from several sources and minimizes the researcher’s effect (Creswell, 2013). In this research, triangulation of individual interviews, focus groups, and reflexive diary reports increased the chance of understanding the meaning from different outlooks and therefore of presenting accurate data. The analysis of data is improved, and the accuracy of coding and categorizing is achieved through analysing multiple sources of data, such as interviews, focus groups, and diaries, simultaneously (Creswell, 2013). The outcomes of each method are supported and crosschecked by the other methods, which provide a comprehensive coverage. Hence, the strengths of one method cover the drawbacks of another since the methods covered the same subject as in this research. Credibility was also ensured

by following several steps, such as member checks. The wording and questions in each method were reviewed and examined by two Ph.D. colleagues in education from the same culture. Wolcott (1994) suggests that credibility involves reducing the elements and causes of ambiguity when collecting data and that any confusion should be detected and removed. I also explained all the concepts used and defined them clearly to participants in the interviews, and I frequently asked questions to clarify meaning and summarized what the participants said to ensure a shared understanding in the interviews.

### **5.6.3 Transferability of research**

Transferability refers to whether findings and descriptions are believable and could be applied in other similar settings or situations. Transferability was maintained in this research by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, research design, methodology, ways of sampling and selecting participants, data collection, and data analysis. The reader can decide whether to transfer this information or findings to other settings or situations and to find out its relationships to their context.

### **5.7 Ethical considerations**

Wellington (2000) defined ethics in research as the responsibility of the researcher to apply research methods and to communicate research ideas and results according to defined principles and organizational ethical codes. The main ethical issues in this research regarded the researcher's use of interviews, focus groups, and reflective diary reports with university students in a college in KSA. These centered on voluntary informed consent, the right to withdraw, anonymity, and data protection. The ethical guidelines of the University of Exeter were followed throughout the research.



### **5.7.1 Ethical approval**

Prior to any contact with participants in the specified setting, ethical approval was obtained from the University of Exeter Ethical Committee following the submission of detailed research objectives and questions, informed consent forms, and participant information sheets (See Appendix B). Participants were fully informed about the research's educational objectives, and the nature of the questions and procedures used, along with the outcomes expected from the research. I have also submitted a request to apply research in the selected setting and received approval for data collection (See Appendix B).

### **5.7.2 Voluntary participation and informed consent**

All participants in this research voluntarily chose to participate. Before the interviews and focus groups, I received a signed informed consent paper from each participant, which was attached to participant sheets in Arabic (See Appendix B); this included consent to be voice recorded. The Arabic participant sheet explained in detail the objectives of the research and the research procedures. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time or to decline to answer any question. Participants were assured about the procedures to protect their confidentiality and anonymity along with procedures to protect and save their data.

### **5.7.3 Potential issues**

Another issue related to ethical guidelines in educational research concerns the need to protect participants' safety and dignity, and to avoid any possible distress during the interviews to ensure that there is no harm to the participants (Pring, 2000). All interviews were held in a comfortable and quiet room in the college library on campus, but away from classes. All interviews were scheduled to be at a convenient time for the students during the day. All interviews and focus groups started with a

brief introduction to explain the process of the interview and its expected duration. I also explained in detail the focus group process, along with instructions about participating in a way that ensured respect for all participants.

A potential issue in interviews is that the disclosure of potentially sensitive information is required from the participant. Interviews and focus groups raise the issue of dealing with participants with respect and dignity and of avoiding causing them any distressful experience. The voluntary participants were treated with respect and thanked after the interviews and informed of the researcher's contact details and offered to receive their copy to discuss the findings. At the start of the focus group, I ensured that students are aware of the process by giving complete instructions on how to participate to avoid sensitive issues or misconceptions.

My position and previous links to the setting could emerge as another ethical issue concerned with the power relationships with participants, who are students in the same college. This did not affect participants because I had had no teaching or another contact with the participants as students prior to conducting this research.

#### **5.7.4 Privacy and data protection**

Privacy is a reasonable ethical matter for females, particularly concerning the culture of the participants. For instance, the use of videos or pictures in research is not acceptable in this setting. Nevertheless, I have informed the participants that the interviews would be voice recorded and obtained signed informed consent for voice recordings from each student before the interviews. I also adopted the ethical procedures that ensure the protection for the privacy of research participants. I have notified the participants about privacy protection procedures for their data and recordings. For instance, I warranted that participants' identities kept protected during this process, as well as in the report. I have avoided referring to real names during the research process, and I used pseudonyms in writing the report. Students

were not asked to put their names on the reflective diary reports, and these were kept anonymous to ensure their privacy and free reflection. I assured that no one except me has access to the data. Hence, all research data, either paper print outs or digital, were kept protected in a safe place and locked with a password. Following the University's ethical and data protection guidance, I will destroy all research data upon a specific time limit of research completion.

## **5.8 Summary**

All students have a similar experience of using social media; still, each experience is distinct. My choice of IPA methodology is guided by the objectives of this research to explore the various and complex learners' experiences in a higher education context. The literature has reported on the complex and conflicting contemporary learners' experiences, which required a closer look at both the personal and social factors involved.

IPA has been utilised in the literature as the most comprehensive and accessible methodology to gain a nuanced understanding of the students' lived experiences implicating several factors into the understanding. IPA also provided me with the ability to look at differences and similarities. It has a particular advantage for discovering different and conflicting attitudes, as reported in the literature. It is also a flexible methodology, so bracketing is not always required which makes it a suitable methodology to understand a wide variety of issues that focused on the learner and the interpretation of this understanding concerning the wider contextual and social context of the experiences. Thus, I was able to strengthen my understanding of the educational issues, drivers, and difficulties related to students' engagement in this context from the learners' uses, experiences, and perspectives.

It should be noted that IPA is a methodology and is not only a type of discourse analysis. IPA is a qualitative interpretive methodology that shapes the application of

methods and questions of research to become more focused on the participants' feelings and reflections. My method choices and procedures, including the data analysis, have been designed to allow for iterative reflection and modifications that contribute to explore new subjects and construct knowledge. Finally, the procedures concerning the quality and trustworthiness of the research and the ethical considerations adopted have been outlined.

## Chapter Six: Research Findings

### 6.0 Introduction

This chapter reports on the findings and the final themes developed from the IPA analysis of the students' in-depth interviews focus groups and reflective-diary reports in the Saudi higher education context. The main purpose of this research was to let the experiences and voices concerning learners' engagement in independent learning and personal development to emerge. The IPA analysis of the students' personal accounts and their own interpretations of their experiences, along with my interpretations, have been developed into four main themes that corresponded to answering the final research questions. The final themes include first Motivations and drivers for students' engagement, second, Difficulties, and barriers to students' engagement, third Benefits of social media as a tool for supporting students' engagement and development, and finally, Issues raised from the students' experiences and perceptions in this context. Table (6.1) presents the main final theme list.

**Table 6.1: The final themes and sub-themes**

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Categories
<b>Motivations and drivers for students' engagement in independent learning and personal development</b>	Positive attitudes based on personal factor	<b>Self-efficacy and reflection</b>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived confidence and awareness of personal abilities</li> <li>• The prospect of enhanced performance</li> <li>• Self-awareness of needs and self-evaluations</li> <li>• Control on behavioural engagement (effort)</li> <li>• Time management</li> <li>• Coping strategies</li> </ul>
		<b>Personal values</b>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hobbies and interests (things they value)</li> <li>• Mastery of skills and performance (doing their best)</li> <li>• Exploration and its relation to independence</li> <li>• Originality and its relation to creativity</li> <li>• Helping others and spreading knowledge</li> <li>• Religion and family influences</li> </ul>

**Table 6.1: The final themes and subthemes**

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Categories
<b>Motivations and drivers for students' engagement in independent learning and personal development</b>	Positive attitudes based on social and contextual factors	<b>Awareness of opportunity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enriching and updating information</li> <li>• Self-regulated learning and its relation to the availability of different methods and forms</li> <li>• Strengthen social skills and relationships</li> <li>• Emotional regulation</li> <li>• Self-presentation and self and career development</li> <li>• Differences and multi-cultural Awareness</li> <li>• Collective decision-making and interactive voting</li> </ul>
		<b>Challenges and transitions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transition and university adjustment</li> <li>• Academic requirements</li> </ul>
		<b>Social inclusion and learning from others experiences</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community influence</li> <li>• University influence</li> <li>• Teacher influence</li> <li>• Peer influence</li> </ul>
		<b>Freedom of choice and independence</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowerment in social life</li> <li>• Empowerment in academic life</li> <li>• Empowerment for identity</li> </ul>
<b>Barriers and difficulties for students' engagement in independent learning and personal development</b>	Negative attitudes based on personal factor	<b>Negative attitudes and its relation to personal and academic difficulties</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detecting academic difficulties from social media use</li> <li>• Lack of awareness of the learning process</li> <li>• Variations and gaps in students' attitudes and experiences</li> <li>• Depression and disconnection</li> <li>• Perceived lack of support</li> </ul>
		<b>Perceived social media risk</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of social media risks (Openness Vs. Risk)</li> <li>• Awareness of potential risks in social media</li> </ul>
	Negative attitudes caused by social and organisational contextual factors	<b>Distraction and Overload</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disorientation</li> <li>• The influence of disorganised behaviour on the network</li> </ul>

**Table 6.1: The final themes and sub-themes**

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Categories
<b>Barriers and difficulties for students' engagement in independent learning and personal development</b>	Negative attitudes caused by social and organisational contextual factors	<b>Curriculum and educational organisational culture</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Lack of inclusive pedagogy and organisation plans</b></li> <li>• Lack of personal support and feedback</li> <li>• Focus of assessment method</li> </ul>
		<b>Lack of social inclusion</b>
		<b>Technical Problems and its relation to fears</b>
		<b>Time and cost issues</b>
		<b>Perceived Change in attitudes and development of self-confidence</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived development of life skills</li> <li>• Perceived development in awareness and openness</li> <li>• Perceived development of confidence in social engagement and relationships</li> </ul>
<b>Benefits of Social media on students' engagement in personal development</b>		<b>Perceived Change in attitudes and development of academic/career confidence</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived academic performance and achievement</li> <li>• Perceived change in attitudes and motivation</li> <li>• Perceived engagement in career development</li> </ul>
<b>Educational Issues raised from students' experiences and perceptions</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived differences amongst students' abilities and knowledge</li> <li>• Views concerning teachers</li> <li>• Views concerning curriculum</li> </ul>

As described earlier in the methodology, the IPA analysis had several iterative steps, and these steps are flexible. For instance, the first and second themes needed sophisticated multi-level coding method, while the third and fourth themes were developed directly from the interviews. Table (6.2) presents some examples that illustrate the explicit multi-level coding in IPA.

**Table 6.2: Illustration of IPA multiple level coding from the participants' data**

Case	Words frequently used by student	Descriptive words from students' words	Researcher's conceptual understanding	Emergent theme
<b>FG1S5</b>	I do not use I am not a user I do not know these things I do not know what is going on	Feeling frustrated by the educational process because there is a lack of perceived support for her needs when other students present different knowledge in social media	Lack of inclusive teaching strategies	Barriers and difficulties caused by the social and organisational context
<b>SE2 Interview</b>	I am not from this college I do not know anyone I was shy to ask My school has not offered me this training	Shy from asking the teachers because she felt that other students do not need the support she needs and she felt they do not expect her to ask	Lack of personal support	Barriers and difficulties caused by the social and organisational context
<b>ICT5 Reflective diary</b>	I know I am sure I feel positive I rarely brows without a goal There are chances Some people can not get benefits	Feeling positive because she is confident about her ability to achieve goals and to control how much time in terms of life priorities	Confidence Self-efficacy combined with self-regulation and achievement	Personal motivations and drivers
<p><b>FG1S5 (focus group):</b></p> <p>I don't use social media a lot. I mean, I am not a user. And I do not know these things on social media. The students in their presentation refer to social media sites, experts and events as examples that I do not have any background about it, when this happens, which is often, I feel like I do not know what is going on.</p> <p><b>SE2 (in-depth interview):</b></p> <p>I am not from this college, I mean when I came I did not know anyone I found difficult to find friends and to go on with my study, because the university is different from school. My school has not offered me this training I was not introduced to networks and computers, so I was very slow and felt frustrated. However, I was shy to ask for support, because all students seemed talented and used to using these networks for study from their school. So I used social media to learn independently.</p> <p><b>ICT5 (reflective diary):</b></p> <p>Social media has a positive influence on me because I can control when and I know how much time in relation to my religious, family and study priorities. Then I think about my hobbies and future and life after, so I rarely browse without a benefit or goal. I am sure that these sites provide golden chances for people who employ it in a right way; however, unfortunately, some people in spite of having these chances in front of them, they cannot get benefit from it. The reason is that their family may not encourage them or because of their friends, and they are not getting advice on how to use it.</p>				

## 6.1 Motivations and drivers for students' engagement

Motivations and drivers for engagement have emerged in all student interviews, focus groups, and reflective diaries, whenever reflecting on their learning experiences in social media. Still there were different levels of motivation amongst



students. Often students who had positive attitudes from their experiences spoke about what they thought needed to be put in place before their successful engagement in independent learning in social media could occur. Students spoke about their feelings and attitudes of personal and social support for their engagement from their learning experiences. The three main social motives and drivers were: challenges and transitions, social inclusion and learning from others' experiences, and finally, freedom of choice. Nevertheless, the personal motivations and drivers that emerged in this research from the participants' experiences reinforced the literature findings of increased individual differences and engagement levels amongst students. The three personal drivers were self-efficacy and reflection, personal values, and awareness of opportunity.

#### **6.1.1 Self-efficacy and reflection**

Self-efficacy is a general term that indicates one's confidence in their personal ability to control and achieve their personal goals. Thus self-efficacy in this research can apply to different life situations and goals, either for learning or socialization. As described earlier self-efficacy is a construct that underlies critical reflection, self-evaluation, positivity, self-regulation, skills, and decision-making ability (see Chapter3). This self-perception was identified from students' talk and attitudes, mainly when they describe their use and personal development experience around social media. For instance, the students frequently repeated terms like "I can", "I will", and "it is easy". Students who had positive attitudes from their personal development experiences spoke of a belief in their self-ability to control and achieve their goals, without being distracted. This emerged in their self-motivated attitude towards engagement in the improvement of their social life and academic performance. As shown on table (6.1) the following six themes emerged under the sub-theme of positive attitudes based on personal factor self-efficacy and confidence in ability. These are

- Perceived confidence and awareness of personal abilities
- The prospect of enhanced performance
- Self-awareness of needs and self-evaluations
- Control on behavioural engagement (effort)
- Time management
- Coping strategies

The findings concerning these themes are presented in the following sections.

### **Perceived confidence and awareness of personal abilities**

Students who had positive attitudes and experiences expressed awareness of their own abilities as well as limitations. This confidence in personal ability and performance emerged in students' talk and reflections around their learning experiences in social media. Often students who expressed the confidence exhibited a general satisfaction of their performance. ICT4 was a talented student who was active in design production and was chosen by her teacher to participate in this research. In her reflective diary essay, she put a conviction of confidence alongside a satisfaction of performance. Meaning that she perceived positive experiences and development because of her ability to control and achieve her goals when using social media:

Social media have a positive influence on me because I have the ability to control when and how much time in relation to my religious, family, and study priorities. Then I think about my hobbies and future...

Several students reiterated the same conviction, saying, "I think I have positive feelings because I know how to use it". SE3 was a student in her first year; in her interview, she presented a critical attribution and conviction of her ability; she interpreted her performance and achievement as influenced by her own will, and pointed to her undeniable efforts that cannot be overlooked: "I do not think that social media has any effect on my development, as I was looking for that in social media".

Students present variations in terms of conviction and awareness of self-abilities.

These differences in awareness were apparent in the diversity of students' attitudes and experiences in focus groups. Students who perceived positive experiences were

explicit in reporting a positive attitude towards social media in their lives, which they accompanied by a demonstration of confidence and awareness of self-ability.

Conversely, students who reported a negative attitude towards social media lacked awareness of their personal abilities and presented a general discourse on the positives and negatives of social media to explain their experiences.

Frequently, the students who expressed a positive attitude with sense of achievement and revealed awareness of their role in learning. They were not convinced of any positive advantages or negative risks of social networks and perceived social media as neutral tools shaped by the user's personality, learning ability, and study skills. For instance, students usually said things like "it depends on the person" and "it depends on how you use it" and "social media is shaped by my personal tendencies and hobbies." They believed in themselves, held positive attitudes based on their abilities and achievement, and attributed achievement to their own abilities. In contrast, students who had negative attitudes spoke more about the negative influence and risks of social media. One student (FG2S4) explained this in the focus group: "My opinion is that social media is important for anyone to learn and know about everything in life, and it is very useful, but it can have different influence from one person to another".

Similarly, FG2S1 believed that any experience of development in social media was based on personal ability in the first place: "It depends on the person. You can see it as a two-sided tool that can be used either for good or for bad. One should know how to balance different issues and how to choose accounts and people".

### **The prospect of enhanced performance**

Students were quite motivated by social media convenient tools to improve their abilities and performance, which add to their self-confidence, abilities and positive attitudes even more. Often the participants reported on the prospect of enhanced

performance as part of their perceptions of social media ease of use. This means that all students perceived improvement in their performance and eventually increased confidence in their ability to achieve their goals enabled by social media. Although this was at different levels, as explained beforehand, the outcome totally depends on the student's abilities. For instance, most students, similarly iterated E2's words that social media ease of use and convenience have increased their ability to manage and achieve study goals: "I think learning in social media becomes easy, and I can find the information that I need fast".

The prospect of enhanced performance that was usually associated with the perceived ease of use was much reported amongst participants as a driver for academic confidence. For instance, these excerpts from FG1 presents the students' perceived academic confidence with the perceived enhanced performance.

S1: Our assignments and presentations become easier because I can find what I need without being in need for finding someone to ask for help.

S2: In social media, we find a lot of help related to our assignments and course work, because I want to present the best in my course work, I will use social media to get ideas.

S3: I agree that it helps me a lot in course work. I mean if I have handwork, I will have the detailed steps to get my work done accurately.

S4: On YouTube and Instagram, I develop my ideas. For example, I have work to do, but I do not have any idea how to start; I mean it helps me to discover new things and to be creative in my presentations and assignments.

S5: When I have an assignment or work, and I feel like, I do not have any idea, and my thinking is limited, I use Social Media, and it helps me to improve my ideas.

### **Self-awareness of needs and self-evaluations**

Students who had positive attitudes indicated self-awareness of their needs and difficulties as a primary driver for their engagement and use of social media. This self-evaluation of limitations was followed by the willingness to overcome difficulties and weak points and to seek improvements with help of social media. It seems that students who display positive attitudes and development experience in social media

are those who are aware of their personal problems and have the willingness to adjust and solve these problems and limitations. Social media presents handy self-development tools for those who are self-aware. Most students' responses to my question in the reflective diary 'What is your aim from browsing social media?' exhibited self-awareness of their needs for overcoming difficulties and weak points, either in their social life or in making their academic study easier. Most students pointed to using social media to make their academic study more manageable and enjoying. ICT1 reported in her diary: "My main aim from browsing these sites is to develop myself and to enrich my information and to overcome my weak points..." E3 similarly pointed to her awareness of weak points as the main driver for her engagement in development:

On Instagram, I follow cooking, doctors, designers, sports, dietary, makeup - I mean I like to improve myself and to improve the points that are weak in my personality or my appearance... I think any girl now needs these important skills.

Many, like PS1, point to the need for self-improvement and the awareness of limitations as the main driver for their engagement and use of social media: "... my aim when browsing these sites is to develop myself and to gain help and information from others either in my studies or in general".

Nevertheless, self-evaluation processes can also be gathered from the students' self-regulation, as in the following themes.

### **Control on behavioural engagement (effort)**

An essential element of the students' self-efficacy and the perceived performance was due to self-regulation and the control over behavioural engagement. Students reported on a process of behavioural engagement and effort beforehand any successful engagement and performance outcome. The participants are quite sure that it is not hard to use social media though there were different levels of ability to self-control, and the ability to persist and achieve goals.

For instance, some students pointed to a required process of behavioural engagement and effort with monitoring and testing of their progress, by applying

what they had learned. They believed it was important driver for any perceived performance and self-change from their use of social media. E4 explained that in her interview indicating her learning experience to overcome anxiety and shyness in her life by employing social media, she said:

I learned how to become more confident and comfortably talk to people... I am a little bit anxious in social situations, so I followed different professionals to read, write, listen, and watch to know how I can control my anxiety when talking to people. I mean, I make efforts to learn, and then I test myself (apply what I learn on social media) in my life situations, and I practice again and again until I achieve results.

Similar to E4, several participants believed that self-control, experimentation, and determination were primary factors that lead to their achievement and growth.

Despite that participants generally perceived social media as engaging in self-directed learning. Concerning the distraction in social media, students found it challenging to sustain a commitment by not being distracted from their goal.

Furthermore, students can use social media for different and conflict directions, such as entertainment and shopping. This situation places much demand on the students' readiness and self-efficacy since students can quickly be distracted if they lack a required level of determination and self-confidence.

### **Time management**

Often students who had positive attitudes about their performance spoke about how they performed plans to arrange their time and spoke of how they dedicated distinct times for learning and development. The effort and the skill to control one's engagement described the student's commitment to developmental goals and thus explained why some student's obtained performance and positive attitudes. PS1 was a high achieving student in the college and a blogger. In her interview, she pointed to the importance of giving time in the process of finding a balance between different issues in life to get development advantages from social media: "I need to devote

time and to balance between different requirements of study and life if I want to use social media for development”.

When I finished secondary school, and before entering college I wanted to invest my free time in this period in anything that can return benefits on me, so I used social media to establish a blog about self-care where I learned about design and media production.

As adult students who had several responsibilities, such as study and family many students believed in the importance of dedicating particular times and stressed on managing time for different requirements in their lives. E3, who was active in designing and publishing as a member of college clubs, in her interview, such as several active students in college clubs, linked her talent to investing free time in social media:

The self-awareness of dedication of time and effort usually emerge as a driver for successful performance and achievement in social media. E3, who was active in media production for social clubs in the college, talked about adopting predefined time slots: “Social media is important for my successful studying and development, but I need to have control, and I usually have my time and days split into predefined slots in order to get these advantages”.

Students often linked time management and effort with the performance they perceived in their lives. SE1 believed that she improved her English language because she was able to accommodate informal learning in social media within her busy schedule in the college:

I improved a lot in English. I was not able to pronounce simple words such as “add.” Every day I assign only half an hour to learn English. I do not make it longer because I have other commitments to my studies in the college.

The student then explained how she preferred to fit into predefined weekly schedules to obtain performance in her English pronunciation. Similarly, other students pointed to following teachers on Snap Chat as they delivered short lessons on a weekly basis that could go into their occupied days.

To meet their increasing academic requirements, students reported on their sense of responsibility for investing and saving their time by having specific goals when learning. M2, who was studying mathematics, talked about how difficult her academic subject was and thus she needed a better balance between social media and study requirements: "Studying math is not easy. I feel my responsibility as a student, and I define what I need when I use social media; otherwise, it is so easy that I will be wasting my time".

Time management is an important feature that emerged in positive students' experiences. E2 is a student who lives far from the college. Still, she was participating in designing academic products and was selected by her teacher for her outstanding class presentations. E2 also told me in her interview that she had a blog where she contributes to publishing stories in the Arabic language after translating them from English. She also told me that she engages in development courses regularly and identified that time management and balancing several requirements in her life keep her up with development in her life.

I come every day from [a city that is over one hour from college]. My laptop is usually with me. I always do my work and study because my time is split two halves - one for social life and the other for academic life and study.

### ***Coping strategies***

Students who had positive experiences also reported awareness of adopting coping and emotional self-regulation strategies to promote their engagement to the point of accomplishing their goals. Examples of such strategies are using social media to assist their commitment to learning by making the process of learning more convenient and enjoying. For instance, participants repeatedly pointed to several ways they employed social media to cope with life difficulties and study stress. Often the students in interviews, focus groups, and reflective diaries report employing YouTube whenever they faced difficulty in their study, and that they found sufficient



and instant help with examples and demonstrations. Thus all students report they used various social media to overcome difficulties in their study, for instance, E4: "Sometimes, I do not have an idea about how to start my study. I mean social media presents examples that facilitate my commitment to study. Without this help, I would find it very difficult to start".

M2 also stated that she used social media as a strategy to help her achieve her learning goals in a more compressed time and efficient way:

I seek information in social media that is presented simply and lightly; I do not like to read or watch a lot. Heavy learning can make me bored, and then I am afraid to stop learning, so when I use information that is simple and divided into light excerpts, such as in Twitter, YouTube and SnapChat, this motivates me to learn and engages me in my study because I think I get understanding of things better and I will not get bored when I study or learn anything.

Almost all participants pointed to using YouTube and other social media to facilitate their engagement as coping strategies to deal with the stress of academic study and requirements. Students spoke with satisfaction of their performance due to these strategies and the information presented on social media, which they perceived increased their retention and facilitated their comprehension of complicated information in different areas of their study. Quite often the students who report using social media to combat study difficulty and stress reported awareness of their limitations and thus attempted to adapt and do something to aid their engagement. For instance, ICT5 said: "I know that I have limited abilities, so when I have difficult assignments, I use YouTube to help me expand my abilities and ideas".

Some students stated this awareness of coping strategies such as to make study time more fun and to improve their capability and motivation. E4 interpreted her utilizing of YouTube and other social media to increase her efficacy in the study time: "I use social media when studying for exams. This is because I need to study

smartly - I mean, I use videos to make my study time fun and efficient at the same time”.

Students’ interpretations of their own experiences in using social media for self-directed learning were quite relevant to coping strategies; for instance, E4 reflected in her interview on her learning in social media:

In social media, I can find summarised and simple information about anything I want. If I used a book, for example, I would take a long time to find the exact information I want, and then I need to read, and it will take time to understand what I read. I think in social media, I can get intensive and easy to understand the information in a short time.

Similarly, many students pointed to the use of social media to save study and comprehension time by using videos and photos that illustrate information; for instance:

I often use YouTube while studying, and while doing my homework. I feel that it saves my time when studying. For instance, if I need to do homework it is difficult and time-consuming to do it by myself, the ideas will come very slowly, but when I use social media I learn faster on my homework, and then ideas come easily. So, by using social media, I facilitated and saved my time either when studying or doing homework.

Social media tools equip students with the choice of what and how they learn and grant the students’ control over their pace of learning. Social media videos and broadcast enable receiving live and efficient one-to-one support to self-regulated learning. All participants point to the part of student control on videos on YouTube in improving their performance and facilitate their engagement in academic study. Often the students’ experiences in the focus groups, reflective essays, and interviews report on using YouTube as a strategy to cope with study stress. Students often pointed to the use of videos to aid their performance and engagement in study, and as a strategy to save study time.

Thus it could be argued that students interpreted their use of social media as a way to help the process of learning any life skill they needed, including academic skills.

They quite sure that social media, when used in this way, promote their engagement and ability “to overcome any difficulties” they faced and to “make their learning easier.” Those students increased their expertise and skills even more. They perceived learning as much easier, and more fun with increased motivation levels and engagement. They report they find study time during exams as more enjoyable and less painful when using social media. Coping strategies were also raised in the focus groups discussions, one student concluded on the discussion that as she found social media an effective tool that aids engagement in personal development and academic study. Still, personal self-efficacy and commitment is the most critical driver in engagement development and academic study. FG2S4 commented on the discussion saying:

Social media facilitate learning. I mean, without social media, it would be difficult to learn. It facilitates many aspects of our social and academic lives. This is true insofar as the person is effective and in control and has divided their time equally into scheduled slots.

Self-efficacy and reflection them that emerged in all participants’ experiences are in agreement with the literature on the relationship between self-regulation and self-efficacy, and the use of social media in personal development in the current age. Under social media influence student’s ability and self-efficacy, self-regulated learning, responsibility, and commitment are essential drivers for their development and the reported perceived performance in their social and academic lives. It was evident from the participants’ experiences of using social media in their development and independent study that students who have positive attitudes and experiences report believe in self-ability. They report the ability to control and the awareness of their abilities and study skills required to achieve performance. Furthermore, students who report engagement in development in social media are often aware of their own needs, limitations, and difficulties and present a determination to overcome these difficulties, which helped them achieve their life and academic goals and engage in

development. Self-regulation emerges as part of the students' perceived self-efficacy and performance. It points to the students' ability to control time and effort, along with time management. Coping strategies also include emotional regulation as a factor in helping students deal with academic study stress and to engage in development.

### **6.1.2 Personal values**

Under the free access to multiple resources of information and availability of enormous choice, students believed that learning and engaging in development become more accessible and easy. Though, the person in these open and available opportunities needs to have certain values or direction. Values are principles or standards of behaviour or one's judgment of what is important in life. Personal values consistently accompanied students' talk and interpretations of their development experience in social media.

#### ***Hobbies and interests (things they value)***

Hobbies and interests formed a critical theme defining positive experiences of development in social media. Frequently the students started their discourse about their social media use with the words "I love: drawing, cooking... so I used social media" or "I used social media for developing what I like" or "I use social media to know about the things I like." In their reflective diaries, students frequently responded with the primary two purposes of their use of social media. The first is to achieve self-improvement by solving their own problems, and the second is to develop things they loved, such as hobbies or interests. S4FG1 in a focus group pointed directly to the importance of one's values and love of something as the main driver for development; she put this as:

I have things I love to do, and I have hobbies. I mean, no one can learn anything without having willingness; for instance, things they love to do and hobbies. If someone loves something, then it is easy now that they can use social media to find out more about it and to develop more and more.

Quite often, students also point that interest in the academic subject was a significant driver in students' academic development and exploration in social media. Students who were interested in their specialization reported engagement and exploration in social media for enriching and knowing more about their field. Ph1, for example, said in the interview that her interest in the academic subject leads her for explorations and development in her field:

I love my specialization, and I like to explore it even more. In social media, I have the chance to go beyond what I learn in college and textbooks. I mean, in my field, I have expanded my knowledge and learned in social media more than what I have learned in the class.

### ***Mastery of skills and performance (doing their best)***

Students talked about seeking mastery of skill and performance as drivers for their engagement. For instance, many of them said that they engaged in practicing different skills to reach a level of mastery and professionalism in a skill or in a hobby, which eventually engaged them in development. E2 talked about mastery in her interview: "I use social media to have a high level of performance. For instance, Ok, I know how to do makeup; however, in social media, I learned even better on how to do this professionally and fast".

Similarly, many students reported on their search for mastery of photography from Instagram, and some reported on seeking fluency in spoken English. Personal values such as developing hobbies and mastery of skills were drivers for many students to learn drawing, design, decor, art, makeup, fashion ... etc. Mastery and performance also emerged as drivers for students' academic development from their experiences in social media, as students who used social media in their academic development were looking for performing the best to achieve their potential. FG1S3 in a focus group said: "I use social media in my study and in my presentations and

work because I am looking for doing the best. In social media, I can expand my ideas and abilities to do the best that I can”.

Students also pointed to mastery when seeking the ability to self-regulate their skill by having a detailed one-to-one support. For instance, PS3 was talking in the context of doing handwork and crafts for children as part of pre-school education requirements: “Social media help me do my work accurately, including course work. I mean, if I have handwork I will have the detailed steps to get my work done accurately”.

The same was iterated by E4, who pointed to seeking control over the learning pace for the sake of raising her study performance in language: “I use social media to practice. I mean, I do things again and again until I reach the level of mastery in my study”.

Often iterated in many students’ experiences that they use social media to seek one-to-one support for the sake of improved control of skill and performance, for instance, FG2S5 said: “For example, when I have handwork, I can find many photos and videos that explain what tools I need and how can I do work in simple steps...”

### ***Exploration and its relation to independence***

Students spoke quite often the part of their independence and self-direction when reflecting on their development experience in social media. FG1S2 believed that self-reliance was an essential requirement for students’ development in the age of social media and networks: “Now everyone needs to depend on themselves and search for the missing information. There is no time to wait for teachers or anyone else to help”.

Some students realized the role of independence in the development of more confidence. For instance, E2's reflected on her learning experience in doing a presentation for her course subject, and said in her interview: "When I did my presentation, I relied a lot on searching YouTube for the subject. I retained this subject, and I understood it. I believe because I worked it out for myself with the help of social media".

FG1S3 agreed, and interpreted more about the effect of being open and free to exploration on development, from her learning experience: "If I want to learn something, I use search. Then, I don't restrict myself to one site; for example, I will see it on YouTube, on Twitter, and on Instagram. I think exploring itself is the thing that adds to my knowledge".

Similarly, FG1S4 pointed out:

YouTube helps me in doing worksheets and assignments because I can find unlimited ideas about the activity and more examples... But for me, when I use it for my assignment, I like to see more. For example, I will see more than one reference to expand my knowledge in my specific field.

SE3's interpretation of her learning experience pointed out that exploration and independence presents one's critical ability to test and build knowledge. She reflected that in her interview: "Sometimes I have information, but I am not sure about it, so I use social media to test and modify my knowledge and this knowledge I think would stay with me because I tested it and searched it myself".

Quite similar, SE1 was passionate about her exploration in social media and the impact of this has on expanding her knowledge. She believed that one needed to be open to exploring things because benefits come from explorations:

I think that it is rarely that one browses or look at other worlds without getting a single benefit! Possibly my information is growing every day, even if each day I get only one benefit. I like to explore and expand my knowledge. This

can be a way to invest my free time in social media. It can be enjoyable and beneficial at the same time.

ICT4 was also motivated for development from her own explorations and independence in social media. She revealed that independence is the central value associated with her exploration as she is trying new things in her life assisted by social media. She was grateful to her father for promoting her independence, which had helped her to explore and develop:

I like to explore! I think this is the thing that engages me most in social media and development. I mean, I like to try new things; I like to discover things. I think my dad has the main role in this because he always encourages us to search by ourselves for the answer and for information and he always says 'instead of asking, you need to search for the information yourself.

### ***Originality and its relation to creativity***

In the age of increased demand for talent and creativity, these participants presented creativity and originality as required values for development. Similar to exploration and independence in the students' experiences, originality and creativity emerged together. For instance, some students interpreted their use of social media to expand their ideas along with their awareness of the limitations of their thoughts. FG1S2 put it as: "When I have an assignment or work, and I feel like, I do not have any idea, and my thinking is limited, I use Social Media, and it helps me to grow my ideas".

FG1S4 put it clear that she used social media to be creative and to brainstorm ideas for doing creative work: "On YouTube and Instagram, I develop my ideas. Usually, when I have work, I will struggle to have ideas to start with, so it assists me to discover new things and to be creative in my presentations and assignments".

Many students pointed to awareness of their limitations along with their search for creativity through brainstorming in social media: "Social media make our assignment



and handwork easier... I mean there is some exchange of ideas on social media; sometimes, I have only little idea, and social media grow these ideas”.

Other students presented different interpretations of creativity from their experiences and pointed to creativity as uniqueness and originality. For instance, PH1 interpreted her use of social media as being to increase her chance to be creative by achieving a unique style, within human limitations. She explained:

In social media, I can expand my knowledge and explore different ideas. My thinking is limited if I use it alone, but when I see different ideas, it helps me to expand my horizons and to be creative in my assignment by mixing these ideas to present new ideas using my own style.

ICT4 also pointed to a creative behaviour that sought originality, while others simply copied from social media:

Everyone uses social media in different ways. I think social media support my development because I am not copying ideas. For instance, my friend finds an idea and just copies it - this is easy! However, I try to explore and find new ideas, so I explore a lot and combine different ideas to create a new idea.

In focus group discussions, students particularly raised the issue of copying ideas for academic handwork. They believed it was very easy for someone to copy ideas from social media without being detected. FG1 S5 said, in the context of copying ideas from social media: “When I have an assignment, I usually do not look at one model or design; rather, I watch at least three models, then I will generate my own one which merges those three”.

Several students in the focus groups, similarly, pointed to differences amongst students with respect to how creative they were when using social media for designing work or even when doing assignments or e-quizzes. Students suggested that one’s values of creativity and seeking for originality when designing their own work and products, including academic assignments and handwork, was an important issue in their development. Creativity and originality were important drivers

for students who reported high levels of engagement. Students reported increased use of social media for enriching their ideas and brainstorming their own creativity.

### ***Helping others and spreading knowledge***

Students often mentioned helping others as one driver of their development. Many students expressed awareness of the participatory give and take feature when using social media for development. In fact, most students realised this value to sustain their ability to obtain learning benefits from the networks. Several students replied that they liked to help others and get help when they were asked about their aims of using social media. ICT3, who had a development experience of using blogs, revealed a participatory attitude to seeking knowledge and then sharing it with others using social media platforms, which returned benefits to her and to the others who read her posts: “For me, social media is a platform to reach and learn from people, and at the same time to teach and help people”.

Many students answered my question about the reasons for using WhatsApp as informal class groups, which were used widely in this context by simply to help each other, and even to teach others as peers. Students believed that helping others using WhatsApp created a positive environment of learning amongst them that was motivating for their development. ICT5 pointed to the value of helping each other to sustain these groups:

The most important thing in WhatsApp groups is that it links students of the class together and there becomes amiability between students when each one wants to help the other. I mean, when students share lecture notes and if someone does not understand, someone else will explain to them. I mean, when all the group is of one heart and help each other.

There was one student, E3, who was active in college social clubs, who pointed to the importance of helping others in her development, from her reflection on her use of social media in the interview:

I love to devote time to helping voluntary and social clubs. I helped in these clubs by designing products on social media and participating in events. When I graduate from this college, I think I will not have only an academic certificate. I mean, I could say that I graduated from these clubs because I really learned a lot from voluntary and charity work and a lot of opportunities for development have opened to me.

Some of the interviewed students who expressed confidence and development in the use of social media replied that they had charitable and religious motivations.

### ***Religion and Family Influences***

There was a clear influence of religion and family that emerged in the students' talk about their experiences. ICT4, who had a positive attitude, talked about her experience in her reflective diary, pointing to the role of religion and family:

Social media has a positive influence on me because I have the ability to control when, and I know how much time in relation to my religious, family, and study priorities. Then I think about my hobbies and future and life after, so I rarely browse without a benefit or goal. I am sure that these sites provide golden chances for people who employ it in the right way; however, unfortunately, some people in spite of having these chances in front of them, cannot get benefit from it. The reason is that their family may not encourage them or because of their friends, and they are not getting advice on how to use it.

Many students talked about Islamic values in their use of social media and the choices of people in social media. FG1S5, in a focus group, interpreted development in social media as influenced by choice, which needed to be guided by values: "I do not take any information from anyone whom I do not know who he is, what he looks like, or someone I do not know something about his life and values".

Besides, some students held strong values and emotions against plagiarism which had become easy and less detected even in e-quizzes. They suggested that religious values helped to avoid copying and cheating, which become easier.

Some students indicate that religion also was a motivation for helping people. For instance, one student pointed to her voluntary teaching of old women in her

neighbourhood and her mother's friends by using social media. ICT3 talked about her motivation to establish a blog:

My motivation to have a blog on information security is voluntary because many people do not have any idea on how to protect their data on their phones or when they face a problem or lose their information, they do not know how to get them back. Especially in our Muslim society, photographs are very important and need to be secured.

Values are prominent in the experiences of participants with high levels of engagement. Students who perceive increased development express values of independence, creativity, originality, helping others and voluntary sharing of knowledge and teaching others. Students also often describe religion and family influences as being drivers for their values and choices and for helping others and spreading knowledge.

### **6.1.3 Awareness of Opportunity**

Students elaborated on their interpretation of their learning experiences and the adoption of social media, pointing to its attractive impacts on their personal development. Still, whenever they describe how they used social media for development, they usually emphasized their critical awareness of its hidden educational opportunities. Of course, there were different levels of awareness of opportunities amongst participants, based on different experiences and adoption time. Thus participants stated different benefits and opportunities that showed how they gained support for their current affairs, whether personal, social, religious, political, or educational. This section discusses topics that emerged under the theme awareness of opportunity.

#### ***Enriching and updating information***

Social media generally are accessible and easy to use sites that can be adopted for different purposes in various areas of life. They do not need their users to have any

prior technical skills or knowledge. Still, the students need to have critical ability and awareness to filter information, learn, and self-regulate in order to achieve development in their performance and development. Most participants stated they used social media for enriching and updating information every time they viewed their pages. They also showed their critical awareness of hidden educational and developmental opportunities that might not be visible by all who access social media. For an instant, students with high levels of engagement, like PS2 suggested that not all people were aware of the hidden educational opportunities in social media:

Some people think that social media are only for entertainment. I think that social media is important for learning and development. I mean, I think I learned many things from social media... and it [social media] permit my communication with many people who benefitted and updated me in many aspects of my life, including my studies.

In the age of knowledge and information, some students believed in the importance of enriching and updating their information in various domains and did not restrict themselves to one field of knowledge. An instant, ICT5 interpreted her use of Twitter as a “little personal library” and described it as an exciting way to enrich knowledge in any particular field every time she looked at her mobile. She said in her interview:

For me, social media - I use it as my little library, which I choose what I put in my page for further reference. I can carry it with me everywhere I go, and I always read and benefit from it in my free time.

SE2 stated her interpretation of using social media to enrich her information and increase her reading and comprehension of issues quickly:

In social media, I can read and expand my knowledge in many different domains of life and increase my information in less time ... I think this is because I directly understand information on social media, maybe because it is brief and nicely presented and I can find the exact information that I really need.

Likewise, students also perceived benefits in expanding their course information beyond formal education and textbooks, via social media. For instance, FG1S2

said: “In social media, the information is provided in an intensive and simple way which makes me able to expand my background on my courses”.

S5FG1 shared her learning experience of enriching English vocabulary through reading in social media:

I follow English Twitter accounts for entertainment. Whenever I find a new vocabulary, I would search for it. Over time I noticed my vocabulary increased. I even used this vocabulary in my writings and assignments in exams, and I realized this learning opportunity while being entertained.

Students also pointed to enriching the information for trending books and issues so they can keep their knowledge updated and read more about it. M2 was aware of motivating herself with currently trending books and issues through using social media: “I check trending and recommended books on social media, and I can get motivated to read a book only because my favourite people in social media have read it”.

Participants also followed many social and world organizations for the sake of being in contact and being updated with life opportunities. For instance, all participants reported on “following” their college social media accounts such as on Twitter, Snapchat, and YouTube to be in contact with events and workshops. S4FG1 interpreted her use of social media as to be connected and not isolated from the events in her world and the opportunities around her:

It is necessary for me to check WhatsApp, Snapchat, Twitter, and Instagram to know about things happening around me. I need to check these. This is very important! I mean, the day I do not see these discussions, I feel like I’m disconnected, and I miss opportunities.

### ***Self-regulated learning and its relation to the availability of different methods and forms in social media***

All interviewed university students reported using social media as a compensating strategy to “help them make their study easier,” “more enjoyable,” “get

practice/confidence and overcome difficulties,” and “save their study time.” Thus participants frequently quoted social media to be a tool to adjust to self-study requirements and to assist their self-regulated learning and academic performance. Nevertheless, students stated different ways of engaging in their study using social media. Students usually appreciated the convenience and instant access for information and people on social media, and some of them believed that finding support in social media is much easier and faster than waiting for asking the teacher. However, they differentiated between different issues and did not perceive that social media could replace the teacher or the LMS. This was clear in FG1S2’s reflection on her experience:

I think social media is important for my study and learning ... this does not mean that I do not use LMS or I do not need the teacher or I feel that I do not need to attend or concentrate on lectures because I can see it on YouTube ... no... I mean, it is crucial to me to make my learning easier. I mean, it enriches my information. This enrichment I feel is useful for my learning, and without it, I would find difficulty in my studies.

Similarly, ICT5 pointed to increased self-motivation in studying with the ability to find different styles of learning and plenty of teachers to choose from, and different videos and strategies on social media which met different study needs.

I like to study using social media because when I do not understand from one resource, I can understand from the other, and I am expanding my knowledge during this. I mean, the lecture is the beginning, but when studying, I need to expand my understanding or even to remember things that I took in the lecture which I have forgotten.

Many students pointed to the use of YouTube to watch educational videos or real context films related to their study. E5 reflected on her study of English literature in social media:

When I study, I like to study smart! I mean, when I have a novel to revise, I will start by finding videos and films on YouTube which expand my imagination and make me relate the reading to its context and even to its personalities. So, I enjoy while effectively studying; furthermore, I save study time.

Many students linked their ability to adjust to academic study to their ability to pick from wide range of learning styles and forms that maximise their ability to meet their learning needs. E2 agreed with this as she said: “It is natural that if I use only one style for learning, I will get bored... So when I study, I use social media to find different styles”.

Several students pointed to using videos to make their study time enjoyable and less painful or boring. The students in different academic specialization believed that well-designed videos facilitated their understanding of issues and concepts and reinforced their understanding and retention of information. “I can increase my ability when I see the same information in different forms. Whatever information I have, whenever I see a video on YouTube, I think this enriches my existing information”.

Some students also pointed to attending additional lessons and lectures from a wide variety of teachers on social media to seek different representations of the information. Many also reported on using videos for helping in behavioural engagement by having one-to-one support, such as additional lessons and practice. The following excerpt from FG2 shows different examples of student reflections on their use of social media for self-regulated learning and compensating strategies:

S1: I use social media when I study. I enjoy it, I feel it's entertainment, and I get benefit at the same time. For example, things I do not know I get to know. I mean, I gain confidence, and I increase my knowledge with things I was not aware of before.

S2: Sometimes, I have the information from my teachers, but I do not fully understand it, but after watching YouTube, for example, I understand entirely.

S3: For me, I think it gives me more examples. For example, my teacher will give me one example - I can see more examples. Besides, I can see the person applying the information in his life. I mean, I can see how they do things and then I understand thoroughly.

S4: I agree with them. I think I understand from social media because I can pick how I can learn which I would pick practical presentation of the information that helps me to apply myself too.



### ***Strengthening social skills and relationships***

The participant present awareness of using social media in expanding their social connections and to improve their confidence in relationships. SE2 described how she intended to improve her knowledge and experience in social media to supply her confidence when talking and life social encounters and when being with friends. She said:

When I learn new things on social media, my knowledge and experience increase, and my self-confidence will boost because I will know how to talk with people around me. I mean, I will talk about something I know, and I saw. I mean, I have some background to talk about. So, I think social media impacted my knowledge, personality, and confidence. I mean beforehand I was not able to talk more than two words.

Similarly, E3 also believed that social media groups such as in WhatsApp present a chance to strengthening knowledge of friends of the class and alongside improving atmospheres of belonging and mutual benefits

I think WhatsApp groups facilitate a lot of my study and relationships in the college. I get to know students in the class. For instance, some students - I do not know her personally - but from her posts in WhatsApp, I know that she is one that I can ask and depend on and that she is cooperative.

ICT1 interpreted her experience of employing social media to strengthen relationships with friends. She pointed out how she become empathic from viewing her friends' status and how this impacted her relationships to become stronger.

In social media, I am always in contact with my friends and my relatives and know what they have... I think this makes me more interactive, and I improved my relationships ... because I check my friends' personalities and status and know about them more. For instance, if they have any certain circumstances, I will be more empathic with my friends, and I share their feelings, and I think this improved my social communication in my life.

Several students pointed out the possibility of having noticeably better communication and vocabulary in both Arabic and English from using social media. E4, for example, addressed her problem of lack of words and how she employed social media to make improvements. She said:

One of the best things I see in myself from using social media is that I have more words to talk. I was not able to talk. I mean, I was having only little

words when talking. The same applied to Arabic and English conversations. I mean, even in my live conversations when someone asked me a question, I would reply with only one or two words. I noticed that I got better and came to use more words when talking in my life.

### ***Emotional Regulation***

Some students stated that they employed social media to adjust their emotions. PS2 reported in her interview that she used social media for sharing others' experiences and emotions to elevate her own mood. She explained that she used Twitter for turning around her negative feelings and how that helped her. She said:

Sometimes, I have no motivation to do anything, and I feel like I do not want to see anyone. I open Twitter, and I read motivational words and see others' experiences and emotions, and this changes my day! I mean, I start to appreciate what I currently have, and this gives me energy at the beginning of the day to go to college, and I shift more positive in my day.

Students in this study stated different ways they employed social media as breaks to bring positivity and motivational or spiritual uplifting to cope with their stressful moments. Some participants point that they employed Twitter as a strategy to release and share feelings of the moment, either negative or positive. They believed an audience was listening to them, which helped them to express and remove any negative feelings. For instance, often, the students in focus groups pointed to using Twitter for reflecting on their feelings of the moment, which made them feel better. Some of them said, "When I feel something, I express it directly in Twitter" or "I have words inside me, I need to get out." Most participants pointed to the emotional adjustment opportunities in social media; for instance, they say "Social media bring motivational lifting" or as a "spiritual reminder" for me. Often students were aware of using social media as a strategy to decrease their negativity, obtain some motivation and spiritual uplift from others, and to clear unpleasant feelings. M2 reflected on her experience on Twitter in her interview: "Twitter - I use it for letting words inside me go out. I feel it is the best and most accessible way to express my feelings easily".

### ***Self-presentation, and self and career development***

Participants with high engagement levels revealed awareness of the chances for presenting one's self and skills, reaching an audience, and engaging in career development via social media. For instance, students who were engaged in college clubs showed a heightened awareness of the opportunity for self-presentation to reach people and to communicate their work and events to an audience. ICT2, who was active in designing of media products and photography for social clubs, said in her interview:

“I think social media is the only way where I can reach a lot of people and communicate anything I want. I can also express myself and reach people and receive benefits...”

Students who regularly published their ideas, learnings, and photos on their pages on social media revealed more recognition of opportunities in social media for self-presentation and development. FG1S4 pointed to the impact of sharing personal photos of her cooking. She reported that she learned cooking from others on Instagram, then she applied what she learned and shared it on her page. She reported the impact of this process on her motivation and confidence when she did something and photograph it and put it on her page. She said:

On Instagram, I like to learn and develop my cooking because when I do something, I take a photo and put it on my page. When I photograph something that I have done, I feel I confirm my skill, and this adds to me personally.

ICT3 established her personal blog on information security on Word Press, where she posted issues related to how to act to secure personal data. She explained that she viewed social media as a “platform” to learn from, and then communicated and presented what she had learned to others. In this process, ICT 3 claimed that social media encouraged her to learn, to think, and to reflect on her learning, and they also became records of her development.

I have a blog. Although there is only a little interaction from people, I think that my blog has an impact on me. I use it to learn and to communicate my learning to people at the same time. As a result of this blog, one school has invited me to present a talk about information security to their students.

Similarly, students pointed to social media as tools for personal development, which encouraged their reflection and self-presentation. PH1 reflected on her self-presentation experiences in her interview:

Every day, I look at my page on Twitter, and I think about what I am going to add. For example, I will think about my previous contributions and think about how people perceive me from my page before I make my new contribution.

Some students also pointed to the increased opportunity for career building in social media and the increase in the number of female entrepreneurs in this context. Two participants in this study reported the use of social media platforms to start professional careers. PS2, who is in a part-time job involving marketing for social events and training workshops, pointed out her increased realization of the open opportunities to reach a wider audience when using social media.

There were different examples of engaging in careers. S4 in FG talked about her photography learning experience on Instagram and how she developed confidence and professional career from this:

Photography is my hobby. I started by taking pictures on my mobile and post them. I get motivated because I always receive praise for my photographs. Then I bought a professional camera and followed photographers on Instagram who download their photographing settings in detail. For example, the steps of settings, lights, shutters, and photography corners are shown on pictures and videos. I combined my photography skills with skills in Photoshop, which I learned on YouTube. I gained professional skills in photography simply by learning from social media accounts, and I became professional in my photography, and I started to post my own photographs on my page on Instagram. I established a studio in my house, and I get jobs to do adverts.

### ***Differences and Multi-cultural Awareness***

In social media, students reported that they found opportunities to engage with large numbers of people, hear different voices, engage in questions, ideas and queries, especially by actively interacting in social and scientific debates. PS2 pointed to the opportunity to engage in cultural learning from others' experiences in social media and said in her interview: "Twitter facilitated my communication with many people. I need to see Twitter every day. I developed knowledge about how people think and how they deal with different situations".

Several students point to the opportunity of openness in social media for involving them in learning differences in this diversity. They usually replied on my question on purposes of using social media to "learn how other people think and deal in life situations." For instance, M2 said in her interview:

Following people on YouTube, Snapchat, and Twitter, I think changed me in terms of knowing how to deal with people. I mean, I learned how different types of people think; not like an expert in this, but a simple background that helped me to know about the person in front of me and helped me to communicate well with people in my everyday life.

S4 FG1 pointed to discussions as the primary source to learn from in social media. She said: "In discussions on social media, I learn a lot of things that I would never learn by myself or in any other method".

Furthermore, PS1 explained from her experience, how she had been thinking in a specific way based on cultural and family upbringing but how she had perceived change from her daily practices in Twitter, YouTube, and Snapchat. PS1 said in her interview:

I follow hashtags and discussions on trending social subjects on Twitter. I analyse how people discuss with each other, and I learn from how people solve subjects in discussions. Over time, I think I am changing. I mean, I know more about how people think and how they talk, react, and argue when in discussions.

Students also perceived openness and interest in other cultures' ways of living and thinking, especially western cultures, because of their ability to speak English as a second language. E2 said:

I can learn more about the civilizations of the world while at home. This is the most effective way to inform ourselves about other civilizations and their ways of life, so if I travel there one day, I will have full knowledge about the place from social media.

Most participants showed an interest in English educational media and personalities, and most of the interviewed students were learning the English language from native speakers. They were motivated to learn by the prospect of studying abroad afterward. Besides that, many students showed an interest in following Saudi media about living or traveling abroad, mainly when they talked about their daily activities. Many students found that social media allowed learning different ways of living and thinking from other cultures.

It seems that social media become an outlet for learning about different ways of socialization and behaviour for those students with a prospect to enhance their life opportunities.

### ***Collective decision-making and interactive voting***

Participants of this study expressed awareness of using social media as a useful tool for instant voting, doing research, and collective decision-making. S5FG2 talked about utilizing Twitter for airing problems with their timetables and for making a collective decision about organizing examination schedules; she said:

Sometimes, a conflict may occur in the exam schedule so that some students may have two exams on the same day. On Twitter, it becomes easier for the administration to tackle this issue so that students who have these conflicts can raise their voices collectively and this facilitates finding suitable solutions for all students.

Participants also reported on students' use of Twitter instant voting and research. For instance, some students employed instant voting on Twitter in the class to add strong vicarious and reactions. They also report on using Twitter instant voting to ask for

feedback on their performance at the end of their presentation. E2 reported in her interview:

In my last class, students used four videos in their presentation ... The videos included personality tests and quick intelligence tests from social media, as well as a memory test. The video was interactive as it involved Twitter voting in class.

One student also reported using Twitter voting in research by asking questions and evaluating percentages of different answers for her assignment.

Participants who have positive attitudes present increased critical awareness of life opportunities, including that in social media. Students reported that they learned new things, which enabled them to overcome problems and engage in social activity and personal development, which eventually reflected in their feelings of confidence and positivity. Thus they expressed critical realisations of what, how, when, why, with whom and when based on their social life and academic demands. From their experiences and uses the students presented awareness of opportunities for development in social media such as enriching and updating information, self-regulated learning and its relation to the availability of different methods and forms, strengthen social skills and relationships, emotional regulation, self-presentation and self and career development, differences and multi-cultural awareness, collective decision-making and interactive voting.

#### **6.1.4 Challenges and transitions**

Challenges emerged as primary drivers in all students' experiences of using social media to engage in independent learning and development. Most students was triggered to use social media for engaging in personal learning whenever they challenged. They explicitly stated that they used social media to overcome the difficulty they faced, either in their social life or in their academic study. The tow themes emerged under the theme challenges and transitions are discussed below.

## **Transition and College Adjustment**

Several participants believed that transitioning from high school to university was not easy. In university, students believed that they are required to manage their learning. Despite that, the participants pointed to university support and workshops to prepare them in their first year. Still, the participants frequently reported that coping with academic requirements and self-learning was still challenging. For instance, E1 said:

The college is different from school. I mean, I need to depend more on myself, and there are many requirements. Of course, I feel that this would be very difficult without being able to find help at any time I need.

Quite often in students interviews that they report employed social media to combat isolation to get adjusted to the environment of the college and to make friends. ICT1, who had moved from another college in a different city, reflected on her experience in adjusting and finding friends in her interview:

At first, I felt isolated. I did not know any girl in the college until I entered a WhatsApp class discussion, and from this, I was able to find some friends. I talked to them; we introduced ourselves to each other; then we arranged to see each other in the college... Our friendship now lasts for two years. We've become close friends, and we see each other all the time in college.

## ***Academic requirements***

Students believed that academic challenges were motivating them to engage in development and learning due to the availability of various sources of help in social media. Thus, students were motivated to engage in academic development and use social media when they were challenged such as in assignments, presentations, internships, examinations, and other course work, students reported on further growth and exploration. For instance, they engaged with expanding and developing their knowledge in their academic field in social media motivated by the challenges in their assignments. For instance, FG1S4 said:

Whenever I have difficulty in my study, I use social media for support. I end up gaining an expanded background in the subject - not only the idea that was required from me but far more than what is required.



ICT2 believed that demands and challenges in her assignments lead her to follow many academics in her field on Twitter which eventually involved her in further and continuous learning and development said:

Our assignments are challenging, so I follow academics in my field on Twitter; whenever I ask, they reply to me. I've come to know specialists in my field who guided me to resources that I've used, and I've become updated with new things which expand my knowledge.

Students perceived increased development and use of social media when confronted by difficult demands such as class presentations in their course work. FG1S3 said:

Class presentations need a lot of research and preparation; besides, it needs practice. So I learn and practice in social media on different styles of people's presentations. Besides that, I also search for short videos on YouTube, such as cartoon explanations and activities to support the presentation subject.

It seems that the engagement level increased with higher academic challenges. The most challenging, according to most students, was the internship practice where they reported using social media extensively to be prepared. For instance, FG2S4 said:

I see that teaching a child with special needs is not easy. I am following a lot of teachers who exemplify this in videos and pictures because, by the time I do my Internship, I will be prepared.

Students who were currently doing their internship as teacher trainees in schools pointed to increased use of social media to support their development of practice.

For instance, PS4 said:

When I have to do a presentation on the subject, I do not know how to do it. The same applies when I have taught - I do not know what to do.... I open YouTube, Instagram, and Pinterest; then, I develop many ideas and strategies from watching examples of people talking about the same subject.

Similarly, quite often the students point out that they need to use social media to start their engagement in assignments or presentations. It seems that students were motivated to use social media for engaging in independent learning and personal development when they were challenged. The transition to higher education where self-learning is applied is not easy, and students needed help and support, which

they find more in social media rather than in the educational context. Furthermore, being females and in the conservative culture of KSA transition was a real challenge for all students. Two main issues emerged for concern of support to students under increased challenges and availability of help sources through social media: first college adjustment for socialisation with peers, and second academic and study skills.

#### **6.1.5 Social inclusion and learning from others' experiences**

Quite frequently, the participants pointed out that the social and emotional support they found in social media is a fundamental driver for their development. Students pronounced that social media platforms, such as Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat, were generally inclusive platforms and that they could gain space to learn from others' experiences and cultures freely. Participants reported various feelings of social and emotional support alongside the influence of community, teachers, college, and peers in these sites as follows.

##### ***Community influence***

Quite often, the participants indicated the importance of the life experiences and input of communities, such as academics, teachers, professional and social organizations on social media. The students stated different sorts of community influence on their lives and development. Students with high engagement levels present awareness of choosing people by looking at how much experience they have. For instance, E3 pointed out in her interview that she learned by following people with more experience:

I follow people who are known in their field. For example, I follow Dr. X, who is known for his advice in relationships and psychology. I follow Dr. Y, who gives me hints from his experience on how I can deal with children. I follow Dr. Z - she gives me spiritual advice... etc.

Frequently reported by these research participants was the influence of others' experiences on their excitement to apply what they learn. Students with high engagement levels often report ability to reflect and they were motivated by efficient access to others experiences to practice experientially by putting theories in practice. M2, for instance, believed that others' experiences and cultural learning were relevant to her life problems and that she could learn from them and apply them to herself to see their results directly:

I followed on YouTube, a professional who is talking about how one can develop self practically through the use of a technique that involved keeping notes. Honestly, I always get the benefit, and I developed myself from people who present these things.

The influence of communities was often reported by many students believed that being in contact with these cultures and personalities motivated them to reflect and they found inspirational examples for development. For instance:

I follow teachers and academics from outside the college, and I follow influential people in this society. I feel that I become influenced by their personalities. For example, I follow a personality in social media for a period of time, I observe how they deal in their life and how they talk, I get benefit from their experience and personality and from their ways of doing things and I take them as an example for me, either in my contributions and use of social media or in my way of life generally.

Furthermore, several students pointed to the influence of these communities on their motivation to learn and try new things such as reading books or lifestyle. PS2 pointed to the influence of community experiences on her motivation; she said:

Every day, I must see Twitter, and I think this returns benefits to me and motivates me either in academic or personal learning. For example, when I see poems on Twitter, I feel like I want to write poems! I mean - this thing - looking at people's experiences stimulates me to learn new things.

The significance of social inclusion and learning from others' experiences in social media was also repeated frequently amongst participants in the focus groups. For instance, S4FG2 said: "The people on social media have influenced my way of thinking, and my lifestyle and I always try to do things like what they are doing".

One student also named that she get motivated and encouraged to persist in development inspired by stories of success in social media. PS3 said in her interview: “In social media, you find people who build their reputation and career step by step and from the zero point, and this becomes motivating for others”.

Furthermore, students who expressed high levels of engagement and development showed excitement and support that is gained from social inclusion in social media. For instance, E2 talked about her experience in learning and doing translation on a blog and how social inclusion from other people supported her development. She said in her interview:

I think the thing that motivated me the most to do the translations were other people sharing the same interest. I found people from other countries with the same interest, which increased my love for this hobby. It’s fun when you share your hobby with other people, particularly if this hobby is something new for your society and people may not have heard of it before. It is fun when you find people who do know it.

### ***University influence***

All participants in this research pointed to the university influence that has been mirrored on social media platforms. The participants report felt inclusive to be able to view college events and to share other students’ experiences in the university enabled by university social media accounts. Thus the students believed that social media permit them more engagement in college life and participation in workshops and issues. They also pointed to the impact of college influence in social media on facilitating their relationships with other students within the college. For instance, all participants reported on regularly checking college accounts for being updated with issues and events. For instance, ICT2, in her interview, said: “The college accounts and discussions engaged me in activities and workshops and joined me with other students’ activities in the college. I mean, I always follow what is in these accounts”.

FG1S1 also pointed to college efforts to make covers for the activities on different social media:

I follow covers of activities posted by the college on YouTube and Snap Chat. I mean, it is better now that I can participate, even if I do not have time to be in the event. I mean, I feel the same as if I was there.

FG1 S3 noted the difference and advantage on participation when the college used social media accounts to engage students:

Before the college use of Twitter accounts, there was only a little knowledge about the activities of other departments in the college. Now I have come to know more about different issues and students from other specializations.

### ***Teacher influence***

The teacher reflects their personality in their teaching, which is presented in how they deal with students, and eventually, this appears in students' excitement for exploration and learning. Participants of this study noticed differences amongst teachers in terms of their influence on their engagement, which arise from the teacher's use of LMS and social media. For instance, often, the students stressed the positive influence on their self-directed learning when teacher used inclusive teaching strategies on LMS to meet different learning needs. This mean that the teacher gave all students an equal opportunity to be updated with everything they needed in their course study. ICT2, for instance, said: "When LMS is updated regularly with each event or resource in my course, I will have everything I need in one place, and I will not need to ask other students".

Students also were influenced by a teacher who was self-regulated and gave a plan for the lecture time and group work in advance on social media. SE2 reported in her interview: "One of our teachers, Miss A, posts a Snapchat before the lecture to organize lecture time and students' groups. This saves time in the lecture and makes us more productive".

Students also pointed to the impact of teachers who exemplified practices of development on social media sites. FGS3 said in her interview: “I started using Twitter for my study after I followed my teacher, and then I engaged gradually with the specialized accounts and academics she follows until I reached fascinating and useful accounts.”

Another student also reports using social media for learning after being impressed by her teacher’s page on Facebook. SE1 said:

Dr. ... told us in the class to see her Facebook page if we want. In the beginning, I was surprised how it possible that Facebook can be used for academic subjects! I mean, I found the teacher page was informative, and it also engaged me with exploring further interesting academic accounts in the field, and I began to get excited in the course subjects.

Inclusive teaching strategies adopted by teachers to match learners’ self-learning needs on the LMS or in social media have been perceived crucially important teaching quality in the present day. Furthermore, students suggested that teachers’ personal development and behaviour, as exhibited in their use of social media, was inclusive and welcoming for learning from the teacher’s experience. Students perceived teachers who had professional pages on social media as models for their development.

### ***Peer influence***

Students in this context talked broadly on social inclusion enabled in Whats App groups and its impact on the improved motivation for engaging in self-directed academic learning. In these groups, students gathered peer support and reported feelings of belonging and excitement to learn, along with supporting each other to combat difficulties and isolation in their courses. All students reported that peer influence in these groups via WhatsApp was something significant for their self-

direction and development. E5 talked about WhatsApp as essential in her learning experience in this context:

We, the girls in the class in each course, we make a WhatsApp group ... In courses that do not have a group, I feel like lost... I mean, now these groups are something essential for our learning, and from the first day in the semester, after the first lecture, the first thing we do is that we take each others' numbers and make the group.

Quite often, some participants reported that they could not start studying without first checking WhatsApp discussions. It had become an essential source for their metacognitive knowledge, such as information essential for planning their study and assignments, and they used it extensively to plan their group and teamwork.

Participants reported that, when students demonstrated responsibility and cooperation with each other, this encouraged their development because they had an instant response when they needed help. PS1 described some of the issues she found engaging in her study from the girls' discussions and responses:

In WhatsApp, there is instant responding. If I ask a question, I directly have the answer. Furthermore, we help each other, especially the discussions before exams; it helps me know about things that were not visible to me, I mean that students in the group encouraged my involvement in the study.

A lot of participants reported a decrease in anxiety associated with social inclusion in WhatsApp. They reported a feeling of knowing each other and belonging, which increased their excitement for study. Especially before examinations, students reported feeling more secure and less stressed when they were connected via WhatsApp to their class peers who updated their awareness and alerted them to course requirements. In addition to this, they could ask and receive immediate support from their peers. Furthermore, they reported peers teaching others using WhatsApp.

The most important in WhatsApp discussions is that I feel more comfortable, and I feel I can reach the girls' help when I need it. I mean, we can ask and receive help from each other, and we get to know each other as well.

Especially in the time of exams, before the exam, two or three days, the girls help each other and explain things to each other.

Some students perceived that discussions in classroom groups were one of their main sources and that they browsed it every day. They were very keen to do this because, if they missed a discussion, they missed a lot of important information they needed in their studies. FG1S6 said:

Discussions on WhatsApp I need to view daily. If I miss them one day, I will miss a lot of things. In my opinion, in discussions, a lot of important information emerges that I have not thought about in my study.

Social inclusion and learning from others' experiences is a fundamental driver for students' engagement in self-directed learning and continuous development. In social media, students gain social inclusion and feedback efficiently while they still can have space and time to reflect and learn practically from other's experiences. The students often stated the emotional effect of such continuous support and feedback on social media on their self-direction. Students also observed that social media intensified their contact with professionals and academic experiences that increased their learning experientially from others. An important issue raised by students is the improved and intensified educational influence of the university, teachers, and peers on social media.

#### **6.1.6 Freedom of choice and Independence**

Respondents generally reported enabled and empowered for learning when they talked about their personal development experience in social media and reported the positive effects of being independent upon their personal and academic lives. They showed attitudes of self-motivation and responsibility joined with achievement and appreciation of the freedom of choice opened for them in these platforms. Participants also stated awareness of the advantageous of availability of learning choices that enabled them to fulfil their learning needs easier and to select how they achieve changes and development in their lives. Many students thought the main



advantages of social media were that they felt empowered to pursue their learning and life goals and to choose how they could achieve them independently. For instance, SE1 reported feelings of independence and responsibility:

In social media, I can learn any time; I can choose who teaches me. For example, I can choose a native English speaker if I want to learn English, I can decide how can I learn... usually, I cannot decide these things ... Now I have come to have a role in my learning.

This section discusses some of the themes that emerged under the main theme freedom of choice and independence.

### **Independence in social life**

All students reported the empowerment of being in continuous contact with people and cultures around the world. For instance, S4 from FG1 said:

Learning in social media - I describe it as easy, enjoyable, and flexible in terms of time and place. It [social media] helped me to know new personalities and to learn what I want to learn from my house without going anywhere or paying any cost.

Students also felt empowered by the ability to solve personal problems. E4 pointed out her experimental endeavours on solving a personal problem and her use of social media for this. Furthermore she realized that empowerment and autonomy in social media taught her how to learn and how to act on solving her own personal problems as she said:

I am a little bit anxious, so I followed different accounts on social media such as You Tube, Twitter and Instagram. I mean I read, write, listen, and watch to know how I can control anxiety. I mean, I see and test myself in many situations... I think I developed, and I came to know how I learn and how I can spend my time properly. I mean, how I become confident.

S2 from FG2 appreciated the feeling of independence in life that comes with being able to pick and select the appropriate way that matches their learning and life demands. S2FG2 said: "Nowadays, everyone can be self-independent and contribute to their lives. They can pick trainers and teachers on social media who present rich and real learning environments".

### **Independence in academic life**

All students remarked the improved access to personal support in social media and its impact upon promoting their confidence in performing assignments and coping better with study stress without the need for someone else's help. Some students even expressed less dependency on their teachers, and more responsibility, not only for searching for the information they need but also for checking this information. For instance, S3 from FG2 said:

In the past, I would be upset when I needed to register a course with a Doctor whom I did not choose. Now, this makes no difference, because I know how I search for the missing information, and I know how I can study. There is no barrier stopping me from studying because I can search, I can ask, and I can find the help I need to go on in my study and I will not depend mainly on the teacher's help.

Students in the focus groups also realized the benefits of autonomy that is enabled by social media upon their academic development. S3 in FG1, for example, expressed academic confidence from autonomy in social media: "Our assignments and presentations become easier because I can find exactly what I need without requiring someone to ask for help".

S1 FG1 appreciated autonomy as necessary requirement for learning and achievement: "I do not like to ask teachers or anyone. When I search the information myself, it will have meaning for me, and it will last with me for exams".

### **Identity**

Some students reported empowerment in terms of choice of who they want to be. For instance, some students pointed to cultural adjustment and their ability to conform to their traditional roles in their surroundings. ICT5 said:

On my Instagram, I follow cooking, doctors, designers, sports, dietary, makeup. I mean, I like to improve myself and to improve the points that are weak in my personality or in my appearance... I think any girl now needs these important skills.

E3 agreed with that in her interview: "I learned a lot of things in social media that will help my personality when I get married..."

Other students reported that social media permit their access to different people in their cultures or from other cultures and to find new hobbies and interests. ICT4 appreciated that she could learn hobbies that were less available for women: “There are a lot of things and hobbies which I found and learned on social media, that as a woman, I could not find easily in my life”. Similarly, E2 noted: “It is nice to find people who share your interests, especially if these interests are not popular in the culture”. E2 identified that she was enabled to remove cultural boundaries in learning languages, and to bring contextually and increased opportunities for interaction with native speakers: “I like YouTube to watch anything in English because I love to listen to the language and in my environment, there are fewer chances to communicate in English or improve my skill”.

Finally, students reported empowerment because they could learn continuously, whatever they like or needed, so they would never stop learning. S2 in FG1 said: “Now, on social media, if I like to learn something I will search, and I will find it in front of me, and I will never stop learning”.

Freedom of choice and independence arise as one of the central drivers for development in all students’ experiences. Some students recognised the responsibility that comes with choice and freedom from their development experiences. Often the learners point out that freedom of choice and independence is an important factor in their engagement in the academic study that enables joy and control when studying. It also can be inferred that female students from a conservative culture appreciate the effect of independent action and choice enabled by social media on their personal development.

## **6.2 Difficulties and barriers for students’ engagement**

Barriers are the problems that faced students’ engagement in successful development from their daily experiences. A range of difficulties and barriers reported

at different levels and emerged from students' uses and attitudes. The findings suggest that difficulties are classified into personal and social, pedagogical, and organisational difficulties. Nevertheless, these difficulties significantly overlap and interact with each other to create a negative influence on the day-to-day education of contemporary university students. Knowing about these complex issues from the students' experiences and attitudes can present current matters concerning possible obstacles to students' self-directed learning and continuous development in this context. Seven difficulties and barriers emerged: personal difficulties include negative attitudes, social media risk. Social, pedagogical, and organisational difficulties include information overload, and distraction, curriculum educational and organisational culture, lack of social inclusion, technical problems and fears, time and cost issues.

### **6.2.1 Negative attitudes and their relation to lack of awareness and personal/academic difficulties**

Students' attitudes and experience, whether negative or positive, emerged from the participants' experiences to have the strongest effect on their engagement in independent learning and personal development. A few students expressed a strongly negative experience and attitude towards social media in their personal development. Often students who express a negative attitude combined it with personal and academic difficulties and present a lack of management and awareness. It was also quite visible in focus groups that, when students lack positive learning and personal development experiences, they usually display a negative attitude towards social media combined with unawareness of the learning process underlies social media use. The themes emerged under this main theme are discussed below.

### **Lack of awareness of the learning process**

M1, who is studying mathematics and is in her second year, indicated a strongly negative attitude towards social media accompanied by academic difficulties such as low motivation, laziness, and time wasting. In her interview, she was frustrated by her performance and showed a false attribution to social media for the difficulties she faced in her studies, which indicated her lack of awareness of the learning process. Instead of being aware of her limitations or need for support, M1 blamed social media for her addictive use and inability to cope with the study requirements. She said:

In my opinion, these sites need to be removed! There is no benefit from it - it is distracting, and it makes one's brain always thinking about it. When I start using it, I feel lazy and unable to study to the extent that I go to the exam not prepared because of it.

M1 further observed her depression as a negative impact of social media on her academic and social life. She had suffered a low GPA during the previous two terms, where she is facing academic difficulties that she could not control, and which might lead her to drop out. The false attribution of her low grades to social media censored her ability to fix the poor strategies that lay behind her academic difficulties and prevented her from finding the right support. Thus, M1 story further confirms that self-regulation and time management has become critical skills for contemporary university students, for better coping with study requirements and eventually for success in their future career paths.

Several students, similar to M1, could not identify the source of their problems in the interviews and focus groups. Often, students report deleting these programs from their mobile as a temporary solution; however, they cannot stop using it completely. Thus, their real educational problems of lack of ability and academic difficulty in independent learning continue to affect them whilst remained unresolved and

invisible with an evident lack of necessary personal support for self-directed learning in this context.

In contrast to M1, who showed a negative attitude, E4 demonstrated a positive attitude to social media and attributed her problems to the strategies she used. In this case, E4 verified her awareness of the learning process associated with her positive attitude in social media: “I think social media are effective, but I, myself, I am not effective. When I browse, I keep moving from one site to another and waste my time”.

Similarly, some students in the focus groups, who reported negative attitudes, indicated along with this an evident lack of personal goals or determination, which indicated their poor self-organisation. This resembled difficulties such as wasting much time in social media, without any specific purpose and engaging with addictive and uncontrolled behaviour even in the class time. S3 in FG1 said:

There are negatives in social media on my achievement. I mean I cannot keep myself from looking at my mobile all the time from the beginning of the morning till the end of the day. Even in my lectures, I keep looking and messaging. I do not feel the time, and I cannot control myself. I keep going from one application to another, and I cannot control myself when studying.

Now, with the spread of WIFI connection in universities, mobiles are commonplace in classes, and less control can be exerted over this social phenomenon. Thus some students recognised that their friends' difficulties could be indicated by their excessive use of mobiles during class time. Some of these reported difficulties show as social disconnection when with others, and distraction with excessive looking at the mobile during class time. However, the teacher cannot detect student behaviour because mobiles are now commonly used for educational purposes in the class, such as to assist students in research for the activity. E1 said in her interview:

Some students keep messaging and looking at their mobiles in the class. This often happens, especially when the class is boring. Furthermore, when

we have a group class activity, only one or two will do the activity, but others are busy on their mobiles.

### **Variations and gaps in students' attitudes and experiences**

The diversity of attitudes and experiences cover several difficulties and problems. These different levels of experience and skill were even more explicit in students' focus group discussions, and the students even reported recognition of variations amongst them. Students' discussions in the focus groups revealed discrepancies and conflicting opinions based on different experiences. I had the opportunity to clarify from the students' discussion that poor management and coping skills co-occurred with a negative attitude. For instance, students who presented a negative attitude towards social media, viewing them as a source of disconnection and failure, tended to be less aware of their own needs and skills and mostly report depression and impulsive addictive behaviour. These discussions also showed me that students with negative attitudes and experience attributed their academic difficulties or underachievement to distractions from social media, instead of thinking of their problems and limitations or seeking help. Eventually, students who expressed negative attitudes at the start of the discussion usually changed their views when other students displayed positive attitudes and extolled the advantage. For instance, some students who blamed social media for causing them to waste time started to consider their need for study skills at the end of the group conversations.

### **Depression and disconnection**

Students report depression influenced by the non-regulated use of social media that was combined with a negative attitude and experience. For instance, M1 excessive use over a period of time with a lack of awareness and support result in a lack of confidence and depression associated with a lack of experience and competency. As these sites promotes the skills of competent students even more and increase gaps in development. This feeling of prolonged incompetency in social media made

students feel even more marginalised and withdrawn from social and academic life.

For instance, M1 explained this gap in development:

I can see students enrich their presentations and assignments with new information and different ideas from social media. I do not think this is the case for me. I mean, social media make me feel occupied, and separate from the real world, from my study and people around - my family and my friends.

### ***Perceived lack of support***

Quite often, the students report learning difficulties from their use of social media.

However, students seemed to have no support for the difficulties they had in their use, either from the university, teachers, friends, or family. For instance, ICT4, who is one of the most talented and active students in the college, noted this gap in talent and development and indicated discernment of the academic difficulties arising from their use. Further, she pointed to a lack of support for those students from the university, teachers, family, or friends. She wrote in her reflective diary:

I am sure that these sites provide golden chances for people who employ it in the right way; however, unfortunately, some people despite having these chances in front of them, cannot get benefit from it. The reason is that their family may not encourage them or because of their friends, and they are not getting advice on how to use it.

The negative experiences of social media combined with students' unawareness of their educational needs and problems with lack of formal personal support arose as critical personal barriers in these students' experiences. This is because these students' problems remained invisible educationally and covered by their negative attitude towards social media. The complexity of these experiences indicates several connected reasons for students' problems. The lack of personal skills and self-organisation and students' shortages for formal support remains invisible, which made the problem continue and create skill gaps amongst students. Students who had these problems report facing real academic difficulties and low GPA with depression. Students also reported on a noticeable gap in self-development and competency amongst them that affect their academic performance as well. For



instance, some students who expressed negative attitudes towards social media point a significant negative influence on their personal development. Quite often in these experiences, the negative attitude exposed student's lack of awareness of the learning process underlay social media use and was associated with academic and personal difficulties such as lack of academic achievement and depression. Students perceived no support for their learning problems and pointed out a shortage of educational support and detection for these difficulties from their teachers and families.

### **6.2.2 Perceived social media risk**

Social media provide individuals in this age with an unregulated free space for expression where everyone in the world can post and share life experiences on different issues. Awareness of the potential social media risks, which inevitably occur from being in an open space of expression, gives more control to limit its negatives and maximise the potential of its positives. Students in this study presented awareness of social media risks; however, they presented diversity in their understanding of social media risk. The categories under this theme are discussed below.

#### **Understanding of social media risks (Openness Vs. Risk)**

The findings of this investigation showed that many students who demonstrated a high level of confidence and developmental advantages also showed critical thinking to judge the concept of social media risk. Although they believed in risks, they still held discernment in their views of social media as a tool that could be controlled by them either for negative or positive outcomes. Thus when they were asked about social media risks, some students pointed out a realisation in their interviews and focus groups that social media “depend on one’s choices” and “depend on how one uses it” or “depends on whom you follow.” Some used the phrase “a tool with two sides” in their diaries. PS1 used the word “tool” and the word “balance,” which

presented her critical thinking. In her interview she pointed out that “balance” was needed for personal freedom in opposition to social media risk when using social media. She said

My opinion is that social media is very useful, but one should look at social media as a tool with two sides; one should know how to balance time between different issues and know how to choose accounts and people.

SE3 further demonstrated her critical thinking when she was asked about social media risks in the interview and suggest that it is relative and different from one person to another. She said:

I can't tell if social media is either have a positive or negative effect - it depends on the person, and everyone is free to choose how to use it. For me, social media have benefitted me in many ways, either in studying or in anything else.

Similarly, some students supported freedom and openness in social media and believed in their role to balance. Thus they did not support any central formal control because openness presented them with greater opportunities for exploration and development. However, in focus groups, the students were more divided in the understanding of social media risks and the possible influence on their development. The diversity in the interpretation of social media risk emerged when some students demanded central control; nevertheless, most students disagreed with this demand. They presented critical thinking of social media risks as they directed other students to discriminate between different issues, including children's use. For instance, S4 in FG2 stressed openness and personal freedom in social media and its influence on personal skills and development. She said: “I think that there should be control over children because this is very dangerous for them. However, as university students, we should have the capability for personal control and not to cross our limits”.

### **Awareness of potential risks in social media**

Students usually pointed to potential risks. They mentioned risks that they had experienced and which they perceived to have a negative influence. The widely reported risks included those on social and family ties, harmful content and communities, and lack of trust. S2 FG1 believed that social risks presented a threat to family ties as the principal social institution from which people gain support to develop their skills and identities. She noted:

Any time when there is a social gathering, everyone starts looking and chatting in their mobiles. Even in my family, we sit together, but everyone is busy looking at their mobiles, and family members become far from each other.

Social media is an uncensored space of expression that enables everyone to share personal information and view sensitive issues and ideas freely. Some students perceived this openness beneficial on increasing their horizons and expanding their opportunities for growth. However, students also associated some risks with this freedom, such as the potential to be exposed easily and accidentally to harmful content that could have a significant impact on personal development. PE 2 said: “It always happens to me when I use YouTube that I will go over some videos that have some harmful content accidentally. That’s why I think about how dangerous this could be for a child”.

As those young students are members of a conservative society, it is not surprising that social media openness does not mean that they cross cultural lines. For instance, most students reported on controlling issues of privacy to minimise risk from leaking personal information on social media. This is perceived as a potential risk because they may feel stigmatised if their personal information were broadcasted. Thus, most students tended not to share personal information or photos on public sites. However, as young users of this generation, they were open to sharing details of their social events, artwork, and achievements, whilst keeping

their privacy protected. E2 pointed in her interview to the privacy issue for females in this culture: “In our society, we are anxious about issues of privacy, especially for females, so I share stories and photos only with my family and close friends”.

Some students indicated risks from engaging in debates with different communities and the possible effects upon their personal beliefs. PE1 perceived risk from communities which misuse freedom of expression, especially when presenting ideas that cross the line of free expression, or express discrimination against any group or person, such as the use of negative language or when the contributor does not respect cultural and religious boundaries. She said in her interview:

Some communities in social media do not respect how they present information to the public. I mean their use of language in discussions is not appropriate, and they don't think about how people perceive them when they do that. Even some well-known personalities in society sometimes do not respect their positions when they freely express their opinions.

In the focus groups, students exhibited a critical sense of lack of security and trust when in contact with communities of different cultures and backgrounds. S1 FG1 raised the issue of filtering information based on its sources as a way to minimise risks from anonymous communities who spread misleading information or ideas. She said:

I do not take any information from anyone I do not know what he looks like, and I do know something about his life and values. I mean, I prefer Snapchat and YouTube because I know more about who the person is and what he looks like.

Many students pointed to a lack of trust as a barrier as they reported on incidents of identity theft of some of their contacts. Generally, students always pointed to their search for trusted sites.

It seems that students' lack of awareness of the learning process underlies social media have been associated with a lack of understanding of social media risk.

Students who have positive attitudes and personal development experiences

presented a critical understanding of social media risk. Lack of awareness of the learning process jeopardises students to more risk in social media.

### **6.2.3. Distraction and Information Overload**

All students in the focus groups and personal interviews pointed to distraction as difficulty when talking about their engagement experiences. Students stated several positives of social media upon their personal development and study, as discussed. Yet, they also stated some negatives. Many students reported on the problem of information overload along with two main problems - disorientation and distractions - while using these sites, which decreased their attention and diverted them from their original goals, causing them to waste time.

The concept of Information Overload developed from cognitive load theory which determines some constraints on human memory once this limit has exceeded a problem of information loss and inability to construct new knowledge occur (Chen, Pedersen, & Murphy, 2011). The amount of information that would cause cognitive overload would be different from one person to another based on different factors that are not within the scope of this research. This means that students will have different limitations and abilities when dealing with large amounts of information.

#### **Disorientation**

Most students pointed to the problem of disorientation. Disorientation means unawareness of where one is situated, having no idea about how one has arrived there, how to move forward, or where to go (Yurttas, Karademir, & Cicek, 2011). It usually happens when facing a large amount of information and choices on the networks. Students pointed to this problem that made it difficult to stop exploring when using social media such as YouTube and Twitter. Students started with a goal in mind; however, it became difficult to endure. They reported frustration from wasting much time moving from one link to another, leading them away from

achieving their primary goal. All students reported this problem as an academic difficulty attributed to large amounts of information in social media. Often this creates difficulty during the exam period, or when using social media for searching and studying. Many students reported unawareness of time and choices, especially on YouTube, where they experienced unstoppable tendencies to follow links and watch videos. Quite often, the students repeated, E2:

YouTube is handy for study support, but one must be aware of controlling oneself. Usually, when I start YouTube for studying, I will have an unstoppable feeling to follow link after link, and then I will end up in a place different from what I was looking for! Then I suddenly realise that I have wasted much time so if I had an exam on that day, then this would be a real problem.

### **The influence of disorganised behaviour on the networks**

Part of the reported information overload problem is caused by increased volumes of annoying and disorganised information and behaviour on the networks. This is manifested as conflicts and increased volumes of posts on these networks. In its essence, these behaviours in the networks present the lack of organisation in human behaviour or lack of cooperation within institutions. Students pointed to increased frustration from some behaviour on the networks that they believed caused continuous stress and information overload. M2 reported frustration and stress and feelings of pressure by daily WhatsApp and Twitter notifications, where she reported being annoyed and distracted by its unorganised repetitive information from students' behaviour. She also reports a realisation of disorganisation as the primary leading to such problems. She said:

Sometimes I get 300 or more notifications on the class Whats App just for course notifications. I get stressed and frustrated, especially when it is an exam period. I reach to the extent that I read, but I cannot understand. Still, I need to read because I feel a responsibility to reply and receive messages. Then we decided to find a solution by limiting messages to important things only.

Furthermore, students' strategies and approaches to learning were reflected in their use of networks. Normally, students adopt different strategies for learning that was

displayed in how they used social media and other networks. For instance, students who adopted strategic and deep approaches used social media for exploring, linking to real-life contexts, and going beyond the course requirements. Other students presented a strong surface approach, and they used networks extensively to reinforce and memorize the examination materials and methods, instead of exploring. E3 reported that some students exhibited an attitude of increased reliance and lack of cooperation, which increased the volume of redundant messages that had become ambiguous and unorganised.

The classroom Whats App discussions are good sometimes, but sometimes they are not good. I mean, sometimes it becomes frustrating and stressful. Students rely on it so much to discuss everything in the class so the important information will be lost in this large volume of discussions.

Due to the diversity of behaviour, some students found that Whats App was not only distracting, but it facilitated an attitude of over-reliance and encouraged students' instrumental motivation, which influenced their free exploration and decreased their motivation for independent learning. Students also pointed to a lack of teacher organisation and formal communication as the main reason for the increasing volume of messages and the stress of information overload.

This section explored the difficulty of information overload and distraction in the networks and its possible educational influences, from the students' perspectives. First, the problem of disorientation was explored generally. Then the problems of these networks as participatory media were explored in terms of diversity of personal behaviours. Some of these behaviours demonstrated a lack of clear and fixed curricula and educational culture, which is in line with other studies in the literature, as follows.

#### **6.3.4 Curriculum and educational/organisational culture**

Several issues and factors in the educational environment of the setting interacted with each other to form the day-to-day educational experiences of the students,

including the curriculum and the pedagogy. Young participants identified some organizational barriers to their engagement that were manifested in students' and teachers' behaviours in the networks. These findings provide insights into the way universities are now working towards being more modern in terms of improving their curricula to support students' development and the extent to which inclusive pedagogies as integrated curricula are incorporated. Under this central theme, three categories surfaced: lack of inclusive pedagogy, lack of personal support and feedback, and focus of assessment method.

### **Lack of inclusive pedagogy**

The students in this research do not exhibit a preference for pedagogy that lacks the understanding regarding their current practices and needs, which are influenced by digital networks and social media. They believed that some teachers have only a little understanding of their differences and the resources that can support each of them. This student, FG1S5, commented on the use of some examples in social media about which she had no background:

I don't use social media a lot; I mean, I am not a user. And I do not know these things on social media. The students in their presentation refer to social media sites, experts and events as examples that I do not have any background about it, when this happens, which is often, I feel like I do not know what is going on.

The student expressed that something needs to be done to ensure that all students have the same backgrounds. She had difficulty in understanding other students in the class because they use examples from social media events that she is not aware of. Unfortunately, she felt unsupported.

Inclusive pedagogy can be defined as the pedagogy that supports different students' self-paced learning by offering a range of instructional resources that fit different students' needs to ensure all students' learning (Kurt, 2018). Inclusive pedagogy is a particularly important element for the quality of integration in the curriculum (Kurt,



2018). Meaning that the curriculum focusses on the individual learner, and the use of technology is for that sole purpose. Over the last decade, the Saudi higher education system has established a Learning Management System (LMS) in all universities to support students' individual and self-paced learning. There have been technical training for all teachers on how to use its educational features. These features facilitate a range of students' learning needs and support students' self-paced strategies, including monitoring performance and students' assessment. It also supports students' study goals through course plan notifications, supports the widening and diversifying of instructional resources, and empowers teacher creativity. However, findings in this research suggest that not all teachers were able to deal with students' individual learning needs, such as dealing with differences, which influenced students' engagement in independent learning negatively.

Most students stressed the importance of proper and sustainable use of LMS to support their self-learning when it regularly updated with all the information they need in their course. FGS1 said:

LMS is the most important thing in our study. I mean, it is the main thing that facilitates our learning. The Dr who uses LMS constantly - her course becomes easy, even if it is the most difficult content. I mean, if they update resources regularly, after each lecture, update the assignments, and update the information about exams and midterms - I mean, for instance, they put the time and the location and the content of the exam.

Students of this study pointed out that their need for certain requirements for their self-paced learning had not been satisfied. For instance, they reported a lack of the course organisation plans with a shortage of regular updates such as changes to the course readings or plans. Some students reported the lack of updates on the syllabus, including important events and issues of the course. Adding to this complexity, a lot of difficulties emerge through individual behaviours when there is a lack of teacher formal and continuous support. There must be increased awareness that teachers' behaviours influence students' networks, and act as invisible barriers

for students' strategic and deep involvement. PE3, for instance, reported frustration when there is lack of organisation or shortage in updating essential course information which lead the information to be disorganised and scattered across different networks, such as WhatsApp and Twitter discussions. This created a lot of stress and unorganised discussions concerning course organisation, which increased the cognitive load on students.

I need to check Whats App and Twitter every day to check the course information. The LMS is much organised and works better, and I like it for the course. However, the information on LMS sometimes is not updated, and everybody is using Whats App and Twitter for such things. I will miss things if I don't check all these regularly.

Many students reported that they relied on other students in WhatsApp as the main way to be updated, because of lack of formal communication from the teachers. This created much stress on the self-paced students who viewed the information on the system as unreliable or out-dated.

Furthermore, the young participants of this research demonstrated critical discernment between different demands concerning their learning experiences and issues that might be confused. For instance, they were aware that their ability to employ social media or Whats App as external and informal support does not mean that they do not require formal support. They also stressed the use of LMS to establish a stable relationship with all their course information to support their strategic and deep approach to self-learning. E3, in her interview, expressed this discernment:

Of course, I am free to search and ask and find information on social media and I like to get my learning from different resources and spaces, but when it comes to study and courses, I like to get precise information from one source, namely the teacher, and not even the students.

Another student explained more about the different student approaches in the networks and how she adopted a strategic approach. She also discriminated between different issues and spaces and did not mix issues together. FGS4 said:

Social media and Whats App facilitate our learning. This does not mean that I need to rely completely on it in my learning. For example, this does not mean that I do not use the LMS or I do not attend my lectures or that I feel that I do not need to concentrate because I can go to YouTube or I can ask students later - No!

The effect of such unorganised behaviour is a failure to meet the educational needs of the students. This not only increases the cognitive load on informal networks but also led to students developing a negative attitude towards LMS and other networks because they sometimes embodied irresponsible behaviours and overload. FG1S3 said: "I like the use of LMS. It facilitates a lot; however, some times, there is an only short notification for assignment or quizzes".

Students reported feelings of insecurity about course information in light of poor formal communication with the teacher, which had been replaced with informal interactions on Whats App and Twitter. Furthermore, some students recognised the consequences lack of formal organisation and communication through technology on the quality of their education, and its inclusivity for all students' skills ranges, especially for students who lacked social circles or were new to the college. E2 said in her interview:

When there is no updated information on important events and issues of the course on LMS this becomes frustrating, especially for students who are new in the college or those who have limited relationships, because they need to have other students' numbers to be in contact with for midterm and course information.

Another student similarly indicated that, when LMS lacked updates, she felt insecure about course events and information presented by students in Whats App. E4 said:

I like self-learning. LMS helps me much in this. I mean, I feel frustrated when there is not sufficient information in LMS, which means that I will need to find students and to add students' numbers to access course information and midterms. Still, I feel unsure if students will give me the right information I need.

The findings from students' experiences confirm other literature in this context. There are still several problems and ambiguity in educational understanding and culture

concerning the integration of technology into the pedagogy (Al-Shehri, 2010). This finding is also in agreement with Alebaikan (2010), who pointed out that some teachers still did not have the pedagogical basics on how to modify their traditional instructional design and teaching to meet the learner-centred model of education under the influence of the current practice of networks. The lack of inclusive pedagogy was reported to increase pressure on students and encourage irresponsible behaviour in the networks, while this teaching problem was invisible because of a culture of lack of integration in the curriculum.

### **Lack of personal support and feedback**

Most interviewed students talked extensively about teamwork as an assisted requirement in their courses. From their experience of using Whats App to coordinate group work, they reported a lack of teacher supervision of individualised work, which created a lot of difficulties and stress amongst team members and obstructed their cooperation. For instance, many students reported a lack of responsibility of some team members because they were not penalised for their irresponsibility when the teacher credit the work as a whole instead of supervising individual contributions. SE2 reported in her interview: “Some girls I consider as barriers for teamwork more than enablers because, in teamwork, the responsibility and work are divided. However, mostly, girls differ, and some of them are not cooperative”.

The students perceived by their colleagues as irresponsible and not doing their work. However, in fact, those student may had certain reasons, including learning difficulties. This was recognised by a students, who pointed to differences and difficulties in teamwork. PS2 said in her interview: “Teamwork is the most stressful experience. I need to deal with students who are different in abilities; some of them have difficulties in completing work, and I wish that Doctors supervised and assessed everyone individually”.

While it was clear that the lack of teacher individual support increased these students' difficulties, some suggest that individual assessment can create a more proactive learning environment. PS4, for instance, talked about group work in her interview: "Students rely on each other, while the teacher does not care about how much and what each one does. I hope that the teacher supervises the group, and this will make students more cooperative".

Often the students pointed to a lack of personal support and feedback from teachers. Example of such required support and feedback is that the need support for self-study learning resources that are available. This feedback includes answers to what and how to find personal support related to their self-study. However, lack of feedback from the teacher led them to waste time on YouTube to find resources:

There are videos that are effective and short to explain course information. I mean, now this has become very important. I mean, if the teacher knows that one short video can replace and simplify a whole lecture, this would save our time in searching for the proper videos.

Many students believed that the transition from high school to university was not easy in terms of the challenges of higher education that required advanced skills. Most of them said that the university supported them with workshops in their first year; however, they still need more support and some of them reported that they utilised social media extensively to increase their own skills and to cope with the transition with no perceived assistance available in the college. For instance, SE2 talked about her experience of transition from another college in her in-depth interview:

SE2: I am not from this college, I mean when I came, I did not know anyone I found difficult to find friends and to go on with my study, because the university is different from school. My school has not offered me this training I was not introduced to networks and computers, so I was very slow and felt frustrated. However, I was shy to ask for support, because all students seemed talented and used to using these networks for study from their school. So, I used social media to learn.

Me: Have you asked for support or told your teacher about this?

SE2: I was very shy to ask for support, and I did not know how to receive help when I needed it. The teacher expected that all students knew these things from school, so I depended on myself, and I used social media. I started learning from the zero points, and now I am much better.

These experiences suggest that students need personal support and feedback.

Teachers and faculty need to take advantages of the current available resources for providing personal support and to ensure students' abilities and needs are satisfied in the light of the increased diversity of the students' intake.

### **The focus of teacher assessment method**

Assessment methods are tied to personal support and feedback in an integrated curriculum. Students' experiences also show that some of the teachers' means of assessment have not facilitated their academic development and feedback. For example, several students pointed out that they wanted to expand knowledge in their field in light of the increased enrichment opportunities, but they mentioned that multiple-choice assessments made them stick strictly to the book, not only in the information but also in the same language and wording. PS4, for instance, reported that she was not challenged to explore in her field because she had developed an instrumental motivation based on the assessment method: "I came to avoid using social media for increasing information in my field because I would get more information than I require for the exam, and I will get confused in the multiple-choice..."

Similarly, many students pointed out that one barrier preventing them from exploring their field was that they would get information that may contradict or be inconsistent with their book language or teachers. As explained in the previous theme, students also pointed to some problems concerning group assessments that were linked to a lack of personal feedback and support provision from the teacher. Thus students also noted that, with the lack of personal and individual monitoring there is increased hidden plagiarism. They report that other students could find easier ways to do their

assignments, using social media through specialists who do the work for them.

Furthermore, they reported on other students' behaviour of cheating through Whats App in the multiple-choice e-quizzes when they were administrated online for students at home.

### **6.2.5 Lack of social inclusion**

For some students, support and inclusion have exceeded the university environment and the curriculum, and they believed it is an important social culture. For instance, ICT5, in her diary, noted a positive effect of the online behaviour on people's attitudes and acceptance of each other generally:

People of this society are changing, becoming more open to discuss their problems and to talk about sensitive issues and share their life experiences and even some of them become free to discuss issues that can make them feel stigmatised.

PE2 agreed to some extent as she said in her interview:

People will judge you even on minor things - even on a word you use. For instance, once I gave information on the LMS discussion - it was scientific information, not even an opinion- on the other day I was bullied in the class by the students who were in the discussion - they were talking 'like oh philosopher! We are impressed! I would never share a class discussion again.

Many students pointed to similar situations in their class Whats App discussion, where they reported misconceptions and exclusions becoming an increasingly noticeable barrier and negatively impact on relationships. E3 said: "The group in Whats App is good when students are cooperative and supportive of each other, but it depends on the girls. I mean, a lot of misunderstandings and personal attacks occur in Whats App groups".

SE1 talked about the same issue in Whats App groups and pointed some behaviours that impede cooperation, she said in her interview: "The word has a psychological effect; either it will make you feel supported and open to share information, or it will make you feel silly and stop you from any participation in the group".

Most students noted that, due to invisibility in social media networks, it is more likely that one could have negative experiences. PE1, in her interview, acknowledged that one needs to have the strength to face criticisms and other online behaviours when using social media: “Anyone who uses social media to express their opinion needs to be ready to face criticism and personal attacks; so, they need to be strong enough to bear the consequences”.

### **6.2.6 Technical Problems and its relation to fears**

Having technical problems, such as slowness of connection or other technical issues, can cause loss of access to information and influences the quality of the current network-based educational process. It also generally impacts on equitable access to education under the extensive use of networks in education. Many students pointed to fears and stresses arise from technical issues. S1 from FG2 reported that technical issues caused her academic fears and increased her stress: “The Internet, for some reason, becomes very slow or it might cut down suddenly during my connection to the university system. Once it took me a lot of hours making registration”.

It also presents an obstacle for teachers moving towards quality and inclusive teaching practices and ensuring equal access opportunities. Students point to technical issues and problems in this context and point to a lack of technical support. In addition, in some local areas, there was still poor Internet connection, so those students suffered from a lack of sufficient connection at home. S3 from FG2, for instance, pointed to the loss of information and inability to access assignments and information on time, because of sudden disconnection: “If there is an electronic quiz, I will expect that I could not submit the quiz because of slowness and disconnection on the Internet.”



S4 reported that students had greater difficulties in connection when the teacher changed plans at short notice: “The system [LMS] has facilitated our study, but, when the connection is poor, it becomes frustrating. Especially when the teacher put notifications for an assignment or quiz without giving enough time, we need enough time to connect and study”.

#### **6.2.7. Time and cost issues**

Many students reported a lack of time as an obstacle to engaging in independent learning and personal development. They perceived many opportunities but little time to engage between lectures, assignments, and study requirements. PE2, who is an active blogger in the college talked about her blog where she recorded her achievements and readings about childcare. She said in her interview: “I used to blog on several issues from childcare to self-care, but I have stopped blogging now. It takes time, and I need to focus on my study”.

Many students reported difficulty finding a balance between different issues at the same time. For instance, many of them perceived failed to engage because of a lack of balance and study pressure. For instance, some report that they suspended engaging in personal development in social media after finishing their university. SE3 reported in her interview: “A lot of issues can engage me in social media, but I need to balance time between study and life, because of my study, I do not have enough time”.

Students also pointed to the role of the college in engaging them in opportunities for personal development and various workshops. However, the lack of time was a barrier: “Twitter increased my awareness about what is going on in the college in terms of social activities and workshops, and I hope that I will participate as soon as I have time”.

Similarly, students pointed to the enormous opportunities that opened up their horizons for future development and career. Nevertheless, they were deliberately postponing this step until they graduated because of a lack of time. E4 said, in her interview: "I am now more informed about my career choices, and I have a lot of plans to do. When I finish my studies, I will have a lot of time for these issues".

Time and cost issues could be barriers or drivers for students' development during their life-course. According to Boyd (2007), the difference amongst students' experiences and use depends on whether they were early adopters and the range of their interests, which depends on their family. This was supported by students in this study who pointed to the important role of their families in providing time and cost, and in deciding issues relating to how students adopt social media in their development. For instance, E2 talked about the reasons, which engaged her in learning translation from English to Arabic on social media, she said in her interview: "My family helped me and bought programmes which assisted in the translation, and they also gave me the time I needed".

Cost also emerged from students' experiences as a significant barrier. Students used social media for learning because it is free. For instance, they noted that it was expensive to engage in face-to-face training workshops and that they could not find specialists easily in their situation.

The abovementioned difficulties and barriers in this study show that student' personal characteristics and the surrounding social and educational environment were both important factors as either drivers or barriers for students' independent skill improvement and continuous development. There were several difficulties and barriers emerging from the students' attitudes and development experiences. Some of these negative attitudes are personal to the students, such as academic difficulties and lack of awareness, which has a significant negative impact on students'

development when combined with social media risk. Other barriers were social or caused by context situations. The findings in the above section covered a discussion of the main sub-themes of barriers: students' negative attitude and its relation to lack of awareness and academic difficulties, social media risk, distraction and information overload, curriculum and educational culture, lack of social inclusion, technical problems, and finally, time and cost issues.

### **6.3 Benefits of social media for supporting students' engagement and development**

The students described certain benefits of social media as a tool for supporting engagement in independent learning and personal development. Young students show different levels of engagement based on several personal and social factors, as discussed. Nevertheless, all students reported gains and noticeable improvements in their lives from the perceived autonomy and the benefits of learning and sharing others' experiences in social media. The main themes that emerged are perceived change in attitudes and development of personal confidence, perceived change in attitudes, and development of academic and career confidence.

#### **6.3.1 Perceived change in attitudes and development of self-confidence**

The perceived development of self-confidence, along with academic self-efficacy, was the most quoted statement amongst students when addressing their personal development background in social media. Students noted increased confidence with remarkable changes in attitudes. However, they realized the role of their experiential learning and training practices with the help of others' experiences in social media.

M2, in her interview, attributed the benefits to her learning and training, she said:

“It depends on the person's interests and attitudes; for me, I learned and practiced many things that have changed me and gave me positive energy for life.”

Similar to M2, many students believed that self-regulated learning and reflection in social media were required to achieve an outcome that leads to a change in attitudes and development when using social media. Some of the codes under this theme are discussed below.

### ***Perceived development of life skills***

Several students reported developing and practicing many life skills from learning from others' experiences on social media, including lifestyle and communication skills. Most students in this study stated practicing and learning new skills and hobbies in social media. For instance, most of them reported learning about lifestyles, self-development, decor, design, diet, DIY, cooking, English language, and health. A remarkable impression is that these students consistently named their self-regulated learning and experimentation as an obligation to achieve any perceived outcome of confidence or change in attitude in social media. This quote from E2's interview displays her use of experimentation and self-regulated learning to achieve results and changes in attitude.

I learned how to become more confident and comfortably talk to people... I am a little bit anxious, so I followed different professionals to read, write, listen and watch to know how I can control my anxiety when talking to people, I mean I see, learn and then I test myself (apply what I learn on social media) in many life situations.

### ***Perceived development of awareness of differences and openness***

Many students reported that their explorations and readings in social media had led them to understand the world around them better and to understand other cultures better. Thus they reported their perceptions of changes in attitudes; however, with a consciousness of their part in reflection. ICT2 also described her reflection in social media and wrote in her reflective diary: "The things that I have learned gave me a new vision and perspective on life".

Likewise, several students noticed that they became more open to new information and accepting of others' differences and variety of opinions. Most frequently, students in interviews and focus groups described their perceived changes in attitude in the form of increased awareness about "how different people think" and "how to deal with different people" and openness as an outcome of being in contact with different people's life experiences and as a result of their reflections. Furthermore, ICT4 wrote in her diary about her change in attitudes and linked that to change in her identity. She also wrote about a change in attitudes on the social level as well as on the personal level:

Since social media become available, just within a short time after that, it is obvious how it changed people in this society.... I think social media have changed me, and without social media, I do not think that I will be the same person as who I am today.

Students also elaborated on their reflections and openness when engaging in sharing others' talks in social media, recognizing it to be responsible for the outcome benefits and change of attitudes. Ph1 reported in her interview on her change in attitude from her increased knowledge about differences in thinking:

From following people on YouTube, Snapchat and Twitter I think I have changed and become to know more in every domain of life, besides that I become to know how to deal with people I mean I learned how different types of people think.

PE1, in her interview, presented her story of improvement and change of attitude in terms of dealing with different opinions and points of view:

I was not accepting other's disagreement with my opinion, or if I was in a discussion, I would be irritated when there are different opinions than mine. From being in Twitter discussions, I realized how important to consider and learn from other people's opinions and not to impose my opinion on others. I notice that I have changed, and I started to deal better with people in my life, and I have come to know how to act when engaging in discussions.

Similarly, several students pointed to changes in attitudes and confidence in terms of increased knowledge and awareness of how to deal with others.

### ***Perceived development of confidence in social engagement and relationships***

Students realised the significance of social media on their learning and improved skills. For instance, SE1 reported in her interview on her increased efficacy and confidence in social engagement:

When I learn new things on social media, my knowledge and experience increase and my self-confidence will increase because I will know how to talk with people around me. I mean, I will talk about something I know, and I saw. I mean, I have some background to talk, and I feel much improvement in terms of social relationships.

Many students reported improved engagement and motivation in personal development and social life through their learning and reflection in these sites and through engaging in self-presentation and stories. E2 explained in her interview:

One of the best things I see in myself from using social media is that I have more words to talk, I was not able to talk, I mean I was having only little words when talking, the same applies for Arabic and English conversations. I mean - even in my life conversations - when someone asks me a long question - I would reply with only one or two words. I noticed that I got better and came to use more words when talking in my life.

Students also pointed to more engagement in the academic life of the college and to be more connected with, and aware of, people and activities. Faculty and counsellors played a role in engaging and informing students through the use of social media. Furthermore, many students pointed out that being in constant contact with new friends helped their college adjustment and engagement and combatted feelings of isolation.

When I first came to this college, I was able to connect with other students who were also new as we joined Whats App. Since that day until now, we maintained our relationship supporting each other, and they have become best friends of mine.

These quotes show that participants perceived how their self-regulated learning in social media supported their engagement in learning and personal development and the perceived change in their attitudes in different aspects of their lives. Students believed that the capacity to control learning, combined with the ability to share and

learn from others' experiences in social media, has offered them sources to change their attitudes and increase their self-efficacy.

### **6.3.2 Perceived change in attitudes and development of academic/career confidence**

Students perceived increased autonomy, joy, and motivation combined with performance concerning engagement in academic life and requirements. The students reported engagement in different activities and design production in the college, and some of them managed student social clubs. In the academic domain, students showed increased engagement in creative academic production and engagement in interactive class presentations. They also showed their confidence and awareness of different academic and career development opportunities and choices available in their lives.

Besides, students stated different aspirations and goals for their academic development: some of them displayed extensive knowledge in their fields. SE1 wrote in her diary: "In social media, I was open to further explore and understand the concepts in my field, and I get knowledge much further than what I can get from the teacher or when I am on class seats".

#### ***Perceived academic performance and achievement***

All students recognised improved academic performance and creativity in terms of assignments and handwork production. Quite frequently, students stated academic self-efficacy as a perception of ease of use. For instance, S4 in FG1 said:

It's now easier to get and develop creative ideas, to do assignments and handwork or to find help in our study; even my sister who graduated from the same subject before social media revolution says it's now much easier and enjoyable.

PE3 perceived enhanced performance and confidence in her presentation and internship practise from her reflection and self-regulated learning in social media; she said in her interview:

I use social media. It enriches my ideas, and I use it to practise my presentations and teaching, and this helps my performance. I mean, the teacher always praises my work, and I feel confident in my presentations in the college and my teaching in school because I know how to do it. I mean, I have seen experienced people, and I practiced.

Many students described improved retention and understanding of difficult concepts in different subjects from exploring videos, which helped them to aid examination stress, and overcome study difficulties. For instance, ICT1 reported on improved achievement and performance from attending additional lessons on YouTube: “I use social media to attend additional lessons in many courses, which have had a great influence and positive results on me in terms of my academic achievement”.

#### **Perceived change in attitudes and motivation**

Quite often, the students repeated the words social media make study enjoyable and boost their motivation for the subject. For instance, Ph1, who is studying physics, reported on her change of attitude and increased engagement and motivation in physics, following being able to view real-life contextual learning videos: “I enjoy physics on YouTube. I watch life experiments and real-life context videos, and I felt it got me to start understanding and love physics and to engage more in my courses”.

#### **Perceived engagement in career development**

Self-regulated learning supported by social media not only impacted the students' educational opportunities and achievement but also influenced their career opportunities and future goals. Several interviewed students stated on combining their academic study with developing creative arts, such as drawing, design, and photography. They also realized the potential to improve their professional skills and talent to engage in jobs using social media. For instance, some interviewed students



reported that they had become more informed of choices and goals in their lives, which engaged them in the development of their talent, and some of them had already engaged in careers while studying in the college. E1, for example, reported in her interview:

I had a talent in photography. I often get praise on my posted pictures. Thus I was encouraged to develop my hobby, and I bought a cam and followed photographers on Instagram. I have improved just from my self-learning on social media accounts on YouTube and Instagram. I grew professional in my photography, and I also gained followers, and I had sent jobs and advertisements to do.

In this them, I presented the students' perceived improved benefits from social media upon their own self-regulated learning. The students recognized the role of self-regulated learning, experimentation, and reflection as primary issues in their perceived change of attitude, and they point to the value of the learning process in using social media. Additionally, students' stories attributed students' observed change of attitudes and the development of knowledge or skills tied to a self-regulating learning process. Students reported on positivity, improved performance and skills, and achievements, which influenced their motivation levels to engage in social activities and even in careers. Social media supported students' choices, where each of them was able to satisfy their own personal development needs.

#### **6.4 Issues raised from students' experiences and perceptions**

The young students, as experts in social media, reported the main current issues and challenges to the educational system from their lived day-to-day experiences and engagement in this context. I classified these issues into perceived differences in personal/academic development amongst students, views concerning teachers, and views concerning the curriculum.

##### **6.4.1 Perceived differences amongst students' abilities and knowledge**

Many students believed that a powerful, accessible tool of learning and development, has inevitably make divides and differences amongst students in terms of skills.

Young students, as experts in these novel experiences, replied, “depends on you” when I ask them about social media advantages. They recognized differences in development and advantages based on one’s attitudes and self-efficacy in achieving learning goals are what shape these advantages. SE3 believed it was differences in the way people used the media, which influenced the way they got benefits:

I think social media advantages depend on the person. Even my sister and me can use it differently. I like to explore, and I like to try new things. For example, I like to learn every day a new thing, and I like to spend my time discovering and enjoy achieving my goals with support of social media.

Many students believed that differences amongst personalities shaped personal learning and development in social media. For instance, S4 in FG1: “Learning and development in social media, in my opinion, is shaped by personal attitudes and tendencies. I mean, determined and talented people will increase their talent even more and more”.

Similarly, several students believed that these tools could shape the one who lacked awareness and direction. Many students replied with “I know how to find things in social media, but others do not know” or “I can control my use, but others cannot”. For instance, E4 believed that these tools could be used to shape users when one lacked control and awareness: “Some students may lack awareness about the opportunities in social media, so they do not feel advantages on themselves. For me, I choose people and accounts carefully, and I check the information from different sources”.

Students also reported on increasingly noticeable gaps amongst students in classes in terms of academic knowledge. Especially when teachers are not adopting strategies that motivate students’ engagement in independent learning. SE1 believed

that her attitude in social media is the crucial thing that made the difference between her and other students in the class. She reported in her diary:

I become updated with new things which expanded my knowledge. My exploration in social media has influenced my presentations plus my knowledge compared to other students who limit their knowledge to the book or to what the teacher put in LMS.

PE also suggested that students who learned in social media became more active and creative compared to those who limit them self-to formal education: "Not all students can control their learning in social media, and not all of them are aware of how to find things, so they become silent".

E2, who managed a Whats App group, also agreed on that and pointed in her interview to differences from her experience in the class group:

In the WhatsApp group, there are usually thirty students. Only ten are active in asking and answering questions - those are the ones who are talented in the class- and the rest are the ones who are silent in the class.

PE1, from her experience in the group work, noticed differences amongst students that impact on their self-motivation and confidence. She said in her interview: "Some students are cooperative and do work creatively; others just do not care".

PE4, also, was discriminate and pointed to the importance of social inclusion amongst students in a WhatsApp group because of increased differences in skills. She points to the ultimate aim of using Whats App: to help students and get help. She said: "Students who know need to help other students who do not know. I mean, me, myself, I just do good and forget about it".

Furthermore, ICT4 recognized that lack of awareness of differences with lack of support as the main reason for increasing gaps in development and learning difficulties amongst students. She wrote in her diary:

...I am sure that these sites are presenting good chances for everyone... despite having these chances available sometimes it is difficult for someone

to get benefit from it - maybe because of the family not encouraging, or because of friends or because they are not getting advice on how to use it ...

The quotes present a realization amongst students of increased differences in skills and knowledge amongst them as a result of increased out-of-class educational practices at present. Students' experiences suggest an increased need to adopt teaching strategies that build on social inclusion and sharing of experiences and to assess students' needs for educational support.

#### **6.4.2 Views concerning teachers**

The findings from students' experiences imply that social media, and networks generally, have become an increasingly significant and integral aspect for the teaching profession, and teachers' lives. Increased levels of enactment of personal technologies in the academic fields create opportunities for talented teachers to increase their ability to match students' different needs, which influences students' satisfaction. However, students perceived that differences in terms of teachers' practice are mirrored in LMS and social media. S2 in FG2 precisely point to that as she said: "All teachers now are using LMS and PowerPoint. It is not about whether they use it or not. Some teachers do creative PowerPoint; this also applies to LMS - some teachers are effective and active in the LMS".

Furthermore, often, students expressed a lack of benefit from teachers who do not satisfy their needs that are massively affected by digital resources. For instance, several students pointed out that young teachers were more satisfying for their needs as young students, especially in providing resources and links for different methods and styles. S1 in FG2: "Now, there are different methods to simplify and reduce the time in explaining the complex concepts in effective ways... I mean, providing certain videos from social media is significant in teaching and feedback".

However, some students explained from their experience that age was not always the main factor of difference amongst teachers in terms of providing the feedback they need. For instance, E4, in her interview, pointed out that differences amongst teachers in using these tools could be attributed to their own talent and personality. Many students noted that teachers who used social media and LMS were more organized and understood their needs better. PE3 also noticed the differences amongst teachers in terms of providing academic feedback they need. She said in her interview: "At this age, the teacher who does not use social media is unlikely to have accurate or updated information, they cannot benefit students. I mean, their students will go forward, and they get left behind".

Self-directed learners reported that they benefitted the most from teachers who are inclusive and care about the needs of each one of them through continuous feedback on LMS. The self-directed learners appreciate teachers who had set their professional development accounts as they influenced their motivation in the academic subject. Self-directed learners also praised teachers who had organized course plans and regularly updated students with course updates and enriched them with different types of resources.

#### **6.4.3 Views concerning curriculum**

Students are experienced in these innovative learning practices at present, and they reported a critical discriminate and differentiating of various confusing issues in current practice. S2 from FG1 reported awareness of the danger of mixing different issues in education; she said:

...social media is important for my study and learning ... this does not mean that I do not use the LMS or that I do not need the teacher or that I feel that I don't need to attend or concentrate on lectures because I can see it on YouTube or LMS ... no! I mean, it is very important to me to make my learning easier. I mean it enriches my information. This enrichment I feel is useful for my learning, and without it, I will find difficulty in my studies...

Most students mentioned the need for using a wide range of different methods in education to meet a wide range of preferences and styles as being essential needs associated with current practices. S4 from FG1 suggested that videos and educational film production could be one way to meet the different students' needs in education; she said:

Videos on YouTube enrich our existing information. Maybe because of the different teachers' styles or maybe because of the different ways in the production of the information itself, such as cartoon production for explaining concepts. I think my ability increases when I see the information in different forms.

However, students wished that teachers realized this need and put links to quality videos to support their personal learning in LMS. Students reported that LMS was not supported by educational film production as resources related to their courses and that they needed to waste a lot of time finding a suitable video on YouTube.

Sometimes, I waste a lot of time on YouTube to find a suitable video to study. The teachers put only their own designed PowerPoint. I need to see different quality resources and links for the lecture. This is necessary because if I do not understand from one resource, I can understand from the other. I mean, the lecture is the beginning, but when studying, I need to expand my understanding even more.

S3 in FG1 also pointed to the lack of educational film production in Saudi Arabia or the Arabic context on YouTube:

There is a lack of Videos and educational films. You Tube videos sometimes they are not suitable for our context so it is not suitable for use in the class or by teachers and often quality videos are in the English language so we cannot use them either.

Students also raised issues about recorded lectures and expert knowledge. S2 in FG1 noted the cultural barrier for video recording of lectures of females in this context. However, she did not think this would be a problem if there were enough other open resources:

Some teachers put their voice on PowerPoint. However, it does not have to be only our teacher recorded. It could be any other teacher who is known to have a style in teaching or any teacher on YouTube that she [the teacher] selected for us. I mean, we need to have a recorded video lesson on LMS to

view at any time. This has become essential because I may not have full attention in the lecture, or I may be absent from some lectures.

Students suggested that having open access to course recorded lectures at the university would meet their various needs for expert knowledge. M2, who study math suggests in her interview:

Our study is difficult, and there is a need for sufficient additional lessons for our courses. I use additional lessons such as in YouTube channels that are specifically specialized for teaching courses. However, I wish there is access to formal university lectures. For example, some universities, such as..... university, the department of ..., has made all the recorded lectures for all the courses available for their students...

Students also raised dissatisfaction with the current curriculum, which was based on theoretical knowledge and suggested more modernization. For instance, S5 in FG1S4 suggested changes in terms of curriculum and assessment to give increased emphasis on hands-on training and practice in real-life contexts.

I do not think that the theoretical knowledge in books is enough to get understanding about how to deal with children, and I will understand better when I see things in a real-life context. For instance, I have seen some videos where the expert applies these theoretical concepts to children and presents and explains the children's reaction.

They did not see the need to spend class time on theoretical subjects, as they perceived a little benefit from theory alone and doubt it could prepare them for their professional future:

E5 said in her interview: "When I graduate, I do not think that I will keep any of my books. Instead, I will learn from experts and teachers on social media who explain issues in their practical context".

Under current circumstances, students demand an increase in quality of education in terms of curriculum design to increase real context activities that meet the current needs in society S3 in FG1 said: "When we asked to 'search' It is now easy, and we know how to research, but I will understand theoretical issues better when I apply them in a real context".

Similarly, S5 from FG2 point to lack of usefulness of classes that are based on theories and wished more active engagement with real issues:

It's not easy to keep our full attention in the class based on theoretical and old knowledge I wish that class time become useful and interesting - the students - everyone is on her mobile, and no one is following the teacher or the activity.

Some students suggested a reduction of class time to increase the quality of education undercurrent out of class learning practices. The students' personal accounts presented several challenges with respect to the matching of the pedagogy and curriculum with their changing and diverse needs. It could be seen from the students' perceptions that teaching involved using inclusive pedagogy would ensure students' social stimulation and engagement. In terms of the curriculum, it could be inferred that there is a need to think about the self-directed learners' needs in terms of scheduled times, and to meet the current needs of students' preparation by adding more real-life context experiences and training.

## **6.5 Summary of findings and answers to research questions**

The findings of this research present an in-depth understanding of the complex experiences of learners' engagement in independent learning and personal development in the Saudi higher education context. The meanings concerning students' engagement were developed using an IPA analysis of the Saudi university students' personal accounts and lived experiences of using social media as significant events in their social and academic lives. The meanings developed covered students' engagement in independent learning and personal development from multifaceted personal, social, organizational, and educational factors. I have explained how I employed IPA to help deep meanings of engagement, including students' motives and difficulties, appear to the surface from students' personal development accounts in social media. There have been four main final emergent themes from the analysis of in-depth interviews, focus groups, and reflective diaries



that have been discussed in detail in this chapter. These central themes correspond to the research questions and identify the objectives of this research to illuminate the main issues, attitudes, and difficulties for students' engagement and non-engagement in independent learning and personal development in a Saudi higher education context. Below I will discuss a summary of the findings concerning answering each of the research questions.

· RQ1: What motives to, and drivers for, engagement in independent learning and personal development do students describe from their lived experiences of using social media?

The motivations and drivers that played essential roles in students' engagement were influenced by personal, social, organizational, and pedagogical factors. The first research question is answered via two sub-questions, as follows:

· RQ1.1: Why do some students engage in independent learning and personal development, from their lived experience of using social media?

The findings show that positive attitudes and feelings towards engagement in personal development were influenced by students' self-efficacy and reflection, organizational skills, including the use of self-regulated learning strategies, coping strategies, and time management. Also, personal values such as hobbies, creativity, originality, mastery, and helping others, family, and religion influences were important personal drivers. Finally, students' awareness of opportunities for how to use social media for different aspects of their learning and self-development arose also as a personal driver for development. These personal drivers that emerged from the engaged students additionally exhibit the challenges and skills needed for other students' engagement. And it also generally displays the challenges for engagement in personal development under the current influences of social media at the individual level.

RQ1.2: How do students describe drivers that support their engagement, from their lived experiences of using social media?

The findings show that social and organizational pedagogical factors influenced students' positive attitudes and feelings towards their engagement in independent learning and personal development. A significant factor was social inclusion, which involved constant feedback and social support along with continuous personal feedback and the use of inclusive strategies through LMS or social media. College, teacher, and peers influences emerge important for students' engagement. Besides, students perceived that educational challenges such as college adjustment and academic requirements were factors that engaged them in personal development. Finally, freedom of choice emerges as a significant driver for students' engagement.

· Answer to RQ2: What barriers to, and difficulties for, engagement in independent learning and personal development do students describe from their lived experiences?

The negative attitudes of some students towards engagement in independent learning and personal development were influenced by personal, social, and organizational factors. Research question two, concerning the difficulties and barriers, was answered via two sub-questions:

· RQ2.1: Why do some students not succeed to engage in independent learning and personal development, from their lived experience of using social media?

The negative attitudes of some students towards personal development from their use of social media underlined their learning choices, which revealed their learning difficulties. These difficulties include lack of personal control and skills, lack of awareness, and lack of formal support to improve their awareness and learning skills. The problem of having negative attitudes towards social media and its relation to

hiding learning difficulties and the need for support present a challenge for the education system. Often students whose learning difficulties are not detected are more likely to engage in social media risks and negative behaviours that have negative influence their personal development and academic progress. Thus the findings show that students who have negative attitudes towards social media in their personal development exhibited learning difficulties. The findings also confirm that social media personal use and attitudes can indicate the underlying learning difficulties such as lack of control on time management and other organisation skills.

· RQ2.2: How do students describe difficulties and barriers that hinder their engagement, from their experiences of using social media?

Students also expressed some negative attitudes that were influenced by social, organizational, and pedagogical barriers in the context. These included lack of continuous feedback and support, lack of inclusive teaching strategies, lack of organization and course plans, lack of social inclusions, distraction, and information overload. These difficulties were intertwined and complicated as they produced more difficulties from disorganised social or pedagogical behaviours that have been mirrored in the networks. Besides that, time and cost issues and lack of technical support also emerged as difficulties in the students' experiences.

· How do students perceive the benefits of using social media in supporting their engagement in independent learning and personal development?

This involved the gains perceived by using social media as a tool for engagement in independent learning and personal development. The participants who expressed positive attitudes and engagement in personal development associated advantages of social media to support their self-regulated learning and reflection, leading them to improvements and achievements. The students also observed a change in their attitudes with increased motivation and positivity in both social life and academic

performance. They believed using social media as tools to facilitate their engagement in experimental and self-regulated learning has a positive influence on their self-confidence and social engagement. The students also perceived the change of attitudes towards academic subjects influenced by increased confidence and academic performance.

- What educational issues in this context arise from the students' experiences and perceptions?

Research question four concerned the issues students' perceived from their practices of development in the informal context and the challenges these practices of development bring into the educational context. Students displayed variations and diversity, with some exhibiting discernment and confidence when talking about curriculum issues in the interviews. For instance, the students often identify the mismatch - between the organization of the traditional curriculum and its traditional pedagogies that have been adopted in this context for long decades- with their self-directed learning practices that were supported and influenced by social media openness. Some of the current issues concerning curriculum and pedagogy in this particular context were presented from the students' voices. Often the educational challenge of increased diversity in student populations based on their range of skills and personal engagement in independent learning and personal development in the informal context was raised by students in terms of its educational implications.

Both personal and social factors in the social environment interact and intertwine with each other to identify situations of students' engagement and non-engagement in this research. These findings contribute to research knowledge by adding an in-depth understanding of the complicated relationship between personal and social factors that interact with each other in the modern university learner experience.

Understanding the role of curriculum, pedagogy, and the social factors in terms of

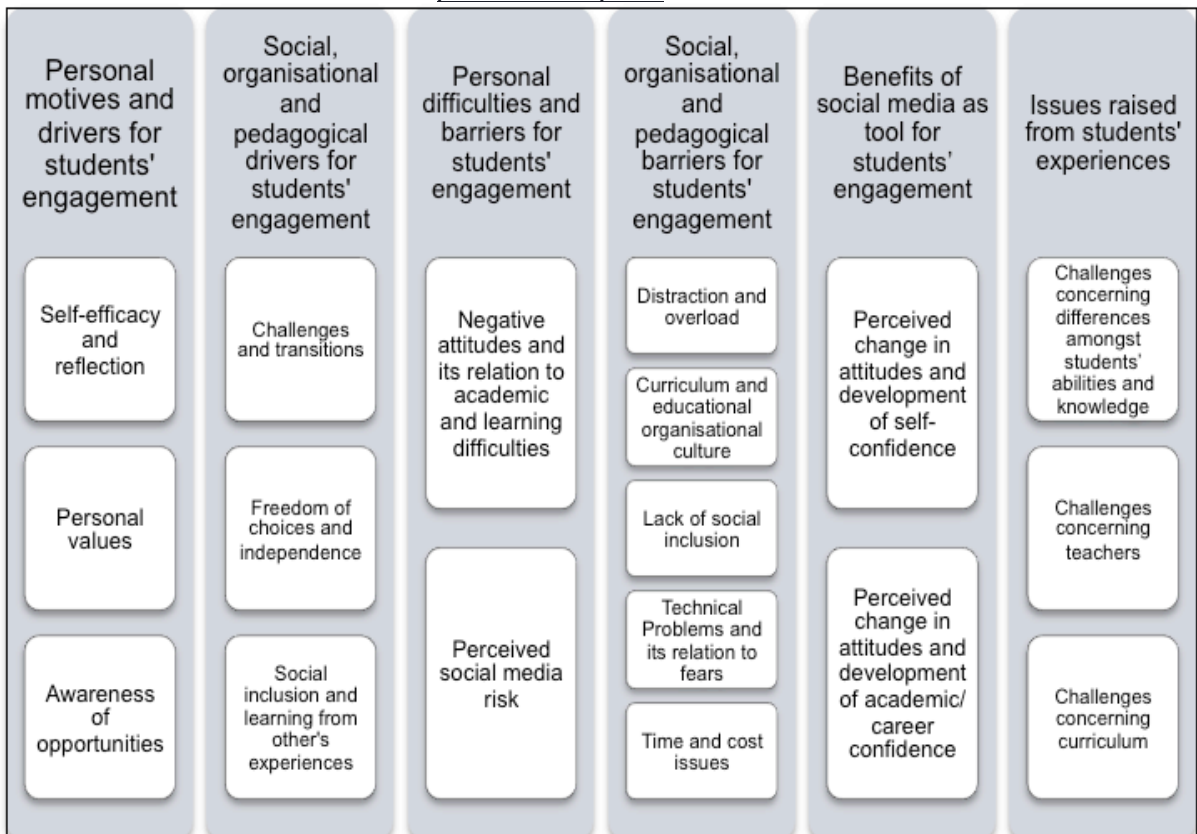
how they could act as either social drivers or barriers to students' engagement in independent learning and personal development is significant to satisfy students' needs and to improve support and feedback under current influences.

## Chapter Seven: Discussion of Findings

### 7.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the main themes and issues that have emerged from the participants' experiences and stories of success and failure in engagement. Figure 7.1 gives a summary framework of the findings with the main themes and factors that influence students' engagement on individual, organizational, pedagogical, and social levels from the students' experiences in the context of KSA higher education. I have summarized the main theoretical contributions and themes, as emerged from the data in Figure 7.1, to facilitate mapping the data from the findings in this discussion.

**Figure 7.1: Research findings framework to understand students' engagement in independent learning and personal development**



Thus, Figure 7.1 above displays the whole picture of the current learner experience as displayed from their use of social media. As discussed earlier, this research has applied IPA methodology along with educational theories that have been described in

the theoretical framework (see Chapter 3). This lens has enabled me to focus on the “learner experience” by focusing on each participant’s attitudes and behaviours from their daily use of social media. Eventually, I have arrived at a specific understanding of the current learning situations and issues that emerged from the different learners’ experiences implicating both personal and social factors. Thus, the data and themes obtained in this IPA research as presented in the findings chapter and summarised in figure (7.1) above present a comprehensive understanding of the issues related to students’ engagement in Saudi higher education. This chapter involves a discussion of these themes and factors by linking them to the broader context of the Saudi higher education and the existing literature.

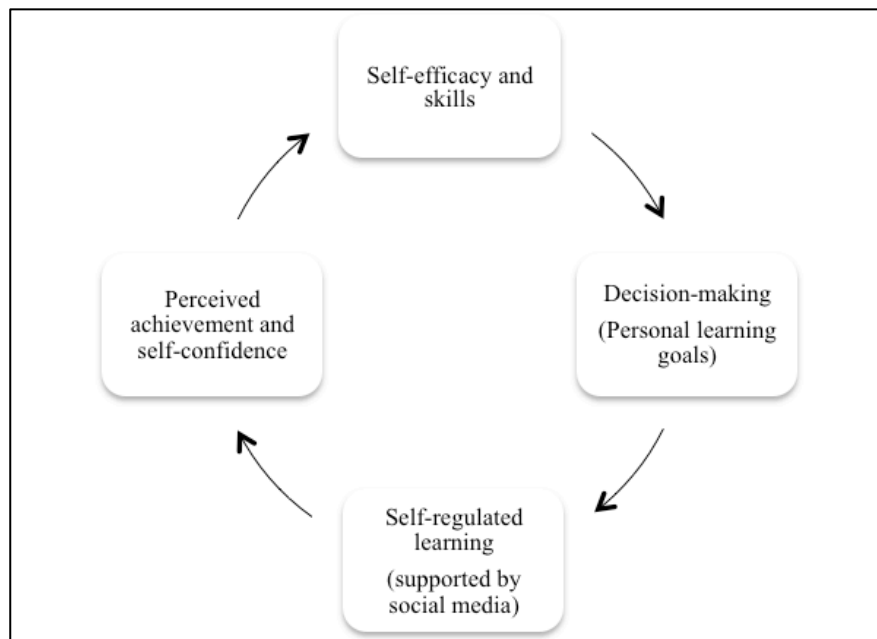
### **7.1 Personal motivations and drivers for engagement**

The findings confirm that students’ positive attitudes of successful engagement in personal development through social media have been influenced by several factors. Some of which are personal to the learner such as the learner past experiences, skills and characteristics. Such personal motivations and drivers are significant in understanding how students develop independence and strengthen confidence from their personal accounts and interpretations of using social media. As shown on figure (7.1) and in the research findings, personal motives and drivers played an important role in participants’ engagement in personal development. These included self-efficacy and reflection, incorporating study and self-regulation skills; personal values; and awareness of opportunity. It is difficult to draw a line between distinct personal factors as they intertwine significantly. Thus, the following discussion centers on two main and general points concerning the personal factors: self-efficacy and confidence, and students’ preparation and support.

### 7.1.1 Self-efficacy and confidence

The personal factors surfaced clearly from the students' uses of social media, which display their control and confidence. Often the positive attitudes towards social media were evolving from successful engagement in personal development. They also were often combined with self-awareness of the learning process with an acknowledgment of the self-ability to achieve personal goals. In this section, I will present a discussion of these findings in the context of theories that present an explanation of engagement in personal development inside a social environment throughout the interaction between personal control and social factors (see Chapter 3).

**Figure 7.2: Personal motivations and drivers for students' engagement in independent learning and personal development**



Students who expressed successful commitment with positive influence of social media upon their personal development usually have combined that with a perception of self-awareness of their own abilities and limitations. This perception was explained in the findings from the literature as self-efficacy judgment. Self-efficacy judgment is measured through self-evaluation and perception of personal ability that is recognized from “the conviction one can engage in behaviour that will



produce the desired outcome” (Bandura, 1977, p.193). This judgment and self-perception of personal abilities underlie personal awareness, reflection on abilities and needs, motivation for personal development, decision-making, positivity, and the ability to control (see Chapter Three). Thus, matching this theory, participants who presented positive attitudes combined that with the awareness that social media alone are not responsible for their development, and they often elaborated extensively on their effort, self-discipline, and how they perceived themselves as learners.

The confidence perceived by those students was based on a prolonged record of successful engagement and achievement that was clear from their stories of success. Eastin and LaRose (2000) suggested that critical self-evaluation of ability is the real skill gained from past experiences. Thus, the positive attitudes of participants were inspired by their past experiences and real skills. Furthermore, the findings shows that students’ positive attitudes were also influenced by a determination to overcome any obstacles they faced, either in their social life or in their academic study. This displays a sense of awareness of self-abilities and limitations. Hence, these students described processes of self-evaluation and reflection that are essential to start any learning decision. Thus findings from the participants’ interviews and reflective diaries were matching the self-efficacy theory (see Chapter Three).

In the context of self-efficacy theory, Figure (7.2) illustrates the personal motivations and drivers that explain this research participants’ engagement in independent learning and personal development from their stories of success. As shown in the Figure (7.2), these drivers are personal to the learner on an individual level. It includes the perception of confidence and self-efficacy judgment, which underlies one’s learning decisions and is influenced by previous experience and self-regulated learning. The aim of Figure (7.2) is to illustrate the main personal drivers and

motivational factors for engagement and the relationship amongst different personal factors as they emerged from students' attitudes and perceptions in this study. For instance, it explains that self-efficacy judgment influence students' abilities in decision-making and initiating action; it also influences one's behavioural engagement and control, leading to acquiring more confidence and engaging in higher development goals.

As shown in Figure (7.2), social media supported the students' self-regulated learning process and improved their achievements, and eventually added to their confidence even more. Hall and Hall (2010) suggested a close relationship between students' self-efficacy and using social media tools for development. According to Hall and Hall (2010), students' attitudes change when students use social media tools because of the positivity gained from the achieved performance. This was sensed in the study interviews that suggested that skilled and experienced students who demonstrated positive attitudes described engaging in higher goals with the help of social media. Thus they added even more confidence and achievement through using social media in their own personal development.

Thus another critical issue in students' engagement in the development of self-efficacy as emerged from stories of success is the use of strategies of coping and self-regulated learning. These incorporated study skills, reducing stress, cognitive strategies, behavioural engagement, and time management all these were involved in students' positive attitudes and development. This matches the literature on self-regulated learning, which links the personal organization skills to personal self-efficacy and the eventual achievement in the social environment (see Chapter Three). Zimmerman (1989) suggested a constant relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and self-regulated learning and, eventually, academic attainment. Zimmerman (1989) defined self-regulated learning as a general construct that encompasses methods of self-evaluation and goal setting, stress management and emotional

regulation, self-monitoring, and reflection. Approving Zimmerman's (1989) description of self-regulated learners, participants who presented positive attitudes were able to use social media to facilitate their learning, and they were able to face obstacles and distractions and manage their stress levels and emotions until they achieved their goals. Participants of this study also demonstrated awareness of their progress and their emotional needs while completing the task, such as withholding rewards and avoiding competing distractions. As shown in the findings, participants of this study were also able to develop time management techniques to plan their learning tasks based on time allotted slots and limits to overcome distractions. Zimmerman (1989) emphasized the relationship between self-efficacy and self-regulation by suggesting that self-regulation is demonstrated through self-efficacy perceptions. He suggested that self-efficacy perception predicts the student's ability to control behaviour for achievement and, therefore, is helpful for identifying individual differences amongst learners.

My study findings concerning the self-regulated learning strategies used by participants can be aligned with previous research, which shows a steady relationship between social media use and self-regulated learning process (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; McLoughlin & Lee, 2010). Matzat and Vrieling (2016) also found an alliance between self-regulated learning and social media educational use amongst both teachers' and learners' groups. However, this study focus on the learner -rather than on the learning process- enables an understanding of the personal drivers such as skills and factors and its role in the students' engagement.

It worth mentioning that the personal motivations and drivers that emerged from some of the highly engaged participants in this research also present the main challenges for engagement in independent learning and personal development on an individual level, generally. Thus it can be helpful to apply such knowledge for supporting other students. This agrees with Greenhow and Robelia's (2009) study,

which suggests that learners' experiences of using social networks present the current learning literacies negotiated in educational systems. Thus in the educational context, such findings contribute to understanding the challenges for students' engagement and personal development. As these personal drivers emerged from learners' development experiences of using social media, they become in agreement with new trends in students' preparation in the global higher education which emphasise holistic frameworks for students' whole personal development that have replaced the formal focus on a set of skills (Kumar, 2007; Normand & Anderson, 2017).

### **7.1.2 Students' preparation**

From their experiences of using social media the participants' perceived that the transition from high school to university was challenging for them in terms of the increased independent and self-directed learning involved. According to Profanter (2014), there have been improvements in supporting students' transition to Saudi higher education by building their confidence and independence through the introduction of a preparatory year. However, the transition to Saudi higher education where global standards are applied is still challenging for some students with respect to the traditional teaching culture used in high schools. Concurring with Alebaikan (2010), for females the transition to higher education can be even more challenging with respect to conservative social culture. As discussed earlier, the personal motivational factors and drivers detected in this research address some of the personal challenges for students' engagement in self-directed learning and help assist with knowledge about areas of students' shortcomings and needs under current influences. These include self-efficacy, self-awareness, self-evaluation and reflection, time management, organization and coping strategies, and self-regulated learning including effort and emotional regulation.

The findings concerning personal drivers show that awareness of the learning process and self-efficacy present major challenges for students' engagement in independent learning and personal development when they first come to higher education. In accordance with Kitsantas and Dabbagh (2010), learning how to learn and self-organization skills are important challenges in education and for students' preparation under the current influence of technology. Furthermore, this learning awareness and skills build students' confidence and autonomous action for self-directed learning and last throughout the students' life. Fallows and Steven (2000) refer to learning skills, including organization, as the transferable skills in higher education. They enable students to cope and manage their study requirements and their engagement in academic life, and eventually facilitate their transition to the work environment. At the present time, there is increased support for new students in their transition to university from high school with respect to the transferrable, personal, career and life skills in Saudi universities. According to Profanter (2014), the preparatory year that has been introduced in Saudi universities to include training in different skills, including study skills, to increase students' motivation and confidence to engage with the challenges of university and the self-directed learning. For instance, the participants of this research had a preparatory year and some workshops related to study skills and strategies. In spite of this, the findings show that there are differences in the students' engagement in independent learning and life eventually in the critical skills and some students had difficulties with engagement. This suggests that students' preparation did not meet all students' current need to gain the self-organization skills that have become increasingly important under the current influence of social media.

Saudi universities have developed their curriculums to meet global trends in order for their graduates to be competitive. There are increased challenges of self-directed learning in academic requirements, along with increased support for students'

personal and career development, and these contribute to their academic success. According to Kumar (2007), there has been a global trend for universities to focus on students' personal, career and academic development as a holistic framework. In view of this, the personal drivers in this study form a contribution to the understanding of the attitudes and skills necessary to improve students' preparation in Saudi universities for engagement in personal development, including academic performance. This reflects Normand and Anderson's (2017) analysis of the influence of the current social culture of lifelong learning that has emerged with the digital revolution on educational preparation to increase students' need for having appropriate attitudes as well as skills. Their list of attitudes includes self-efficacy, coping with transitions, self-awareness, resilience and confidence, agility, empathy, ethics, media and creativity, communication, emotional intelligence and regulation, and active citizenship.

Furthermore, the attitudes and skills that emerged in this study's findings as personal drivers contribute significantly to research knowledge in the educational context of KSA higher education regarding the students' skills and attitudes that lead to variations in students' engagement levels and why some students engage whilst others are not able to. This highlights the challenges for preparing students and the need for adopting individual and continuous support approaches to improve students' skills and confidence and to avoid negative influences on students' performance.

Nevertheless, it appears that a multitude of other social drivers can influence student engagement, as I will explain next. Based on the theoretical framework adopted, these findings strongly suggest that students can gain benefits in the social environment either from social media or from other resources such as teachers, libraries and friends only when they develop awareness of the learning processes and skills involved. This suggests that the personal drivers of this research need to be taken into consideration in advancing knowledge about the main issues in

students' preparation and continuous skill support in this context to improve students' engagement and avoid any negative influences on their personal development and academic performance under the influences of social media.

The personal drivers that emerged in these findings advance knowledge about evaluating current students' needs in the educational context under current influences and from students' experience in KSA higher education. The personal drivers for engagement are also beneficial to better understand the process of engagement in personal development on the individual level generally that could be applied with different groups other than students.

## **7.2 Social drivers for students' engagement**

Participants also reflected on some of social and organizational issues that influenced their attitudes and engagement levels positively. These drivers and issues were significantly overlapping in the learners' experiences. Consequently, I will discuss these issues under two main points: students' independence and engagement, and social inclusion and learning from others' experiences.

### **7.2.1 Learning choices and students' independence**

The findings show that the freedom of learning choices in social media supported students' independence in evaluating their selves, solving their own problems and positively influenced their critical reflection and engagement. According to Green, Facer, Rudd, Dillon and Humphreys (2005), educational environments that present students with choices increase their ability to meet their personal needs and support their independence and decision-making. Similarly, the study by Bonk, et al. (2015) found that freedom of choice was highly motivating for self-directed learners on an open course provided by a university in another culture. The present study advances this knowledge by presenting a comprehensive and contextual understanding of these social drivers and their relationship with other personal factors in the

educational context. Along with the ability to choose in social media, students also perceived that academic requirements that are challenging gave them important motivation that engaged them in self-directed learning and personal development.

In Saudi higher education there has been increased utilisation of self-directed learning as part of the academic requirement to improve students' skills and personal development. This was reflected in the participants' perceived development when they were challenged by academic presentations, internship practice and assignments that gave them freedom of choice. Self-directed learning is seen in the organized structure of higher education institutions worldwide. These institutions have incorporated specific time to give the students the opportunity to think about how they are going to learn, known as self-study time (Deepwell & Malik, 2008). Loyens et al. (2008) defined self-directed learning in an educational context as when the student not the teacher defines the learning task, meaning that the learning tasks give students the freedom of choosing what to learn. These include problem-based learning and project assignments in which the students are required to select study resources; these have been used extensively in higher education to increase students' independence and prepare them for life-long learning when they leave university.

Similarly, Saudi universities give specific weight in all of the courses for self-directed learning activities for preparing students with skills and attitudes for supporting their future lifelong personal development. For instance, there has been also increased utilisation of research facilities such as electronic libraries and networks to facilitate students' research. In addition, the use of Learning Management Systems (LMS), social media and other technologies has recently received attention for supporting students' self-directed learning. Most Saudi universities utilise technologies to support self-directed learning approaches.



The findings demonstrate students' increased engagement when they were challenged either with academic requirements or to overcome difficulties in their transition. Self-directed learning requirements, such as class presentations, assignments and internships, have been engaging students in high levels of social media use for research and study. Some students, for instance, had high levels of engagement in creative work and college activity from their experiences. They used social media to create academic content and design, to do research and collect votes on issues, and to manage university clubs.

However, as discussed earlier, not all students were able to engage and there were variations in students' attitudes and engagement in self-directed learning based on personal factors such as their life experiences and skills. Unfortunately, there were students who could not engage in learning decisions on their own which influenced their group work and motivation. According to Profanter (2014), students moving to university from secondary school might have different experiences based on different types of school preparation. Some schools in KSA for many reasons do not offer self-directed learning opportunities for students. This is supported by Greenhow and Robelia (2009) in another culture who suggested that some students, for whatever reason, were not engaging in learning through technologies, which means that education systems need to work on preparing students equally with the needed skills. According to Green et al. (2005), increasing students' independence and learning with technologies entails continuous personal support and evaluation of students' needs. Such continuous and personal support and feedback involves issues with respect to increase critical reflection about what, how, why and which are the main learning literacies for students' engagement and motivation. Consequently, the findings suggest that it is important that students be challenged with tasks that engage them in self-directed and independent learning to improve their skills and awareness of how to learn. However, in this context, self-directed learning tasks

have to be based on pedagogies that support students' differences in skills and individual needs to avoid negative influences on their personal development.

### **7.2.2 Social inclusion and learning from others' experiences**

It could be argued from the findings of this study that social inclusion and ability to share and learn from others' experiences through social media have significantly influenced students' attitudes and engagement levels in their own personal development, in self-directed learning and in academic life. Students of the present study indicated community influence, university influence, teacher influence and peer influence on their engagement. This has been recognized by universities internationally which have tried to meet the new generation's preferences by increasing communication and constant support through social media and other technologies. Nevertheless, it is difficult now to provide personal and constant support and feedback, or inclusive strategies that meet different needs, without the support of technologies (Kurt, 2018).

The findings show that students perceived university influence on their engagement. The university environment had an important influence on students' engagement and personal development which was seen in the students' experiences. Generally, students perceived that the online format of support through social media adopted by university in this context was an important driver for their engagement in academic activities and career development. Along with the global interest in higher education in students' personal and career development, Al-Khalifa and Garcia (2013) indicated increased utilization of social media in Saudi universities for informing students and engaging them in college life as well as in some academic decisions. In accordance with this, the participants in this study reflected positively on some efforts in the context for supporting their engagement in extra-curricular activities, academic life and students' clubs. Participants reported benefits for their engagement in social

clubs and college communities through university social media accounts, and increased awareness of patterns of social relationships and their engagement with friends. They also reported increased participation in workshops and were more informed of career development opportunities; they reported on several benefits on their levels of motivation and engagement in personal development on the campus. This reflects Junco et al. (2011) study on faculty use of Twitter for engaging students for both academic and co-curricular activities to support their personal development using different inclusive strategies such as event and campus reminders.

A recent study by Alghamdi and Plunkett (2018) shows similar findings with respect to increased perception of female involvement in academic life from university support through social media. The authors attributed this noticeable involvement to the cultural situation of females in this context. This could be aligned with these study participants being females as, with respect to several cultural limitations, they perceived increased awareness of social activities and engagement in personal development. They also pointed to benefits of activities and workshops from the college coverage of activities on YouTube, Snap Chat and Twitter, which was more suitable for their free times. This study advances Alghamdi and Plunkett's (2018) knowledge from students' lived experiences and presents many contextual factors involved in students' attitudes and perceptions.

Students also reported on faculty and teacher influences on their engagement, particularly in academic self-directed learning. Participants perceived higher motivation levels from faculty who presented models of personal development from their accounts on social media and perceived that social media were an inclusive way to learn from the teachers' experience. In addition, students reported positive effects on their engagement when teachers used inclusive pedagogies that met their different learning needs and when they took whatever opportunity was available to enrich their experiences. These inclusive pedagogies were reflected in faculty use of

LMS and social media for informing and continuously supporting students personally and equally. The findings show positive attitudes and increased engagement in self-directed learning when faculty updated students regularly with informative and quality resources and provided continuous and informative feedback through LMS.

Students, for instance, pointed to some faculty using different and quality forms of personal support resources including different types of videos and activities that met different needs and preferences.

In addition, faculty who gave students equal opportunity to be updated with everything they needed in their course study through LMS reduced students' fear of missing information during the class and influenced their self-directed learning.

Similarly, Al-Fahad's (2009) study in one KSA university revealed that adopting pedagogical continuous and constant personal support through technology influenced students' attitudes and satisfaction, which increased their retention.

Furthermore, participants perceived an influence on their engagement and strategic involvement from organized teachers who updated them with course events and plans in advance through LMS or social media. This was important to assist their organization and time management for academic study. In this case students perceived that updated LMS with organized notifications of course events and a range of informative quality resources that supported each of them significantly influenced their engagement in organization and self-directed learning of academic courses and reduced their stress. Similar findings on the importance of the teacher student relationship and continuous personal support and feedback through technology on university students' engagement in self-directed learning were presented by Deepwell and Malik (2008) and Hrastinski and Aghaee (2012).

In addition, participants perceived peer influence to have a great impact on their engagement in this context. This finding reflects those of many studies in the literature, including Saudi studies, which show that integration with communities

through social media and networks increases the sharing of experiences which influences relationships and motivation for independent and self-directed learning (Alsolamy, 2017; Selwyn, 2009). However, according to Alsolamy (2017) there is a lack of literature about the motivations of communities. This research extends knowledge on motivations of communities as presented in the findings with respect to personal drivers such as self-efficacy, personal values including helping others and opportunity awareness and social drivers such as social inclusion. This educational research therefore is in line with Tay and Allen's (2011) argument that educationally and within education settings social inclusion should come before technology in order to increase students' motivation and engagement.

All participants in this study reported benefits from peer influence in WhatsApp informal classroom groups and student communities on their engagement and motivation for self-directed learning. They reported that, in these groups, they influenced and were influenced by their peers' experiences, which increased their excitement and sharing of experiences and knowledge. Further, they reported that the effect of these communities continued to support their excitement in the class with a climate of interest and empathy in knowing each other and helping each other. Alibrahim (2014) pointed out that students in Saudi universities were interested in analyzing differences in thinking amongst themselves in the social network, which influenced their social integration in the class. Similarly, the findings of the present study demonstrate that classroom communities increase students' reflection and understanding of each other and support the development of an inclusive environment in the class based on this increased knowledge of their peers. The findings also show that these communities provide constant and immediate social support and feedback and that this makes students feel comfortable, combats isolation and reduces study stress. Students even reported on peer teaching each other using the facilities on these sites. However, they also believed that, when

students held attitudes of social inclusion and helping others, the ability to share others' experiences increased their awareness of the issues that were important to their studies and life and that this increased their ability to persist in their motivation and excitement for engagement.

### **7.3 Difficulties and barriers for students' engagement**

The exploration of barriers and difficulties in students' engagement from the students' different attitudes is a significant contribution of this study. The findings present several sources of negative attitudes; some of them are personal to the learner and others are caused by social, organizational and pedagogical barriers. The findings also present several issues suggesting the reasons why some students are unmotivated. It is difficult to draw a line between different barriers and difficulties that emerged as they intertwined significantly in these experiences. This discussion includes lack of awareness of the learning process, personal and academic difficulties, and organizational pedagogical barriers and difficulties.

#### **7.3.1 Detecting learning difficulties from social media personal use**

Some students presented negative attitudes to the influence of social media on their own personal development. The findings of the present study support Westerman et al. (2016) that students who present negative attitudes towards social media were influenced by their negative experiences and combined that with lack of awareness of the learning process. This is expected in this research which has focused on lived experiences and attitudes, meaning that students' use of social media presents a broader conceptual view of their learning choices and skills. Although there can be several personal reasons for negative attitudes and experiences in social media, the focus group interviews strongly suggest that students' negative attitudes towards social media are combined with students' unawareness of the learning process. Consequently, the present study finding show that students' attitudes and their

perceived influence of social media on their personal development can predict students' personal and academic difficulties. This is aligned with research that predicts academic engagement or disengagement and college adjustment from social media use in other cultures (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2015; Westerman et al. 2016). The present findings add more explanation on how students develop negative attitudes from their lived experiences and stories of failure.

There are several cultural and personal reasons for having a negative experience influenced by social media. Westerman et al. (2016) reported on some personal sources of negative attitudes as a result of late adoption or negative past experiences of use, which contributed to lack of skills and self-efficacy. Conforming to other literature, lack of awareness contributed a major barrier to students' development (Sharpe et al., 2010). According to Oliver (2013), lack of awareness of the learning process is caused by a view of technology that disconnects it from the personal context of the learner or the teacher assuming that technology is a separate entity when use. This means that learning difficulties and teaching problems, along with feedback and support issues, are not coming to the surface in research and in practice that adopts this view. Eventually this becomes a common sense that influences teachers' and students' awareness in education systems. For instance, instead of viewing technology use as underlying learner choices and learning skills, or teacher choices and teaching skills, this view determines that technology come before learning and pedagogy. In education this view can cause problems as learning becomes more connected to using technologies and networks, such lack of integration in the curriculum influences the meeting of the individual needs of self-directed learners with a general unawareness of the learning or teaching processes underlying the using of technology. This affects both students and teachers and the quality of education generally.

Al-Shehri's (2010) study in the Saudi higher education sector pointed to this barrier of unawareness caused by putting technology before learning and pedagogy, when implementation and the negative influence of this unawareness on meeting the self-directed learners' needs. Reflecting Tay and Allen's (2011) argument on which came first - technology or pedagogy or technology or learning – this suggests that when there is an assumption that technology comes first this was responsible for students' lack of motivation and engagement in educational settings.

In education this unawareness of the learning processes underlying one's use emerges as a belief that technology will promote students' skills and independent learning whilst, in reality, this assumption applies to only a portion of the student population (Bennett & Maton, 2010). Consequently, the difficulties of engagement remain invisible in the educational context, even for the students themselves, who blamed social media for causing these difficulties. This reflects Greenhow and Robelia's (2009) argument in another culture that students who lack the necessary skills for out-of-school practice or during the course of their lives, for whatever reason, would have difficulties in their independent learning and that eventually this would affect their personal and academic development. However, students' struggles and need for skills remained invisible and they would 'slip through the cracks' of the current education system's practices that rely heavily on technology whilst disintegrating it from learner characteristics and educational support.

That the disintegration of learning or teaching processes underlying technology use has its influence on the practice of education can be demonstrated, for instance, by emphasizing social media risks or opportunities (Cranmer, Selwyn, & Potter, 2009; Krutka & Carpenter, 2016). According to Westerman et al. (2016), this would not prevent the risk, on the contrary it would influence students' awareness of their role and the learning process underlying social media use. It would also make the teacher less responsible for students' support and feedback on their difficulties in self-



directed learning practices. The findings of the present study show that at least some students exhibited critical understanding of social media risk and of the potential benefits to be gained from social media only because they had developed awareness of the learning processes and control required for their use.

Westerman et al. (2016) suggested that negative attitudes towards the influence of social media on personal development were usually associated with a lack of awareness of the learning process underlying social media use, combined with a lack of awareness of personal needs and the use of strategies that lack control, self-regulation or study skills. When students do not perform, they make false attributions of failure to social media rather than to the strategy they use, which completely hides the learning problem, and prevents educational support. "One is not always consciously aware of the multiple sources of influence on their attitudes" (p.55). In line with this, participants of this study who held negative attitudes in the interviews, whenever they failed to engage or whenever they perceived negative influences, reported false attributions to social media or to themselves rather than to the strategies they used, meaning that they lacked awareness of the learning process and of their learning needs. By contrast, participants who held positive attitudes revealed critical awareness of the learning process and therefore reported accurate attributions to their own strategies as discussed in the personal drivers.

The findings of this study suggest that students' unawareness of the learning process is closely connected with a disintegrated view of technology combined with the lack of an inclusive pedagogy that supports different students' needs. Concurring with Alebaikan (2010), traditional teaching is still the main mode in Saudi universities in spite of the use of technologies, which influences educational quality. The present study shows that, in spite of developments in students' preparation skills, the current self-directed learners' different characteristics and needs have not been incorporated, which causes difficulties for their engagement under the influence of

social media. It is challenging for the education system and for teachers to present a quality education and satisfy current students' needs without integrating pedagogy with technology. Consequently, there is a need to raise awareness of this issue and to provide teacher training that focuses on self-directed learners' different needs, and to provide personal support to avoid negative influences on students' performance and personal development. It is difficult to identify the reasons why some students are unmotivated because these might arise from many other factors over the course of a student's previous life. Nonetheless, all students need to be supported and it is beneficial to raise awareness of these issues in the educational context.

### **7.3.2 Personal and academic difficulties**

A few students in this study reported highly negative attitudes and a negative influence of social media on their personal development combined with a low level of motivation and a lack of learning and coping skills; these came to the surface as personal and academic difficulties. Examples of these included social disconnection from family and friends combined with low motivation, academic difficulties and low achievement. These problems differed in level from one student to another; the most commonly reported were social disconnection, addiction to social media use and lack of control, and depression. These problems were associated with academic and personal difficulties such as the inability to keep up with academic requirements, stress and social disconnection. Stirling's (2016) findings in another culture reported on some university students' disconnection and disorganization associated with feelings of being lost, influenced by social media. Alwagait, Shahzad and Alim (2015) in a Saudi university, found that male Saudi universities reported excessive use of social media for football and movies which had a negative impact on students' academic performance.

Students who present negative attitudes and difficulties need personal support to increase their awareness and build their confidence; these have been influenced by the frustration of continuous failure of control in social media activities such as games and shopping. These failures lead students to lack sufficient confidence in their ability to control their use or even to interact face-to-face with others. Social disconnection has also been reported to influence friendships, motivation levels and the ability to adapt and overcome difficulties. This explains why those students developed highly negative attitudes towards social media combined with depression and excessive use. Since they did not perceive themselves as students who had difficulty in their strategies and learning, they were not aware that they needed to seek help or support. Rather, they held strongly negative attitudes towards social media because they believed that social media were not good enough, which made their difficulties even worse. One student, for instance, blamed social media for making her “lazy”, “stressed” and unable to process information for examination study.

Indicators such as excessive use, social disconnection, and lack of social skills or academic difficulties, need to be encountered and assessed by teachers to provide the needed support before they contribute to academic problems and result in poor performance (Alwagait, Shahzad, & Alim, 2015; Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). For instance, the participants of this study recognised that some of their peers had difficulties and had limited family support, teacher feedback or university support; thus, they noticed other students’ problems and difficulties arising from their use of social media. This indicates that support services and teaching practices in this context were functioning in a disconnected way and were not integrated with the current self-directed learning practices or with current students’ problems.

According to Westerman et al. (2016), leaving students without offering support and increasing their self-awareness can increase their risk of failure and negative

attitudes from lack of control and confidence in their abilities. It is important for teachers, parents and counsellors to provide the personal support that is needed to engage students and increase their confidence once they have increased their awareness of the learning process underlying social media. According to Westerman et al. (2016), when students have raised their awareness and engaged in positive experiences in social media they change their attitudes.

The findings of this research show that there is a need to increase educators' awareness of the learning process underlying social media use along with detection of learning difficulties for all students as basic issues in supporting students. This awareness goes beyond the narrow vision of social media's universal risks, or promises, and engage more in students' learning problems. Most of students' personal problems in social media result from lack of time management and organizational study skills, a finding similar to that of Alwagait et al. (2015), who suggest increasing time management support and workshops for all students as a way to tackle educational problems in social media.

The findings of this study suggest that lack of awareness of the learning processes underlying social media use contributes not only to students' lack of preparation but also to their poor performance and wellbeing problems. According to Crook (2012), focus group interviews with school children have shown that students demonstrate sophisticated awareness of social media risks and safe use; however, this alone will not prevent social media risk. Similarly, in this study, students with negative attitudes had awareness of social media risks but this did not prevent them from being at risk. A multitude of factors could be involved. Nevertheless, the findings strongly suggest that students gain benefits from social media and engage in development, but only when they develop awareness of the learning processes and the learning strategies and skills needed. Otherwise, lack of awareness will expose students to greater social media risks (Westerman et al., 2016).

The findings show that students who have difficulties in independent learning will lag behind their peers under the influence of social media and may face low academic performance and drop out. This concurs with Al-Fahad (2009) who suggested that continuous personal support and feedback for students through social media could improve their retention. Universities could also take advantage of electronic self-assessment methods and e-quizzes on LMS to adopt strategies to raise students' self-awareness of their needs and help detect difficulties in independent learning and improve their self-regulated learning strategies. The findings also show that there are several intertwined reasons for students' negative attitudes and failure to engage, including cultural, family, past experiences, late adoption, social skills, lack of time, and other problems that are difficult to measure or identify. Consequently, all students need to access support on a continuous basis and to have their transferable and self-learning skills assessed regularly.

### **7.3.3 Organisational and pedagogical barriers**

Students' negative attitudes were also influenced by organizational and pedagogical barriers and difficulties that occurred at different levels in all students' experiences. On both organizational and teaching levels there is a need to realize new roles to facilitate students' motivation and engagement. Several barriers and mismatches of strategies influenced students' attitudes and engagement negatively in this context. These include lack of inclusive pedagogy, lack of personal support and lack of organization.

#### **Lack of Continuous personal support and feedback**

Personal and continuous support and feedback are important issue in students' engagement in self-directed learning, as emerged from students' experiences. It was not hard to provide continuous personal support on the LMS if the teacher had quality course materials and plans based on pedagogical knowledge. It was also not

hard to provide personal feedback, monitoring of progress and self-assessment using LMS when there was enough pedagogical knowledge. There has been a rapid increase in utilisation of technologies in formal education in KSA higher education to support self-directed learners. However, concurring with Al-Shehri (2010) and Alebaikan (2010), this development has been influenced by administrative and technical decisions and training has been limited to technical issues poorly integrated with pedagogical preparation for supporting students' individual needs.

Consequently, I strongly suggest that future training for teachers in this context encounters the pedagogical approaches that are needed to support self-directed learners with technology, as emerged from these findings. These include inclusive pedagogy, helping students to evaluate and self-assess their selves and needs, feedback, personal support and quality educational resources and production, course planning and organization.

As discussed previously, the main social drivers engaging students in their own personal development in social media include the ability to choose based on their needs, besides flexibility in time and pace, along with continuous support and social feedback. According to Green et al. (2005), supporting students' independence and self-directed learning entails providing challenges and choices, along with ensuring their ability to make choices and their organizational skills, such as reflecting and developing awareness of their own needs through self-assessment and personal feedback. These parameters are important to meet different students' needs that have been influenced significantly by their self-directed learning.

It is recognized that current advances in technologies provide education systems with different methods and opportunities to meet individualized needs for continuous support, feedback and performance monitoring (Clayton & Halliday, 2017). For instance, individual personal support can be facilitated by teachers in KSA

universities through the use of the Learning Management System (LMS), which includes tools for providing continuous support along with tools to assist monitoring of students' progress and the facility to administer self-assessment e-quizzes to clarify students' needs. Teachers are now empowered with technologies, so they are able to provide continuous support and to support students with choices that meet different needs. They can also monitor the individual learner's progress for supportive feedback.

One point that acts as a barrier to student engagement and motivation is that some teachers tend to use LMS and social media for tailoring the study materials instead for allowing choices to students, which leads to a lack of pedagogical integration. This was reflected in Clayton and Halliday's (2017) argument that the use of technologies in education should not be understood as tailoring the study materials; in contrast it should be for supporting students' independent and self-directed learning where the teacher needs to support students with a variety of choices and resources to meet their differing needs. Otherwise the students will become passive and unmotivated. According to Clayton and Halliday (2017), lack of understanding of how to use technologies in education can influence students' preparation and lead to a lack of independence and an inability to solve or even realize problems by themselves, either in their lives or future professions.

The findings suggest that not all teachers were able to deal with students' individual learning needs, which negatively influenced students' attitudes and engagement in academic self-directed learning. For instance, the findings suggest that teachers had not taken advantage of the available opportunities and resources to enrich students' learning experiences, such as by video links. They had also failed to provide continuous personal support through resources that met different needs on LMS and this led students to waste time on YouTube finding the resources they needed.

It is difficult nowadays to provide continuous personal support and feedback for a large number of students without the use of technologies. This finding reflects that of Al-Shehri's (2010) study that most initiatives for incorporating technologies in this context have not been paired with rising awareness of their educational and pedagogical applications. Even when technologies are available, studies have shown that some teachers lack the ability or pedagogical knowledge to take advantage of their opportunities to support different student needs (Alabdulaziz & Higgins, 2016). This also reflects Deepwell and Malik's (2008) and Hrastinski and Aghaee's (2012) studies in other cultures which reported on university students' perceived increased need for continuous teacher support and feedback.

The difficulties and barriers sensed by students in this context could be attributed to their lack of awareness the individual pedagogical approaches allied with the use of technologies in the current age. There is a dearth of evidence of policy for integration of technologies in the curriculum by paying attention to students' differing needs, skills and individual learning approaches (Alebaikan, 2010; Al-Shehri, 2010). For instance, the findings show that all four areas identified for students' support for self-directed learning still need to be addressed.

Increasing students' engagement through personal support approaches are still new in the realm of the traditional learning culture that is designed for whole class-based approaches, and most initiatives for developing students' skills and self-directed learning through technology in this context have not given thought to the pedagogical implications (Al-Shehri, 2010).

In light of this difficulty, there must be increased care to ensure that all students receive quality personal and continuous support and that advantage is taken of the available technologies such as LMS to support pedagogies for individual learning approaches. These include providing self-assessment e-quizzes, monitoring



progress and feedback, and providing a wide range of supportive course resources that meet different needs, course plans, methods and events.

### **Lack of Inclusive pedagogy**

The findings suggest that teachers do not always adopt an inclusive pedagogy, which is perceived as a barrier for students' involvement. In the first place, lack of inclusive pedagogy reflects directly on teachers' use of LMS, social media or other technologies for personal support. Kurt (2018) defined inclusive pedagogy as that occurring when the teacher ensures that all students have equal access to learning resources, skills and materials, and where the teacher ensures that all students are aware of the learning methods and what is required of them. This implies recognition of student differences and allowing for personal support and feedback.

The findings show that teachers who adopted inclusive strategies with students used LMS to support all students equally and personally, with regular updates on course events and any changes in course readings and enriched them with quality educational resources that met different needs. The ways of informing students with advance organization or changes in course events was mainly through LMS and sometimes through social media. Students perceived the teachers who took responsibility to inform them regularly of anything they needed to know in their course as more knowledgeable of their needs. Further, students suggested that lack of information from teachers on LMS increased their stress with respect to course events and led to a greater reliance on the other students in the class, which influenced their engagement negatively.

Due to the limited possibility for face-to face teacher support to be inclusive for all students, teachers could instead use the opportunities of technology. Some students reported that they were not able to keep up in the class, that they missed important information, and that they needed continuous personal support from the teacher.

This is in accordance with Junco, Heiberger and Loken (2011), who suggested ways of supporting students personally to increase their engagement, such as helping them to know and connect with each other, giving class event reminders, campus event reminders, promoting the student teacher relationship, giving immediate feedback and help with organizing study.

Another point that students reported was that one of the main drivers for engagement was the ability to share and learn from others' experiences. However, students realized that, within the formal academic context, the environment was not always supportive of inclusion or sharing of experiences and that their teachers lacked knowledge of their different abilities. For instance, the findings show that their social cohesion in assisted group work had been affected by a lack of teacher supervision or individual support. According to Boyd (2007), students could impose a climate of segregation in the class and there were incidents that needed the teacher's intervention to facilitate the inclusion of all students. It was noted in the findings that students may develop emotions related to how they treat each other in groups, with some members displaying lack of cooperation. There were several reasons for this lack of cooperation, one of which was learning difficulties. Alibrahim (2014) also reported on interpersonal problems in groups, which resulted from the assessment methods adopted and the lack of individual supervision.

In addition, teachers did not always put pedagogies of social inclusion and experiential growth into practice, which affected students' engagement. The findings point to students' preference for teachers who facilitated their integration and sharing of experiences, as this increased their enthusiasm and independence along with the organization of inclusive and interactive teaching strategies. This is in line with the findings of Schroeder, Minocha and Schneider (2010) who summarized different means of supporting students' engagement and motivation levels. Examples of these were to foster relationships, which could improve persistence and prevent isolation,

support peer influence, improve the student-teacher relationship and give immediate feedback with a better understanding of a student's needs.

Social media showcase the sharing of experiences and products, and this has many advantages for students' identity development through encouraging them towards high quality creativity and social inclusion. Junco et.al (2011) also suggest some ways of supporting students' engagement through social media, such as helping students to know and connect with each other, class event reminders, campus event reminders, student teacher relationship, immediate feedback and organizing study groups.

### **Distraction and overload**

Students reported that organized and fixed planned personal support of courses through the proper utilization of LMS had encouraged their self-directed learning and minimized their distractions. In contrast, lack of organization or advanced plans of course notifications or personal support on LMS created barriers for their deep strategic involvement. All students in this study expressed the need to access to up-to-date knowledge, quality resources, feedback and information on course events. The lack of this from teachers with the increased number of networks amongst students could compromise students' independence and lead to pedagogical problems, as reported. This made students rely too much on their friends on WhatsApp discussions, which was perceived as stressful, especially with respect to information related to courses and notifications.

Students also wanted clear formal statements of consistent organized ways of interacting with their teachers through social media or LMS. For instance, the findings show that not all use of LMS and social media was beneficial, and some uses were not supportive or caused distraction and overload. This appeared in students' appreciation of teachers who used social media to plan ahead and to

organize groups. In this context, initiatives in learning technologies had given little thought to students' individualization, which is the main aim of introducing these technologies, which can explain students' dissatisfaction. These views and barriers related to organization are in line with the studies of Selwyn (2012) and Matzat and Vrieling (2016) that point to members of the net generation being highly self-regulated with a central focus on their personal goals, and thus they expected their teachers also to be self-regulated.

This finding was not in agreement with Matzat and Vrieling (2016) who suggested that teachers who used social media and technologies with students were more organized and self-regulated. Not all teachers' use of social media or LMS was beneficial for students; for instance, students reported the use of long YouTube videos or boring PowerPoint presentations and the overload caused by assisted discussions on Twitter. The findings show that teacher communication through different media such as social media, LMS and e-mail for courses was distracting and caused overload. Therefore, the findings of this research suggest that teacher organization, inclusive pedagogy and the quality of personal support and resources are important factors in student engagement.

Under the current global practices in higher education which focus on personal and career development, personal support is also involved on the university and curriculum levels. Krutka and Carpenter (2016) suggested that raising critical awareness of answering questions such as what, where, when, how, with whom and why significantly influence students' development. They suggest that these opportunities are the new literacies of learning which need to be explicitly revealed to increase students' levels of motivation and engagement. It could be seen that, in other cultures, new opportunities have been added to traditional counseling to increase students' access to on-going personal support. For instance, DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield and Fiore's (2012) study in another culture used social

media site personal support as an intervention to change students' attitudes, increase their engagement and adjustment to college, and assist in their difficulties when they first came to university. Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2015) suggested that personal support through social media and emails had been applied in some universities by adopting a clear policy for continuous personal support over the study period. Similarly, Green et al. (2005) suggested four key areas to increase students' self-directed learning through technologies: first, ensuring that learners were capable of making informed educational decisions; second, diversifying and recognizing different forms of skills and knowledge; third, creating diverse learning environments; and, fourth, including learner-focused forms of feedback and assessment. The four areas should be seen to apply on both structural (curriculum) and pedagogical (teaching) levels to avoid mismatches in practices and to ensure continuous support for students.

It became clear throughout the course of this study that lack of organized personal support for students on both university and teaching levels caused difficulties for students' skill development. It also became clear that some students lacked awareness and skills and that they had not had their abilities assessed or supported. The findings also show that students in this context had not received personal support or feedback on their progress, either from tutors or counsellors, and that several students struggled in the transition to college because of lack of skills without the ability to find support, and that students experienced technical problems without continuous support provided. All four areas identified by Green et al. (2005) still needed to be addressed in this context to organize and support the individual learning of students. This explains the organizational barriers and difficulties that were perceived by students throughout the course of this study and as shown in the findings.

Personal support and individual learning approaches are still new in this context. This was detected in this study, in relation to the diversity of students' attitudes. This means that the efficiency of personal support by the university could be improved by adopting clear policies to provide equal and on-going personal support through technologies. Organization of this support could also reduce conflicts between individual support efforts, which have sometimes been perceived as distracting on the networks. This is supported by Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2015), who indicated universities' use of policies to ensure consistency to achieve its advantages for all students. In the long run, sufficient planning and policy are needed to ensure quality and equality in education, to organize the individual efforts of faculty, and to provide statements of formal communication with students to prevent unorganized behaviours on the networks that might cause difficulties. The increased use of technologies and networks, including social media, amongst academics and students in this context do not necessarily mean a better quality of education or greater equality as there are mismatches between pedagogies that do not support individual students' needs for self-directed learning, such as the lack of individual feedback and lack of organization which caused problems and barriers for students' engagement.

#### **7.4 Perceived benefits of social media on students' engagement in independent learning and personal development**

The findings from students' experiences confirm that social media support students' change in attitudes and engagement in personal development and independent learning. Participants of this study reported a change in their attitudes with noticeably improved skills and confidence that influenced their motivation and social engagement. This can be explained from the self-efficacy theory (see Chapter3). Bandura (1989) suggested that one can improve self-abilities and strengthen skills by using self-efficacy resources. These involve successfully participating in the

experience, vicarious experiences, and social support. According to Argyris and Xu (2016) and Hu, Gu and Zhang (2017), social media provide sources of self-efficacy, such as social support and sharing of experiences that can be used to expand one's skills and abilities, such as career development and intercultural intelligence.

Matching the self-efficacy theory, there have been several studies in the literature that point to change in attitudes in terms of social confidence and engagement.

DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield, and Fiore's (2012) study also has used a social media site as personal support to change students' attitudes to college adjustment. Participants' perceived change in attitudes and confidence in terms of increased skills could also be aligned with the reviewed literature on professionals' use of social media. These studies concluded that social media enabled reflection on their practice and as a self-development tool to engage in professional development (Carpenter & Krutka, 2015; Visser, Evering, & Barrett, 2014). The social media influence on changing attitudes was also reported in several studies in KSA. Social media have created remarkable social changes in a society strongly influenced by culture. AlSaggaf (2004). For instance, argued that online communities influenced offline communities and indicated "participants, in addition to gaining self-confidence, became open-minded in their thinking, more aware of the personal characteristics of individuals within their society" (p.1). This study's participants similarly denoted an increase in reflection and realization of differences within their culture. Some students explained how that helped to engage them with ideas beyond their thinking boundaries and increased their confidence.

The influence of social media was also remarkable concerning the female status in KSA. Alydreessy et al.'s (2017) study, for instance, pointed to the noticeable influence of social media on increasing female confidence and social integration concerning a conservative culture. The technologies in this context have helped females with greater opportunities for social integration and development. Equal to

this, the female participants of this study also report on increased multicultural awareness with remarkable influence on their friendships, and relationships, and increased confidence in their self-presentation, communication skills, and social integration. This also matches the findings of a recent study by Alghamdi and Plunkett (2018), which remarked that females perceived a prominent impact and benefit of using social media on their integration in academic life compared to their male counterparts.

Another issue concerning the perceived change in attitudes is the remarkable perceived academic self-efficacy that reproduces in the students' confidence and activity, as described in the findings. Some interviewed participants even claimed increased positive influence on their GPA from utilising social media to facilitate their self-regulated stud. This can be aligned with other studies that suggest the positive effect of social media on students' academic performance and self-regulated study (Alwagait et al., 2015; Dabbagh, Kitsantas, Al-Freih, & Fake, 2015). This is also in line with the reviewed literature on the role of social media in supporting self-regulated learning and, eventually, achievement and change in attitudes (Chapter 3). A recent Saudi study (Alghamdi & Plunkett, 2018) also pointed out that students perceived better academic performance from social media use.

Some participants also reported a change in attitude towards academic study with increased motivation levels and performance. The change in attitudes and students' confidence could be also be seen from the students' activity that I personally noticed when conducting this research in the setting. The findings show that there has been a visible change in the traditional classroom environment, and students are no longer can be described as passive and quiet. This could be attributed to the confidence gained from self-directed learning in social media in the last few years. As described in the findings, some students in this research confidently exhibited talents with



increased productivity and increased levels of engagement in the learning process, in-class presentations, as well as in other co-curricular and collective activities on campus. Hemmi et al. (2009) study in another culture also pointed to students' increased control and confidence with increased activity in higher education classrooms. The authors attributed this to the confidence students demonstrated from their self-directed learning and utilization of social media.

Thus students of this study perceived that social media supported a change in their attitudes and helped them engaged in continuous goals of personal development. According to Westerman, Daniel, and Bowman (2016), when students had positive learning experiences of using social media in learning, this reproduces a positive change in attitudes, which is followed by more engagement in higher goals of self-development. Similarly, participants reported that they were able to access improved support from social media, and from this, they perceived the development of different life skills. This is in line with the self-efficacy theory, as social media as tools present opportunities to strengthen and develop personal skills and confidence. Hall and Hall (2010) suggested that:

Web tools enhance personal, academic self-efficacy, and subsequently, individual agency. It is argued that the personal developments offered by these tools present opportunities for academics and learners to enhance their self-efficacy, to take action, and to increase their capacity for decision-making in the curriculum. (p.255)

However, it should be noted that based on the self-efficacy theory adopted in this research, only participants who were self-aware and reflective were able to engage in personal development. They are independent of using social media to select and filter information related to their needs and development and, therefore, to achieve the benefits and changes in their attitudes and skills. This is in accordance with Bandura (2001b, p. 11):

The rapid pace of informational, social, and technological change is placing a premium on personal efficacy for self-development and self-renewal throughout the life course. In the past, students' educational development was largely determined by the schools in which they were assigned. Nowadays, the Internet provides vast opportunities for students to control their own learning. They now have the best libraries, museums, laboratories, and instructors at their fingertips, unrestricted by time and place. Good self-regulators expand their knowledge and cognitive competencies; poor self-regulators fall behind.

Thus, the findings stress that there are benefits of social media on changing attitudes and development. The increased use of social media amongst Saudis, including students, has been reported to create opportunities for learning, growth, and productivity in this context (Al-Khalifa & Garcia, 2013, p. 66). However, at the same time, the findings also stress that there are several uncertainties from the openness and unknown communities of social media that can influence and change students' attitudes and development negatively. Alharbi (2017) suggests that the benefits of social media cannot be taken for granted for all students and advised the need for increased care in education for improving students' critical thinking and awareness to avoid negative influences on student attitudes and development.

### **7.5 Issues raised in the students' experiences**

The findings of this study suggest several challenges in the educational environment in KSA that have been associated with increased use of social media in self-directed learning and its influences on students' views. The students exhibited a diverse range of attitudes and views, with critical awareness and discernment of different institutional, curriculum, teaching and learning issues. Crook (2012) conducted focus groups with students and found that they had sophisticated knowledge related to curriculum and their learning. Students in this study further explained the frustrations that faced them in trying to meet their self-directed learning needs. It also pointed to some of the mismatches and conflicts arising in these new network practices within the educational traditional context; this is in line with literature from other cultures

(Hemmi, Bayne, & Land, 2009). The students' views presented the diversity of their attitudes and uses, in line with Crook's (2012) findings which suggested that students' views of technologies were complex because they could also be, to a large extent, shaped by the different practices in the context. Similarly, students in this study, despite their diverse attitudes, pointed to shared issues of concern in the context. The main theme relating to challenges, in the students' views, were challenges related to curriculum and challenges related to increased differences in self-directed learning and skills.

### **7.5.1 Challenges related to curriculum**

According to Crook (2012), students had developed critical awareness of the shortcomings of educational settings and pedagogies from using social media. In the interviews the students pointed to the environment of the university, the curriculum, the learning and teaching culture and values, including assessment methods, the instructors and technologies which played a substantial role in their choices of learning and engagement. Additionally, the students seemed to pay attention to the meaning of their practices of learning in social media and their relation to the curriculum choices in this context. These support the idea in the literature of a mismatch between organization and teaching and other educational system practices with students' needs. According to Krutka and Carpenter (2016), social media facilitated a wide range of innovative pedagogies that engage in experiential and lived experience learning. Examples of these are visual forms of knowledge, real life context learning and cultural and intercultural interactions. As shown in the findings, students developed their own individualized strategies on social media, which influenced their preferences in the curriculum, and they voiced the need to increase real life and experiential and social interactive learning opportunities. Students in the present study reported engagement in social media in applying knowledge in real contexts and in facilitating theoretical concepts through engaging with different forms

of knowledge. They reported engagement in hands-on and experiential activities, including interaction with real cases and experts. For instance, some of them reported applying measures to real cases in their research assignments or interacting with native language teachers with the help of social media.

In their view, this was reflected as demands to diversify the curriculum and forms of knowledge. They pointed to a lack of hands-on and real-life context and experimental activities in opposition to a focus on theoretical knowledge in the curriculum and assessment. They doubted that this approach of theoretical knowledge would prepare them for their future in the teaching profession, so they increased their reliance on social media to self-engage and develop. They pointed to the need to be challenged in all of their courses with experiential opportunities, as in the case of the challenges of internship that would engage them in learning to apply theoretical knowledge in real life.

In spite of the increased focus on personal development and skills and the use of technologies to support students' self-directed learning in this context, students perceived that lack of challenges and assessment method were barriers for their engagement. Rahimi, Berg and Veen (2015) pointed to a lack of integration between the skills required from students and the assessment methods that relied on multiple-choice examinations, which failed technology's promises to improve self-directed learning and skills. This was evident in the student interviews as they pointed to the mismatch between the attitudes held by their teachers and the assessment methods they adopted. They were asked to go beyond the textbook, to explore and to discover; however, the examination was tightly restricted to the phrases used in textbooks as multiple-choice statements. This was also reported as a mismatch between the practices of exploration and learning that were important outside the university, and the practices of academic knowledge that were restricted to textbook phrases of multiple-choice tests that were widely used in this context.

The participants perceived that times and strict schedules in this context were barriers for their development and they looked forward to a reorganization of the times allotted for courses based on the new self-directed learning practices. Some students further suggested the need for more flexibility in terms of choices in the curriculum, such as choosing what to learn, and the possibility of reducing face-to-face contact, especially for those who come from distant areas.

These perceptions of self-directed learners are aligned with those of Green et al. (2005) who pointed out that enabling self-directed learning through technologies in the current age required the development of students' skills and their capabilities of making learning choices, and the diversification and recognition of different forms of skills and knowledge, the creation of diverse learning environments, and learner focused forms of feedback and assessment. These dimensions and demands were for the curriculum in large; however, they also apply on the pedagogical level.

### **7.5.2 Challenges related to teachers**

On the pedagogical level, as shown in the findings, teachers' strategies played an important role as either barriers or drivers for students' engagement. This was in accordance with the studies of Deepwell and Malik (2008) and Hrastinski and Aghaee (2012), who investigated university students' perceptions in different cultures. Their findings showed that students' perceived the relationship with the teacher as pivotal in their engagement. However, the students in this research did not exhibit a preference for teachers who showed a lack of understanding regarding their current practices and needs under the influence of social media. They believed that such teachers had only a little understanding of their individual differences or of the resources that could support each of them. Furthermore, the interviews strongly suggested that students experienced difficulties and distractions when teachers lacked provision of personal support feedback through technologies such as LMS or

social media. They pointed to the need for increased organization and use of inclusive teaching strategies that took into account different forms of knowledge and a diversity of teaching methods to meet their different needs.

Students exhibited different approaches to learning and used social media differently when studying. Some adopted a strategic and deep approach with expansion of exploring; they needed to link ideas to real life with multiple examples. Others, in contrast, exhibited an instrumental motivation, which was aligned to examination material. All of these used social media and networks for their own purposes. Different behaviours were reflected in these networks. Teaching behaviours influenced their students significantly; they could either be a barrier or a driver for students' engagement, based on their talent and teaching along with assessment choices.

Students pointed to those teachers who exhibited development practices in social media as being more satisfying for their current different needs. Eventually, according to Krutka and Carpenter (2016), students need to be able to answer the questions of 'what, how, when, why, with whom' for their specific academic field of knowledge. Deepwell and Malik's (2008) investigation demonstrated that students needed to be supported by their teachers' feedback in answering these questions for their engagement in self-directed learning.

Students expressed having had benefits for their self-directed learning from instructors on social media sites, which had increased their opportunity to engage with experts and gain up-to-date knowledge in their field. In addition, under the influence of open networks, teachers needed to motivate self-directed learning by challenging students with choices and assisting the development of inclusive communities by encouraging socially inclusive attitudes to increase peer influence and exchange of experiences. According to Junco, Heiberger and Loken (2011), the

main role of the teacher in higher education will in future focus on motivating students and engaging them in different ways, amongst them increasing their inclusion and sharing their experiences with each other. According to Green et al. (2005), to facilitate students' self-learning through technologies teachers will need to provide sufficient forms of knowledge by diverse teaching methods, personalizing feedback, facilitating learning environments, developing students' skills and abilities, and utilising self-assessment methods.

The findings from the students' perspectives suggest that, to ensure the quality of their learning, teachers need to follow a new role. This new role would be to individualize learning for different students' needs, give personal feedback, motivate and challenge students along with engaging them through socially inclusive strategies, and be models of good organization. These strategies would be facilitated through the use of technology to give different forms of support and feedback. This also suggests that the teacher would become a model of personal development, social inclusion and organization by her/himself in accordance with the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers (MIL) cited (Alabdulkareem, 2015, p.215):

Media and information literate teachers will have enhanced capacities to empower students with their efforts in learning to learn, learning autonomously, and pursuing lifelong learning. By educating students to become media and information literate, teachers would be responding first to their role as advocates of an informed and rational citizenry, and second, they would be responding to changes in their role as teaching moves away from being teacher-centred to becoming more learner-centred.

This is in accordance with findings of this research which suggest that increased attention be paid to teachers' preparation and professional training for dealing with individualized approaches. This preparation goes beyond training in technical issues disconnected from the current underlying challenges of practice. This includes awareness of differences among students and the application of a variety of

interactive teaching methods and personal support and assessment that suits different students through the use of LMS. In addition, awareness of the need to develop an inclusive environment conducive to self-directed learning and personal development through sharing experiences needs to be encouraged.

The findings also suggest that there are increased differences amongst teachers as a result of differences in their own self-directed learning and development in social media. As such, professional training would best apply evaluation of needs, in light of these new practices in teaching and learning, to see which areas of training are needed, including teaching skills and presentation, research and knowledge production, feedback and self-assessment methods through the use of LMS.

The need for diversity in a wider range of methods, choices and knowledge formats to fit the wider range of students' preferences and characteristics and to fit with the use of technologies in education was raised in the findings. Students' perceptions and diverse views revealed increased demands that efforts be made to conduct research to understand how learners and learning are changing and to identify the developments needed in education in light of this rapid socio-technological change.

### **7.5.3 Challenges related to dealing with increased differences**

The literature has reported variations and diversity amongst students' experiences in personal development and use of social media. Stirling (2016) pointed to conflicts in students' perceptions of engagement in their use of social media; one of connection, organization and identity development, and the other of disconnection, disengagement and unrealized expectations. This conflict of students' attitudes towards social media in their engagement was also reported in the interviews and focus groups in this study. In addition, the students in this study interviews had different levels of engagement, with some perceiving high levels of motivation and engagement in independent learning and personal development influenced by social



media, whilst others perceived disengagement and had a negatively attitude. These variations amongst Saudi students' engagement are in line with ongoing debates in the international literature of university learners' experiences which indicate that some university students are not able to engage in independent learning (Bennett & Maton, 2010; Jones, Ramanau, Cross, & Healing, 2010; Kennedy, Judd, Churchward, Gray, & Krause, 2008).

The investigation into students' lived experience of using social media in their development was a chance to notice the issue in diversity of students' populations in terms of differences in their self-directed learning and independent use of social media, as reported in western literature. These findings make it clear that Saudi students, just like students in other cultures, exhibit different learning attitudes and engagement levels. However, this was challenging because the educational practices in this context did not always address different students' needs. As explained earlier, in light of the increased self-directed learning amongst students there is still a lack of pedagogical and curriculum adaptation that takes into accounts students' needs.

It is normal that students have different levels of motivation and different approaches to learning, and they will have diverse social skills, which determine their ways to engage and to use social media for engaging in independent learning and personal development. Unfortunately, this means that any benefits in these findings, were not achieved equally by all students. As shown in the findings, the increased diversity amongst students was recognized and reported by the participants themselves. Often the students compared their own abilities of self-directed learning to others in the interviews, and they frequently pointed to differences amongst them in the interviews and focus groups, as well as in their reflective diaries. This is in accordance with Eastin and LaRose (2000), who pointed to inevitable increasingly wide divides in self-efficacy and skills caused by the Internet. LeNoue et al. (2011)

further noted that some people could increase their knowledge and academic competency while others could not, which means increased diversity amongst students in the higher education classes that appear as gaps in academic knowledge and skills.

It was sensed in the interviews that some students felt high levels of confidence and social engagement, while others suffered from isolation and failure. Some of the reported reasons for student diversity are family support and early adoption of social media tools for development, along with social skills of self-presentation (Boyd, 2007). She suggests that students' development is now highly influenced by social networks which have become one source of friendships and relationships for these generations. It is also noted that information and skills can grow in social media where the students spend most of their time without being exposed to formal learning.

According to Greenhow and Robelia (2009), under the current influence of social networks on personal development it is important that a range of abilities and attitudes are to be expected amongst students in the education system. Some students will have invisible difficulties, for whatever reason, and need additional support for socialization with friends and organization skills. However, most students will seem extremely talented, self-regulated and confident (Selwyn, 2012).

Some of these barriers to student development are in the educational system itself; when the education system and teachers do not recognize students' diversity in abilities and needs, eventually students do not get the necessary support. Hemmi et al. (2009) noted that students who practised learning in social media present their skills in the formal academic context, which create challenges and discrepancies in the light of disintegrated curriculum.

Some participants who reported negative attitudes pointed to the lack of support and felt incompetent in the class with more advanced students. This is in accordance with LeNoue, Hall and Eighmy (2011) who pointed out the increase in differences among students as a direct outcome of increased use of informal practices of learning outside formal institutions. When students feel unsupported, under the current practice in education, this increases their chance of developing negative attitudes, which means that the curriculum itself can become a barrier to students' development.

The current advances in technology had been so rapid that they had not been incorporated into educational support in this context and thus the awareness of differences amongst students had been under-emphasised. The findings show that students who faced difficulties in their transition because of past preparation had limited or no opportunities of formal support. In addition, as discussed earlier and concurring with Al-Shehri (2010) and Alebaikan (2010), the awareness of differences and individualized learning approaches needed for pedagogical application of technologies in the KSA educational system is still limited. For instance, the present research findings reveal that students who faced difficulty in their self-directed learning had not been receiving support or feedback. This is also in line with Deepwell and Malik's (2008) and Hrastinski and Aghaee's (2012) findings in other cultures, which also pointed to a lack of personal feedback to students based on their self-directed learning.

This mismatch of strategies of education and pedagogy with the current students' learning practices have contributed to reported differences in personal development within student populations (Eastin & LaRose, 2000). According Bennett and Maton (2010), the salient challenge appears in a lack of understanding of the complexity of learning underlying technology use, with the belief that technologies support students' independent learning and skills while this only applies to those who are

talented. Greenhow and Robelia's (2009) study pointed to the responsibility for students who lack essential social confidence and skills as the most disadvantaged in the current education system where new learning literacies are disconnected from the practice of learning and education, which hide most students' problems and issues of support. Similarly, (Krutka & Carpenter, 2016) suggested that answering 'what' and 'how' to learn questions involved teacher knowledge of resources on social media in order to support students' learning. This concurs with Alabdulkareem's (2015) study which found that teachers' attitudes to social media affected students' learning and engagement for learning science in Saudi high schools. Similarly, Al-Shehri (2010) argued that the lack of integration and proper pedagogy for students' self-directed learning needs with the belief that technologies make students more independent and reflective affected students' engagement in higher education.

In fact, the current age of networks and information overload makes learning even more difficult and demanding, with an increased variety of students' skills and attitudes. For instance, in this study, most students reported academic difficulties caused by social media. These differed in level from one student to another, and included distraction, disorientation and time management. Students required support in skills such as time management, emotional regulation and self-regulated learning. Eventually, under the increased diversity of students' attitudes and skills and the difficulty of evaluating these variations, all students need to be able to improve their confidence and development in formal education settings. Generally, students need to be provided with learning alternatives so that each one can find suitable and continuous support for their engagement in self-directed learning and personal development (Clayton & Halliday, 2017; LeNoue, Hall, & Eighmy, 2011). This highlights the need for policy makers and teachers to adopt a clear policy for the personal and individual support of students through the use of inclusive teaching

strategies along with teacher utilisation of technology and LMS. Academic curriculum and teaching practices also need to be updated to meet individual students' needs. These advances should increase students' efficiency and improve equality and quality in the education system.

#### **7.4 Summary of the discussion and theoretical contribution**

The discussion covered an in-depth analysis of the contributions of this research by linking the themes and sub-themes that have been obtained in the Saudi university to the existing literature (see Figure 7.1). This permits a detailed division of the issues and factors revealed in the findings and how they interact with each other in the learners' experiences. The table (see Appendix L) summarises the theoretical contribution of this research and demonstrates the main issues that present current challenges in the social and educational context, and their implications for students' engagement and the practice of education in the setting. As shown in the table (see Appendix N), the factors related to student engagement provide an understanding of the issues of engagement in the current age on individual, organizational, and pedagogical levels. On the individual level, personal drivers and difficulties present the main challenges facing students' engagement in terms of the awareness and skill preparation they need. These factors also need to be understood on the organizational level, including curriculum and pedagogical levels. Thus, this suggests the need for pre-defined plans and policies on both structural and pedagogical levels for matching to current students' needs for personal and continuous support. This also contributes to understanding the changing roles of faculty and teachers in this process, where their pedagogical training needs to deal with students' self-directed learning and individual needs through the use of technology.

Internationally, the literature has reinforced the idea of the complexity of contemporary higher education learners' experiences. Furthermore, the role of social

media and technologies in merging the formal and informal contexts of learning, and making learning and education continuous and self-directed, is widely reported (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Hall, 2008; Rhona Sharpe, Beetham, & De Freitas, 2010). Most quantitative research conducted on students' use of social media and its influence on engagement or academic performance has yielded no conclusions (Matzat & Vrieling, 2016). Such diversity and complexity in learners' experiences are difficult to evaluate with so many factors being involved. Thus, the main issue raised in this research's findings is that the increased use of social media and technologies does not always mean increased engagement of learners or improved quality of education. Research on the influence of social media on students' engagement has concluded that social media use alone is not able to determine the outcome of a learning experience or students' engagement. There are multifaceted factors involved that underlie the learners' choices and engagement (Junco, 2012; Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009). Therefore, the unique focus of this research on the learner rather than on the technology or social media contributes significantly to understanding and addressing the current difficulties and challenges for students' engagement, as well as the related barriers and issues in the context of Saudi higher education. It is hoped that the findings from such an in-depth investigation would contribute uniquely to supporting understanding of engagement in personal development generally and in the Saudi higher education context particularly. It highlights both the challenges learners may face in their personal development generally as well as the barriers for students' development within the higher education context.

## **Chapter Eight: Conclusions**

### **8.0 Introduction**

This chapter sets out the conclusions of the research and examines its major findings, with reference to its aims and objectives. It provides final remarks on the extent to which this research has achieved its aims of exploring undergraduate students' engagement in independent learning and personal development through social media use. It also discusses the contributions of the research and makes recommendations in relation to the findings and their implications. The limitations and challenges of the research are also examined. Finally, suggestions are made for future research.

### **8.1 Evaluation of research aims**

This interpretive research aimed at exploring students' engagement and non-engagement in independent learning and personal development by exploring their personal accounts around social media as significant events in their lives and development. I have utilised some of theories related to understand how the learner develops in a social environment that encounters bidirectional experiential explanation involving both personal and social factors in the process (see Chapter3). The findings present understanding on multiple levels with respect to personal social factors and how they interact to define the learner experience. For instance, the findings indicate that some students have strong personal motivations and confidence for engaging in independent learning and personal development based on their skills, while others present learning difficulties and show a lack of motivation and self-control. At the same time the findings also demonstrate that some factors in the university environment that are related to the curriculum and pedagogies have an

influence either as driver or barriers on students' motivations and levels of engagement.

The personal accounts around social media as significant events of students' lives, including their learning and development, were very useful for bridging the gap between formal and informal contexts of learning, and achieving the research objective of focusing on the learner. The use of IPA assisted to identify issues related to students' attitudes and beliefs towards engagement and non-engagement from their own stories of success and failure in engagement. Many issues come to the surface to provide an indication of the way in which the students perceive themselves as learners, and highlight their uses and choices of learning, attitudes, motivations and difficulties with respect to engagement in independent learning and personal development.

The approach and the broader conceptualisation that focus on the learner rather than on the social media helped this study to reveal issues and complexities. For instance, the findings of this research show that a student can have negative attitudes towards social media in their personal development associated with academic difficulties but they might not necessarily be aware of their problem of lack of skill and need of support. Some of interviewed students have reported problems of engagement influenced by their use of social media, which presented some difficulties underlies their learning choices, and lack of control. However, they – and the educational institutions – had no insight into these problems because of the lack of integration in the curriculum and thus did not get – or provide – the proper support.

Additionally, the learning behaviours and uses of social media as lived by the students and from their stories mostly indicate aspects related to students' identities and self-regulated learning skills. Furthermore, students' experiences also help in the identification of their learning difficulties and areas where support is required. It would



be inferred from the findings that students' engagement can be influenced by their own skills and confidence against their own background and experiences. However, the findings also show the crucial role of university environment and faculty to support the self-directed learners' engagement in independent learning and personal development.

Moreover, the personal accounts and voices of students in the educational environment also highlight the challenges in terms of issues related to the social environment, curriculum and pedagogies. Absence of effective educational support for self-directed learners' needs and skills support could be attributed to a lack of integration in the curriculum at the organisational level in this context which has a significant influence on the assistance provided by faculty on pedagogical levels. It should be mentioned that the common conception that the use of technology is disintegrated from learners' and teachers' practices contributes to the lack of support for student engagement in self-directed learning in this context. Alsolamy's (2017) recent study suggests that some Saudi tutors are highly motivated to use social media. This research findings suggests that the traditional educational environment and educational culture in general is still in its early stages of incorporating technologies into pedagogies, organisation and curriculum, to back the learner-centred approach.

Based on the above points, it can be concluded that this interpretive research investigation has achieved its aims of exploring issues related to students' engagement in independent learning and personal development in its personal and educational contexts. The study presents insights on the students' engagement and non-engagement, including motivations, attitudes, skills and challenges based on theoretical frameworks in the literature. It also provides a useful reflection on the role of the university environment including organisation and curriculum and pedagogy on students' engagement in self-directed learning in the current educational practice.

## 8. 2 Contributions of the Research

The motivations, drivers and difficulties related to learners' engagement make a significant contribution to the existing literature. The research focus on the learners and their attitudes involved an in-depth understanding of how students perceive themselves as self-learners, and on issues related to their engagement and non-engagement from their personal accounts of using social media. Most of existing literature of the learners' experiences focusses on the role of social media to support engagement and the practices and behaviours of learners or professionals in using social media as tools for personal development. Issues related to learners' engagement such as attitudes, motivations or difficulties and contextual barriers have been given little or no attention in research.

Another contribution is that this research has been designed to be significant. The research adopted broader conceptualization of the issue of the learner engagement considering social media as an event in the lived experience of university learners around which their development experience is elicited. This design allowed me to focus on issues related to the learner engagement, rather than on the role of social media to support engagement. My focus on the learner enabled this research to explore new issues and provided a more detailed understanding of the complex issue of students' engagement in higher education and the potential issues that influenced their engagement which eventually have an impact on their success or failure.

A significant contribution comes from the research findings that identify the difficulties of learners' engagement as well as the drivers and motivations. According to Oliver (2013), the learners' difficulties or the problems in the learning and teaching situations are not coming to the surface when research simplify the complex relationship between technology and learning or teaching. This is because the integrated view of curriculum assumes that social media use or non-use or way of

use presents learners' underlying learning choices, motivations, skills or difficulties. This equally applies for teachers' use or non-use of technology in personal development and teaching that underlies their teaching choices and pedagogies and personal qualities. So far, little research adopted a holistic, integrated view of the use of technology as lived experience entangled in its personal and social situations either with learners or teachers' groups to identify educational issues.

This is the first study that investigates issues related to students' engagement and non-engagement from their contemporary lived experiences that feature the use of social media in the Saudi context. By focusing on this topic in the Saudi context using an IPA methodology, and theoretical frameworks of personal development, this research makes a significant contribution to theoretical knowledge by addressing innovative issues that are currently of great social importance in KSA higher education. The increased use of social media amongst students and its influence on the educational system and students' preparation is a current subject of debate in education. Alghamdi & Plunkett (2018) and Alwagait, Shahzad, & Alim, (2015) studies that have focused on social media influence on the academic performance or personal development of learners in Saudi higher education have not carried out in-depth investigation of the issues in terms of the personal contexts of learners or the role of organisational and pedagogical barriers. Aljasir (2015) and Alsolamy (2017) studies, similarly, explored the use of social media as a tool for personal development either for learners and teachers respectively in Saudi higher education. All these four studies present focus on the role of social media rather than on the learner's needs and present focus on the socio-cultural factors influencing students' use, such as gender separation in the educational context. Consequently, they do not examine the specific learner and educational situations of use and engagement or the role of the educational environment on the learner, or the difficulties and barriers of engagement. This knowledge gap has been identified by Bennett & Maton (2010) in other culture, who point that despite of increased research on learners'

experience and use of technology there is still lack of nuanced understanding of complexity and diversity of these experiences in education.

As explained in (Chapter 4), this research was designed to build on the literature and fill a gap in knowledge with respect to understanding young learners' motivations, attitudes and difficulties of engagement in independent learning and personal development from lived experiences in the present day. The focus in this study is in favour of integrated view of the curriculum that is able to identify self-directed learners' difficulties in order to support students who struggle in their engagement, thus avoiding any negative influence on their performance.

Given that institutions and faculty are required to improve and encourage students' motivation and engagement. This research contributes to provide a better understanding of the theoretical issues and factors related to students' engagement that have rarely been investigated in the literature on Saudi Arabia students. The drivers, difficulties, contextual barriers, benefits and issues that have been presented in this study shed light on several educational issues and potential areas of research knowledge.

In addition, the research also gives a chance to learners to voice their success, difficulties and concerns with respect to their own engagement in independent learning and personal development in this context. In practice, an understanding of these practical issues from students' perspectives can help stakeholders to plan better the university learning environment, curriculum and teaching strategies to supporting all students' engagement and personal learning practices in KSA. With increased growth of social media and networks in Saudi higher education, the findings of this research can contribute to knowledge in developing educational plans and policy laws to improve current practices, overcome the challenges and create strategies and policies to meet the needs of self-directed learners. It is hoped that the

findings of this research will highlight some of the organisational issues to improve the efficiency of pedagogical practices and student support processes in the setting.

### **8.3 Implications and recommendations**

The findings of this research suggest there are difficulties, complexities and diversities in students' engagement. Given that social media is a personal tool that can influence students' engagement in independent learning and personal development in the informal context of education, and eventually affect students' academic performance in the formal context either positively or negatively. The findings of this research suggest the need for bridging this gap in education by focusing on the learner development. Some of the issues that have been achieved in the findings with respect to students' engagement are translated into some educational implications that apply to the context of KSA higher education.

As I discussed before in the discussion chapter, implications with respect to supporting students' engagement in independent learning and personal development, in the KSA context, need to be understood on the organisational institutional level to prevent mismatches, because these processes intertwine and overlap significantly in the learners' experience. I have divided the implications of this research into implications on supporting students' engagement on the individual level, and implications to support students' engagement on the pedagogical level, and implications to support students' engagement on the curriculum level.

#### **8.3.1 Implications for supporting engagement on the individual level**

It is normal that students will have various attitudes and levels of engagement based on different personal characteristics, skills and backgrounds. However, under current influences and new trends of engagement in personal development, there is need in education to meet a different range of needs to support all students' engagement and

performance. The findings with respect to personal drivers and difficulties for engagement achieved in this research present the main challenges for students' engagement in personal development. Some recommendations in this respect are made as follows.

### **Strategies that build on students' confidence**

The findings support the need for developing students' confidence and critical action. According to LeNoue, Hall, & Eighmy (2011) self-directed learning and self-efficacy are the main issues that support adults' growth and critical thinking in higher education. There have been differences in terms of students' skills in critical reflection abilities, social skills, time management and self-regulated learning and coping strategies that have influenced their engagement and use of social media significantly. Social media and networks increase the need for critical skills and decision-making even more. This suggests that there is increased educational need to adopt strategies that build on students' self-confidence and to support students' autonomy, skills and critical awareness to motivate all students for engagement.

It could be argued that the traditional teaching culture in Saudi universities environment have influenced students' engagement in autonomous and self-directed activities that would have a positive influence on their skills. Furthermore, the curriculum mostly lacks the integration needed to support individual learning approaches. It is more likely that students' who struggle in their engagement because of lack of skills and strategies will lack continuous support for their skills and engagement. Improving students' engagement in this context entails pedagogies that support students' autonomy and independence by adopting continuous support for students' skills and self-efficacy.

### **Self-reflection and self-evaluation**

In this context it was clear that students have not been encouraged to evaluate their selves and needs for self-directed learning and this is expected within a traditional learning and teaching culture. Students need to be encouraged to evaluate themselves to be in good position in term of their strong points and limitations to support their critical engagement in opportunities of self-directed learning available to them. It is difficult to detect the individual students' skills and needs to support their engagement. Alternatively, all students need increasing their critical reflection and evaluation of their needs, which could be achieved by the use of electronic self-assessment questionnaires through the use of LMS.

Self-awareness and reflection to identify one's strengths and weaknesses was one of the main drivers for this research students' engagement in personal development in social media. Westerman et al.(2016) suggest that, once the student engaged in positive autonomous self-regulated learning experience in social media throughout educational personal support that increase student' awareness and critical reflection, they will increase confidence, develop self-efficacy and eventually change their attitude towards engagement in higher goals of personal development. Literature shows that students who are underachieving can benefit the most from suitable pedagogical support and access to self-efficacy resources available in social media.

### **Programmes for skills improvement**

There has been increased care under the ongoing improvements in Saudi higher education to support students' skills and preparation. Programmes and workshops to support study skills at the beginning of their study or those that are specifically designed to raise students' performance, in this context, can be improved by integrating new issues and trends influencing engagement such as achieved in the

findings. Examples of these include emotional regulation, self-confidence and positivity, opportunity awareness, time management, values and social skills.

In this context, the main personal barrier for students' engagement was lack of awareness of the learning process underlies the use of social media and lack of self-control. This directly influenced students' behaviour in social media and appears as increased problems for their engagement and performance. Students' programmes and workshops in KSA higher education could incorporate issues to increase students' awareness of the learning process in social media. This include raising students' awareness and motivation by explaining the opportunities in social media for personal, career and academic development to support students' positive engagement and development.

#### **Evaluation of learners' difficulties and needs**

Under the prevalence of traditional learning culture and the current divides between organisational curriculum, counseling, pedagogy and technology in this context, it is expected that opportunities of using technology for individual support such as the use of electronic self-assessment and monitoring of students' progress on LMS to not be incorporated into the recognition of students' different needs.

The findings of this research suggest the importance of integration in the curriculum by focusing on the individual learner. This entails taking grater care for detection of problems in student's engagement, because under the influence of social media risk, such problems in students' skills could lead to negative influence on students' development and lead students to drop out. This could be done through electronic self-assessment methods at the beginning of the course to encourage students' reflection and self-evaluation individually.



### **8.3.2 Implication to improve students' engagement on the pedagogical level**

Literatures in this context indicate a lack of pedagogical preparation for supporting self-directed learners. The findings of this research support that teachers do not always deal with students' differences and difficulties in engagement. Some recommendations in this respect are made as follows:

#### **Challenges and choice**

Engagement as emerged from students' experiences in this research entails increasing autonomy by providing choices and challenges. In the current practice of availability of networks and social media teacher behavior can influence students' engagement significantly. The findings show that empowering students with learning choices and challenges is a driver for their engagement and independent learning. However, the problem that was clear is that the traditional teaching and learning culture has shaped the use of technology in this context. According to Hamdan (2014) when teachers are not informed pedagogically on how to use technology to support individual learning, it is more likely that their use of technology will be shaped by their pedagogical practice. For instance, some teachers used LMS and other technologies to facilitate personalising learning rather than to offer choices and support. When students offered support on LMS with a variety of materials in different forms that met different range of needs and preferences, they report increased engagement in self-directed learning.

#### **Assessment methods**

Assessment methods can also influence students' levels of engagement significantly under current practice. The findings suggest that helping students build their confidence entail their exploration and independent learning which would have influence on the development of their skills. Participants perceived that multiple-choice tests and quizzes on course material were not challenging enough to increase

their engagement. A variety of assessment and feedback in this context is needed under increased practice of independent learning and networks. For instance, the use of open-ended questions that support students' reflection and thinking could support their engagement and development. In addition the use of problem solving and real life projects could also support engagement.

### **Inclusive strategies and course organisation**

Students feel valued and engaged in their self-learning of the course when teachers support them personally through LMS with all course information such as organisation and resources. Under the influence of networks and self-directed learning approaches in higher education, students present increased need for personal and continuous support through teacher organisation and inclusive pedagogies. The findings show that teachers cannot always deal with students' individual requirements and personal needs of each of them even in the presence of formal technologies such as LMS. Under current influences, students need for advanced course organization on LMS that would assist continuous supporting of their personal goals of study. In addition, teachers also need to think about ways to support students' socialisation and peer influence to support engagement. An important driver for students' motivation is increasing the sharing of experiences in the class to support students' excitement and engagement levels.

### **8.2.3 Implications to improve engagement on the curriculum level**

The findings show that the university environment is supportive for students' engagement. However, the new practices of self-directed learning that have increased with social media have created some diversities in terms of personal abilities and brought some mismatches with old traditional practices and culture. This is expected when policy and curriculum have been designed and influenced by

traditional teaching culture for long time. Some recommendations with respect to supporting students' engagement on the curriculum level are discussed below.

### **Policy and laws of organisation**

Social media and networks are the frontier of personal, academic, and professional development in educational organisations and in society in large. There have been fast changes during the last few years in education, and people's ways of engaging in personal development and exchanging of information. However, these changes have rarely been evaluated from practice in this context to support the development of new policies and laws. One issue raised is the increased formal use of technologies and social media amongst faculty in providing personal and continuous support for students. Adopting a policy plan to organise and improve the personal support throughout different technologies such as LMS, emails, social media in this context can be of value to increase students' motivation levels and engagement in this context and to ensure the efficiency of such individual practices. This also can ensure that all students receive the personal and pedagogical support they need for their engagement, and to prevent any overload in students' networks when formal support lacks. The findings show some differences amongst faculty in using continuous support such as LMS with students. A policy could include supporting course and campus event reminders, sharing others' experiences, supporting students' socialization, increasing students' awareness of opportunities, and immediate feedback (Junco et al., 2011).

Findings show several pay-offs when educationalists, counselors and faculty adopt personal approaches of support through technology and social media, to support and raise students' awareness. However, this approach can be of greatest influence with vulnerable students who, for any reason, lack suitable social and learning skills or present achievement problems. In the long run, there is a need to extend strategies

of support by increasing awareness amongst faculty of technologies as integrated in supporting students through use of policy to organise these practices.

Another issue with respect to policy for organisations is that technologies and social media increase individual action and personal development in the informal context. There is a need to organise and plan these practices of informal engagement in specific direction and to increase peer support and sharing of experience to ensure social inclusion of different abilities and to improve the engagement of all students. Uninformed individual practices of using technologies can lead un-even distribution of knowledge, diversity and gaps in skills, which eventually bring challenges to the formal context. The findings of this study show that there is still a lack of integration and policy of organisation to support students' engagement in independent learning, which have increased students' overload and influenced group cohesion amongst students.

### **Flexibility and choice in curriculum**

Flexibility and choices in the curriculum have been voiced by students as important drivers for their engagement. There have been considerable efforts in engaging students in identity and career development under current improvement in the Saudi curriculum as discussed (see Chapter 2). For instance, students reported on raised awareness of social and career opportunities and increased engagement in extracurricular activities, social activities and training workshops in this context. However, many students revealed barriers of lacking time, and overload of study and strict timetables, making it difficult to engage in these personal development activities. As adult students who have different responsibilities, and under the influence of technologies, the participants indicate the need for greater flexibility and choice in the curriculum times, and more choice of teaching and learning methods such as engagement with real life contexts, and more hands-on and experiential

learning to support theoretical knowledge and to increase activities and challenges such as in Internship practice.

There have been improvements in higher education curriculum to diversify specialisation and improve quality of curriculum as discussed in (see Chapter 2). In addition, all Saudi universities provide flexible and blended learning programmes, but rarely this is adopted for university basic undergraduate studies programmes. These suggestions may be taken into consideration for further development in the curriculum.

### **Open access to academic videos and expert knowledge in Arabic**

There is increased need in this context for supporting study materials with a wide range of choices that include different forms of academic knowledge, including recorded experts and educational videos and graphs in Arabic language. Students reported a lack of open interactive and academic video resources in the context of this study and lack of open access to academic expert knowledge such as wide range of academic recorded lectures. There is a lack of academic video production in the context of KSA higher education generally; this could be attributed to cultural reasons. Particularly for females in this context the use of video recording of lectures is not acceptable. In addition the production of Arabic academic quality videos need improved skills in design and specialists in curriculum.

### **Teachers as model of personal development**

The findings suggest that the way to improve the quality of learning and teaching practices and students' engagement is that the teacher her/himself becomes a model of personal development. Students will enjoy increased freedom of independent learning under the influence of technologies when provided with suitable feedback. The feedback the students need is about assessing the answers to questions related to their independent learning, such as what, how, why, with whom, meaning that the

teacher her/himself should be expert in engagement in personal development in social media in order to provide this feedback essential for students engagement. In this way, the teacher also can apply the teaching strategies and resources that match students' needs and can support them with continuous feedback they need.

### **Students' voice**

The current practices of education entail that students be given increased voice to collaborate to solve their own learning problems, and to be engaged in university curriculum plans. According to Al-Khalifa & Garcia (2013) Saudi universities have used social media to engage students in decision-making and sharing of their opinions. This was also clear from this research students who demonstrated awareness of issues related to the curriculum and provided some solutions of the problems they face in their engagement in this context.

Finally, these recommendations suggest that there is need for integration in the curriculum in order for social media and other technology tools can be utilised in a way that is fruitful for both faculty and students. This would ensure the quality of their use either by the students or by the teacher in the direction of achieving their promises of empowering the development of learners' self-efficacy.

### **8.4 Limitations of the research**

There have been several limitations and challenges in this research. Due to gender sensitivity in the cultural context of KSA this research was limited to female students because it was difficult for me to interview male participants. In addition, this interpretive research has focused on undergraduate university students' lived experiences within a single setting, so the contextual findings cannot be generalised methodologically to other contexts or groups. However, generalisation was not one of the aims of this in-depth study, which aimed at an understanding of complex issues with respect to students' engagement in its context.

This research also has many strong points, as it utilised an IPA methodology to incorporate the whole learner experience including their attitudes, feelings and voices through the use of social media. Such method enabled me to uncover the meanings underlying students' learning behaviours and attitudes to social media, and to focus on differences in engagement as well as similarities, which was useful for answering the research questions.

Reflecting on challenges facing this research, as in any explorative interpretive research, there was the rich data collected from different sources. This led to a time-consuming process of analysing and understanding large amounts of data, even though I utilised software to facilitate the analysis. Theoretical challenges also arose, learning experiences through social media are reported to be complex and paradoxical in terms of diverse attitudes of students (Stirling, 2016). In addition, data obtained from experiences of using social media in personal development can be used to answer enormous research questions in different fields, not only in education. There was a need to utilise educational theoretical frameworks to look at the data from an educational perspective and to help understand the experiences in the educational context. There was also a significant overlapping in the themes obtained in the data and it was difficult sometimes to draw lines between them.

In relation to the recent emergence of personal development practices through social media, the lack of literature in this area was a major challenge to inform this research process. However, this explorative qualitative study was interesting and challenging at the same time, as it did encourage learning and discovery, until I reached a suitable understanding to frame the research questions.

This qualitative explorative research was designed uniquely to add a significant contribution for understanding novel issues that have not been explored before for further development in educational research. I have adopted new subject of

engagement in personal development in the current age and its influence on educational systems at present. There are several challenges and limitations of research, however, these opened opportunities for discoveries and future studies.

### **8.5 Suggestions for future research**

Given that social media and technologies are tools for engagement in independent learning and personal development in the current age. To the extent that attitudes and abilities are an obstacle for engagement in personal and continuous development at any age, the subject of this research is worth further investigation amongst different groups. This study contributes a multitude of opportunities for future research in terms of its inquiry and findings that highlight current issues with respect to engagement and self-development.

Under the complexity of contemporary human experiences, there have been increased uses of social media data in different disciplines to inform and give conclusions about human behaviors such as of learning analytics (Clayton & Halliday, 2017). In this direction, this research supports that future research on engagement in personal development to adopt the form of the lived experience of learners' use of social media to inform data about learning and personal development for different groups such as teachers, faculty, staff or ordinary people. This will help to identify issues in the context such as difficulties or barriers. Similarly, future quantitative research can also rely on the lived experiences of using social media in understanding attitudes towards engagement in personal development amongst different groups including university learners.

Future qualitative studies could use the same broader conceptualisation of social media as lived experience for exploring the personal and contextual circumstances and motivations of engagement in personal development in educational organisations. For instance, the circumstances under which groups, for instance



teachers, faculty, staff and ordinary people, engage in personal and professional development of their own and why.

The findings of this study suggest that follow-up quantitative studies could use students' attitudes in social media to further explore the themes, issues and factors that emerged in this research to test and generalise from them on a larger scale of university learners. For instance, quantitative studies could further test the personal, social and organisational factors that acted as variables in students' engagement in education at present in the Saudi context.

The findings of this research support that any future quantitative research in the area of students' engagement from their attitudes and lived experiences of using social media in personal development to consider demographic and personal characteristics as base of comparisons. This could help in capturing any impact learner background has on the findings.

This study also reveals some learning problems and difficulties with contextual barriers for engagement in personal development that appear from students' use of social media. Future quantitative studies could investigate this issue of academic and learning difficulties and barriers in students' engagement from the experience of social media use on large scale.

As a reported limitation, this study exploration was restricted to female students' experiences and difficulties. Further qualitative studies could explore this issue from male students' perspectives. Previous research in this context suggest gender differences with respect to the use of social media and its influence on academic performance. Alwagait et al. (2015) found that male students exhibit less control on engagement as influenced by social media whereas Alghamdi & Plunkett (2018) report that female students had increased performance and engagement in social and academic life from using social media. Further quantitative studies could also

trace the differences between males and females in terms of attitudes, difficulties and abilities of self-control in engagement in personal development from using social media and its relation to dropout rates or GPA's amongst these groups. This could help support improvement in students' engagement and to understand any gender gaps in educational achievement, in the Saudi context.

This research on young students' use of social media in engagement in personal development suggests that age can sometimes be significant factor indicating ability for engagement in personal and continuous development at present. The familiarity of net generations with technologies from young ages can be an advantage for their ability to engage in personal development compared to other age groups. The findings of this research point to the importance of engaging adults of all ages in practices of continuous and lifelong development to increase their self-efficacy and assist their adaption to different life problems. It would be worth investigating the attitudes of adults of different ages, to find suitable ways to increase their awareness and engagement in order to reduce any age gaps in attitudes and continuous personal development.

There are some suggestions that emerged for future teacher research and professional development. In relation to the educational context of this study, there would be many opportunities for further research on teachers' professional development issues, in Saudi education and higher education. The findings show that teachers cannot always deal with differences between students or with their self-directed learning needs and feedback. It would be interesting if studies compared different age groups of teachers in terms of applying individual approaches using technologies. The findings suggest there are differences amongst teachers with respect to age in using new strategies. Furthermore, students perceived that teachers who use technologies are the ones who are inclusive and caring. It worth exploring these factors and issues amongst faculty with respect to their knowledge of

individual and inclusive teaching practices. It also suggested with respect to differences to provide any further professional support as tailored for faculty needs through self-assessment. Some areas arising from this study that are important for faculty but not highlighted in this context include inclusive and integrated curriculum, inclusive teaching strategies and equitable access of information, individual learning approaches, and continuous assessment and feedback along with the optimal use of LMS tools for supporting these issues, such as the use of LMS for supporting equitable access for resources and events, learning choices, inclusive strategies and for administering electronic self-assessment tests for monitoring students' performance and needs. In addition to the ability of the teacher to engage in life-long personal and continuous development in social media sites to be able to give continuous feedback for wide range of students' needs.

There are also some suggestions with respect to the limitations of traditional organisational structures and policy laws in the realm of increased use of technologies such as emails, social media, and LMS for providing continuous support and feedback. This is also an important but under-researched subject. There has been fast increase of novel practice in Saudi higher education that have not paired with matching policy laws and integrated curriculum which influenced the disconnection between technologies and pedagogies. In this context, this can increase uninformed individual effect, mismatches and overload. Organising current educational practices that are mostly in the networks need policy to support individual's informal practices in networks in an informed direction. This will directly reflect in the quality of teaching and feedback support and also in motivation levels for engagement in personal development. Future research could explore issues with respect to the development of such organisation to inform the networked practice and the informal engagement in personal development from faculty perceptions.

There are also suggestions for incorporating learner voice in research and practice under these new advances and its influence of undergraduate experiences and views in higher education. The findings show that students developed awareness of some of the current curriculum and institutional teaching practices as barriers to their successful engagement in personal development in this setting. It would be worthwhile for each university to investigate issues related to curriculum under these influences, by holding wide conversations with faculty and students to find better ways to plan teaching and learning settings and times. In doing so, decision-makers would hear voices about the constraints that the students experience and help to find ways to improve the development and implementation of new policies. Students' voices in this context need to be encountered as they show awareness and willingness to become involved in providing insights to solve their engagement problems in the setting.

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## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A: Literature Review Tables

### 1. Studies on social media in university students' lives and identity development

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Main Findings</b>	<b>Methods</b>
(Boyd, 2007)	Identity, confidence and self-image, social engagement, friends, make sense of cultural cues, negotiate public life, seek for cultural negotiation and public participation	Ethnography combined observations of face-to-face and online spaces alongside qualitative interviews High school age group
(Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007)	Maintain relationships, strengthening social ties, social capital and wellbeing	Quantitative analysis of survey of university students
(Steinfeld, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008)	Students' confidence and self-esteem, which increase their ability to make friends, find support and social engagement.	Quantitative analysis of survey of university students
(Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009)	Whole development effect, relationship with friends offline, overall wellbeing and emotional state	Analysis of reflective diaries of university students' experiences
(Greenhow & Robelia, 2009b)	Emotional support, maintain relationships, self-presentation, fulfil essential learning functions, persistence, engage in creative endeavours and communications, vulnerable groups of students development of skills.	Content analysis of My space accounts of 11 students alongside interviews High school age group
(Aljasir, 2015)	Saudi university students point that students in this context used social media the most for befriending and maintaining relationships, followed by entertainment and gaming, emotional and empathy expressing, along with personal and educational purposes such as hobbies and learning languages including study, and joining academic groups.	Mixed methods phenomenological interviews, content analysis and questionnaire with university students

## 2. Studies on the benefits of social media on students' change of attitudes

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Main Findings</b>	<b>Methods</b>
(Argyris & Xu, 2016)	Facebook provides two sources of self-efficacy from experiences of university students' enhancement of career development in Facebook.	Online survey 260 students.
(Hemmi, Bayne, & Land, 2009)	Control of students in organizing their participation, reflecting and sharing their learning experiences, presentations and assignments.	Ethnographic observation of HE classrooms along with interviews with students.
(Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009)	Students' find social support in social media facilitate their social integration and adjustment to academic life.	Online survey with university students
(Hu, Gu, & Zhang, 2017)	Both informational and socializing usage of social media increase individual's self-efficacy whereby individual cultural intelligence is developed.	Longitudinal survey in cross-cultural setting. Explores bilateral relationships between social media usage, self-efficacy and cultural intelligence. Based on Social Cognitive Theory
(Hall & Hall, 2010)	The learner is empowered in social media by the prospect of enhanced performance and eventually self-efficacy and development of confidence and agency in decision-making	Theoretical article linking (SCT) to social media

## 3. Studies on social media in higher education

<b>Study</b>	<b>Main Findings</b>	<b>Methods</b>
(DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield, & Fiore, 2012)	Personalised support through social media facilitates students' transition and adjustment to university.	Intervention of designed site for personal support
(Junco et al., 2011)	Twitter was used for various types of academic and co-curricular discussions with experimental group. Results showed significantly greater increase in engagement and semester GPA for experimental compared to the control group.	125 university students participated, 70 in the experimental group and 55 in the control group. In experimental group, engagement was quantified by using a 19-item scale based on the National Survey of Student Engagement.
(Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2015)	Examined the relationship between social media use and adjustment to college, as well as the influence of university social media support strategic plan. Students' high use predicted low adjustment, no influence of university plan.	Survey with university students
(Al-Fahad, 2009)	Mobile learning adopted in university have increased students' engagement and influenced their attitudes and retention by supporting their distance and open education practices.	Survey with female students in one Saudi university



## Appendix B: Ethical Approval Documents



### GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St Luke's Campus  
Heavitree Road  
Exeter UK EX1 2LU

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/>

### CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of Project: Social Network Sites in KSA Higher Education

Researcher(s) name: Sahar Alkhatlan

Supervisor(s): Professor Rupert Wegerif  
Dr Judith Kleine Staarman

This project has been approved for the period

From: 01/03/2016

To: 01/01/2017

Ethics Committee approval reference:

D/15/16/24

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Durrant'.

Signature: (Dr Philip Durrant, Chair, Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee) Date: 16/02/2016

## COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

**Applicant details**

Name	Sahar Alkhathlan
Department	Graduate School of Education
UoE email address	smra202@exeter.ac.uk

**Duration for which permission is required**

Start date:01/03/2016	End date:01/01/2017	Date submitted:09/02/2016
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**Students only**

Student number	620029949
Programme of study	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
Name of Supervisor(s)/tutors or Dissertation Tutor	Prof. Rupert Wegerif Dr. Judith Kleine-Staarman
Have you attended any ethics training that is available to students?	Yes, I have taken part in ethics training at the University of Exeter 23/10/2015

**Certification for all submissions**

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given in this application and that I undertake in my research to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research. I confirm that if my research should change radically I will complete a further ethics proposal form.

Sahar Alkhathlan

Double click this box to confirm certification

*Submission of this ethics proposal form confirms your acceptance of the above.*

**TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT**

Social Network Sites in KSA Higher Education

**ETHICAL REVIEW BY AN EXTERNAL COMMITTEE**

No, my research is not funded by, or doesn't use data from, either the NHS or Ministry of Defence.

**MENTAL CAPACITY ACT 2005**

No, my project does not involve participants aged 16 or over who are unable to give informed consent (e.g. people with learning disabilities)

**SYNOPSIS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

Social Network Sites (SNSs) are important and natural resources for students in higher education. It is also used to engage learners in active learning in the class and out of the class. The value of using SNS for the

learners' development in higher education has been recognised in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), and there have been efforts to integrate SNSs and Web 2.0 pedagogy in this context. The current interpretive study focus is on the current uses of SNSs in a college in KSA. A case study approach with qualitative methods will be used to explore the current uses, perceptions and expectations of SNSs in this context. The objectives of the study are:

- 1- to explore tutors and students uses and perceptions of SNSs and mobile devices in this context.
- 2- to explore impacts of SNSs and mobile devices on students learning and engagement.
- 3- to investigate factors affecting the use of SNSs in this context.

#### **INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH**

I am seeking permission from the relevant university in KSA and have provided them with necessary details of my research objectives and methods.

The following sections require an assessment of possible ethical consideration in your research project. If particular sections do not seem relevant to your project please indicate this and clarify why.

#### **RESEARCH METHODS**

The research will adopt the interpretive paradigm and a case study will be conducted in the natural setting of the College of Education (CoE) in Jubail , University of Dammam (UoD).During the field study, I will use qualitative methods as follows:

1. Semi-structured Interviews with purposefully selected faculty members in the CoE
2. Student diaries on their daily use of SNS for learning for one week, besides their reflective notes on using SNSs.
3. Semi-structured interviews with purposefully selected students.
4. Group interviews with purposefully selected students.
5. Document analysis, researcher field notes and observations of teaching situations and virtual networks, including participant observation on their personal devices during the interviews.

Data generated from these methods will be in qualitative format, they will be transcribed, translated into English and then thematically analysed.

#### **PARTICIPANTS**

Participants in this research will be (10 ) faculty members selected from the CoE, (7 )for the main study and (3) for pilot study. Faculty members will be selected from different departments in the College, having different administrative responsibilities, from different ages and different experiences in teaching with technology, according to the Dean's recommendation. Faculty will be interviewed, observed in teaching situations and on their personal devices.

Students will be selected from CoE from faculty recommendations; each teacher will recommend four to five students. They will be selected to include different experiences, GPAs, and geographical areas, and they will be students who are likely to present their and their colleagues' views in the College. A total of 30 students will participate in the diaries and, after this; ten students will be interviewed individually. 24 of them will be chosen to participate in the group interviews, which will have four sessions one is for piloting. Each session will include six similar students based on their major. The students will be selected for group interviews based on their ability to participate with their views.

#### **THE VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION**

I will ensure that teachers and students are informed of their right to refuse to participate, both by a written information sheet and orally from the researcher. The analysis of interviews will require a voice recording, so I will obtain participants' consent for this. The participants will also be informed of their right to refuse activities or to withdraw from the study with no further consequences. Participant consent will therefore be voluntary.

#### **SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS**

Participants with a disability are not a focus of this study. If any participant in this study has any kind of disability I will seek advice from the special education department in the College to request a special arrangement during data collection.

#### **THE INFORMED NATURE OF PARTICIPATION**

The participants will be fully informed of the research objectives and procedures, as well as what each data collection method involves for them, both orally and through the information sheet attached to the consent forms. Privacy and anonymity procedures will also be explained in detail to all participants. Participant consent will therefore be informed. The duration of the interviews, the nature of the information required, and what is expected from the participants, as well as disclosing the use of a recording device, will be outlined for the participants. Participants will be informed of the ways in which their privacy will be protected.

#### **ASSESSMENT OF POSSIBLE HARM**

In the field study, the researcher will ensure that all research procedures will be arranged in a schedule that ensures there is no interruption to students' studies. The researcher will run the interviews and interactions between participants in a friendly environment to reduce any kind of stress from participating in the research. The interviews and group interviews will last approximately 45-60 minutes. Interviews will be scheduled according to participants' timetables. While the use of technology in learning is not a particularly sensitive subject, sometimes cultural issues may arise. The researcher is aware of this sensitivity and will ensure that no harm will be inflicted on participants, as one-to-one interviews are completely confidential. The students' group interviews will concern opinions and views and will not consider their personal experiences. The group interviews will be conducted in an arranged and scheduled procedure and students will be informed of their role and dynamic flow of the conversation to minimise any stress of this procedure. I will facilitate the discussions in the sessions, by making them run in a friendly climate while I will seek some help from CoE staff, who volunteer to help, to moderate the sessions and taking notes.

#### **DATA PROTECTION AND STORAGE**

All data in this research will be handled carefully to retain confidentiality and anonymity throughout all research procedures. The data files for this research will be stored securely using a password protected digital medium belonging to the researcher. All written documents, such as student diaries and researcher field notes, will be kept in safe place in the researcher's office. The interview voice data will be saved on the researcher's mobile phone and on a tape recorder, the researcher will ensure that all interview data are stored securely. Audio recordings will be transferred to a password protected computer and deleted from the audio recording device at the earliest opportunity. Only the researcher and supervisors of the research can access this data. All reproduction of data, such as transcriptions of interviews, will be saved securely in the researcher's office. If a transcriber or a translator is used, an agreement will be signed to keep the data

confidential and secure. The research report will not use participants' names, and their quotes will be handled using pseudonyms. All digital data in this research will be destroyed, including any hard prints, within five years of the research according to university rules.

#### DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

This research interest is for knowledge that can help to improve practices involving learning and teaching using SNSs in higher education. It is the participants' right to know the objectives and purpose of this research. I will include some information about myself as a PhD student and how the results of this research could contribute to our understanding regarding improving education this context.

#### USER ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK

The participants will also be provided with contact details for the researcher and supervisors so that they have the opportunity to ask questions or provide feedback, including requests for research results.☒

#### INFORMATION SHEET

Attached

#### CONSENT FORM

Attached

#### SUBMISSION PROCEDURE

Staff and students should follow the procedure below.

In particular, students should discuss their application with their supervisor(s) / dissertation tutor / tutor and gain their approval prior to submission. Students should submit evidence of approval with their application, e.g. a copy of the supervisors email approval.

This application form and examples of your consent form, information sheet and translations of any documents which are not written in English should be submitted by email to the SSIS Ethics Secretary via one of the following email addresses:

[ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk) This email should be used by staff and postdoctoral students in Egenis, the Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies, Law, Politics, the Strategy & Security Institute, and Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology.

[ssis-gseethics@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:ssis-gseethics@exeter.ac.uk) This email should be used by staff and postdoctoral students in the Graduate School of Education.

### Information Sheet for Student Participants

#### Dear Student

I am a PhD student at the University of Exeter in the UK; I am currently conducting PhD research entitled "Social Network Sites in KSA Higher Education". The study focus is to explore uses, perceptions and expectations of SNS in higher education in this context. The objectives of the study are:

- 1- to explore how tutors and students use and perceive the use of SNS and mobile devices in and out class time.
- 2- to explore what impacts SNS and mobile devices use have on formal learning and class time.
- 3- to investigate factors affecting the use of SNSs in this context

You have been selected because your experience is important for answering research questions and it will be helpful in improving future educational practice, you will participate in one or more of the following methods:

1. **Students' daily diaries:** a meeting with 30 selected students will be arranged. You will be asked to fill a daily diary to record your daily uses of SNS for different learning activities over one week period. You will write diaries on the note pad given to you by the researcher. The researcher will explain the procedure to on how to fill the diary in the scheduled meeting.
2. **Students' interviews:** You will be asked to participate in one-to-one interviews after completing their diaries. The researcher will ask questions related to their use and experience of using SNSs for learning purposes, and asked the factors affecting these. The interview may last for 45 minutes and will be scheduled in their free time. I may ask them to explain some SNS the use (i.e. on VLE) for learning on their personal device. For data analysis purposes, the interview need to be voice recorded and then transcribed and translated to answer the research questions.
3. **Students' group interviews:** You will be asked to participate in a group discussion on using SNS in higher education. The researcher will outline some rules to arrange the flow of responses for each question at the beginning of the session. There will be a moderator helping to take notes of students' responses and the session will be voice recorded for data analysis. Students will be asked questions related to their opinions, advantages and disadvantages of SNS and mobile devices for their learning.

The interviews will be recorded to assist data analysis then it will be transcribed and analysed. Any information that you provide in the interview will be kept confidential, protected and will be used for research purposes only.

Please feel free to contact the researcher if you have any questions or inquiries regarding this research and its procedures or findings. My contact numbers are as follows:(UK) 00440746782090, (KSA) (0303904929). Alternatively, e-mail enquiries can be sent to smra202@exeter.ac.uk. You may also contact the supervisors of this research at the University of Exeter, Prof. Rupert Wegerif(r.b.wegerif@exeter.ac.uk) and Dr. Judith Kleine-Staarman(j.kleine-staarman@exeter.ac.uk) to discuss any concerns you may have.

**Title of Research Project: "Social Network Sites in KSA Higher Education"**  
**CONSENT FORM for Student Participants**

I understand that participating in this research means that I am willing to have a respectful attitude towards the research and all the participants involved. I have been fully informed by the researcher of the aims and purposes of the project and my participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

I understand that:

It is not compulsory for me to participate in this research project, and if I do choose to participate I may at any stage withdraw my participation. Such refusal will not have any negative consequences for me. I may also request that my data be destroyed.

I understand that my interviews will be recorded, transcribed and translated for data analysis.

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me.

Any information, which I give, will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications, academic conferences or seminar presentations.

If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form.

All information that I provide will be treated as confidential and the researcher will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

.....  
(Signature of participant)

.....  
(Date)

.....  
(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

\* Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

Revised March 2013

مكتب أَسْم التربية وعلم النفس

سعادة/ الملحق الثقافي للمملكة العربية السعودية في لندن حفظه الله  
السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ... وبعد

بعد التحية والتقدير ....

نود ابلاغ سعادتك بموافقتنا على تطبيق الرحلة العلمية لبحث الدكتوراه الخاص  
بالمحاضر/سحر رشيد محمد الختلان ، والمبتعثة إلى جامعة اكستر في بريطانيا ، بقرار  
اداري رقم 1957/1/4/16 بتاريخ 1433/9/9 هـ ، وذلك في كلية التربية بالجبيل/جامعة  
الدمام، وموضوع البحث معرفة أثر التغيير في التقنيات الحديثة وجيل التقنية النقالة على  
استخدامات وآراء الطالبات والمعلمات في نموذج للتعليم الالكتروني وكيف يتم استخدام  
التقنية في الأنشطة التعليمية ، وسيتم تطبيق الرحلة العلمية في الفصل الدراسي الثاني من  
العام الجامعي 1436/1437 هـ .

شاكرين ومقدرين تعاونكم

عنيدة كلية التربية بالجبيل

محمد الأمين الشنقيطي



س/التحطائي

٢٠٤٩



## Informed Consent in Arabic

نشرة معلومات عن البحث باللغة العربية

عزيزتي الطالبة،

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ،،

أشكر تعاونك ومشاركتك في بحث الدكتوراه حول استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في التعلم الشخصي وأثرها في التعليم وتهدف الدراسة إلى استكشاف الاستخدامات والتصورات والتوقعات المتعلقة من خلال تجربة الطالبة في وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. وأهداف هذه الدراسة هي كما يلي:

- 1 التعرف على استخدام وتصورات الطالبات لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في التعلم الذاتي والتطوير الشخصي.
  - 2 توضيح تأثيرات استخدام مواقع وسائل الاجتماعي على تعلم الطالبات وتطورهم .
  - 3 دراسة العوامل التي تؤثر على استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في التعلم الشخصي والأكاديمي.
- تم اختياركم للمشاركة في هذا البحث حيث أن خبرتكم مهمة للتوصل إلى نتائج الدراسة وللإجابة على تساؤلاتها، وذلك من خلال المشاركة في طرق البحث التالية:

### 1 مذكرات:

يطلب من الطالبة تسجيل استخدامها في مذكرة تأملية يقوم الباحث بإرسالها لهم عبر البريد الإلكتروني أو يدويا حسب رغبة الطالبة، إضافة إلى تعبئة مقال تأملي حول استخدام وسائل التواصل وأثرها على تعلمهم وتطورهم ودورها في التعليم

### 2 المقابلات الشخصية للطالبات:

يطلب من الطالبات المشاركة في المقابلات الشخصية حيث تقوم الباحثة بالسؤال عن خبراتهم في استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي لأغراض التعليم مع سؤالهم عن العوامل التي تؤثر على ذلك. وقد تستغرق هذه المقابلات الشخصية مدة 45 دقيقة مع تحديد جدول زمني لها في أوقات فراغهم. وقد أطلب منهم أيضاً شرح استخدام بعض مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي للتعلم عن طريق أجهزةهم الشخصية. ولأغراض تحليل البيانات؛ يلزم التسجيل الصوتي لهذه المقابلات الشخصية وكتابتها بعد ذلك وترجمتها للإجابة على أسئلة البحث.

### 3 المقابلات الجماعية للطالبات:

سيتم توجيه أسئلة إلى الطالبات للمشاركة في مناقشات جماعية بشأن رأيهم وتوقعاتهم من استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في التعلم الشخصي. وسيقوم الباحث بتحديد بعض القواعد لتنظيم العديد من الإجابات المتعلقة بكل من الأسئلة في بداية كل محاضرة. كما يتطلب ذلك التسجيل الصوتي لهذا اللقاء لتحليل البيانات. وسيتم أيضاً توجيه أسئلة حول آراء الطالبات ووجهات نظرهم والمزايا أو السلبيات المتعلقة باستخدام مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي وأجهزة الهواتف الجوالة لأغراض التعليم.

يرجى عدم التردد في الاتصال بالباحث في حال لديك أي أسئلة أو استفسارات متعلقة بهذا البحث وإجراءاته أو نتائجه. وأرقام هاتفي هي: 00440746782090 (المملكة المتحدة)، 0505904929 (المملكة العربية السعودية). وقد يتم . [smra202@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:smra202@exeter.ac.uk) بدلاً من ذلك إرسال أي استفسارات على هذا البريد الإلكتروني التالي:

## نموذج إقرار موافقة الطالبة على المشاركة في البحث

عنوان مشروع البحث: "وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في التعلم الذاتي والتطوير الشخصي والأكاديمي لطالبات التعليم العالي بالمملكة العربية السعودية"

لقد أطلعتني الباحثة بصورة كاملة على أهداف وأغراض البحث. وتعتبر مشاركتي في هذه الدراسة مشاركة تطوعية تماماً. ولدي الحق في عدم المشاركة أو إيقاف المشاركة في أي وقت. وأعي أنه بموافقتي على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة؛ فأنا على علم بما يلي: أدرك أن جميع بياناتي سيتم حفظها في سرية تامة وستستخدم لأغراض البحث العلمي مثل المنشورات الأكاديمية والعلمية. وتستخدم البيانات بهدف الإجابة على تساؤلات البحث والوصول للنتائج. جميع البيانات ستستخدم لأغراض البحث العلمي فقط، ويشمل ذلك المطبوعات وسيتم إتلاف البيانات خلال فترة محددة من انتهاء البحث. علماً بأن التعامل مع البيانات يضمن خصوصية المشتركات في البحث.

أدرك أن تسجيل مقابلي لغرض تحليل البيانات والوصول للنتائج في هذا البحث .

- أوافق على تسجيل مقابلي صوتياً  
 لا أوافق على تسجيل مقابلي صوتياً

.....  
(التاريخ)

.....  
(توقيع المشارك)

.....  
(الاسم المطبوع للمشارك)

يحتفظ المشترك بنسخة واحدة من هذا النموذج مع احتفاظ الباحث بنسخة ثانية.

## Appendix C: Preliminary Methods Design

### 1. In-depth interview questions

Main question	Probe	Hint
Can you describe the role of SNSs in your development in general and in your learning?	Give me example on what kind of activities you engage in?	
	Do you use it for your learning? How do you SNSs use for learning?	
How did you learn to use SNSs? How do you start using it for learning?	Give me examples on your use of SNS in learning purposes	What spaces? Explain why?
	What encourages you to use SNSs as resources for your learning	How do you feel about using SNSs for educational purposes?
Describe some purposes and activities you do on SNSs for studying?	What motivates you to participate	Patterns of participation
	How do you view group participations	
Describe networks related to the class or in the college you participate in?	What does it mean to you to be connected in networks?	Informal networks? Or Formal?
	Give me examples? What do you talk about?	
	What activities you do?	
	What is your role in these network?	What concerns you? What advantages and disadvantages?
	What motivates you to participate? What discourage you?	Are these network are extension of real activities in the college?
Do you think that the use of SNSs impact and relate your engagement in classes and in college activities?	Give example ... Explain	Is there any class activities depending on your use of SNSs
Tell me about how do you think your development and learning is affected by your use of SNSs.	How your learning is changing? What are your expectations? What are your needs?	Traditional learning?
Do you like to add any thing more?		

## 2. Focus Group questions

Name		Name:
Name		Name:

Main Questions	Probes	Hint
How do you think SNSs use is changing your learning?	Your abilities Motivation to learn Confidant and control Enormous choices Your development in course learning and in general	
From your experience, What impacts does SNSs had on class engagement and on college engagement		
What is your expectations for using SNSs in education	Needs Suggestions	
Do you note problems or difficulties of using SNSs for learning?	Limitations	
Do you have anything to add?		

## **Appendix D: Final Method Guide in English**

### **1.Semi-structured Interview Schedule Guide**

#### **1. Introducing the interview and Demographic Information (5 minutes)**

As a student who has learning experience in higher education in this college and from your own personal use of social media such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook..etc. Please feel free to share all your feelings and opinions about your own experience and personal uses and its relation to your engagement in social and academic life. The objective of this interview is on your learning experience in social media and what does social media use mean to you. This interview will last for approximately 45 minutes. I will start recording after you consent. Remember, your responses will be treated anonymously and your identity will be protected in research. Please if you feel you are under stress to answer any question or to complete the interviewee let me know.

Can you tell about your self? (Name, department, age, hobbies, activities in the college...)

#### **2. Usage and awareness (social media in personal life).**

- What role doe's social media play in your social and personal life? How important social media is for you?
- How do you think social media influencing your personal development?
- Can you describe some personal purposes and activities on social media?
- How do you use social media in your personal development?
- How do you feel about social media in your life?
- What encourages you to use social media for development and learning?
- How do you start using social media?
- Can you describe the influence of engaging in social media on your own learning?

- **Usage and awareness (social media in academic life)**
  - What role does social media play in your study and academic life? How important is social media for your self-directed learning and academic development?
  - Can you describe some academic and learning purposes in social media?
  - How do you start using social media for self-directed learning and academic development?
  - What encourages you to use social media for self-directed learning and academic development?
  - How do you think the relationship between social media and your attainment?
  - How do you feel about using social media to communicate with friends?
  - What do you think about your own role in study and how social media impact you?
  - Can you tell me what do you think the most important factor that keeps you engaged in your study? Why?
  
- **Evaluating learning outcomes and overall experience**
  - From your experience in social media, how do you evaluate and give value to your learning experience overall, what is the importance of social media to your learning and development?
  - Can you tell me in what ways do you think that engaging in social media had facilitated or impact your self-directed learning?
  - What are your expectations, suggestions and needs from your experience?
  
- **Closure**
  - Do you have any comment, suggestions to add or to share?

Thank you for participating in this research. You have the right to receive a copy of finding if you wish.

## **2.Focus Group Interview Schedule Guide**

### **Part One: Introducing the interview objectives and procedures (5 minutes)**

As a student who has learning experience in higher education in this college and from your own personal use of social media such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, etc. Please feel free to share all your feelings and opinions about your own experience and personal uses and its relation to your engagement in personal and academic life. The objective of this discussion is on your learning experience with interested to know what does this social media use mean to you as a person and as a learner and how it influence your views on learning. This interview will last for approximately 45-60 minutes. All of you have the right to express their own views and opinions, and to listen to others views and opinions. All views are important so feel free to participate. I will start recording after you consents. Remember, your responses will be treated anonymously and your identities will be protected in research. Please if you feel you are under stress to answer any question or to complete the interviewee let me know.

### **Part Two: Demographic Information and introducing participants (10 Minutes):**

Can you tell about your selves?

### **Part Three: The discussion (The questions were used for guide for the discussions but not restrictive)**

#### **From your own experiences of personal learning in social media**

Q1: What is the importance of social media to you? How do you think social media use in personal learning is changing your social and academic life?

Q2: What advantages doe's social media had on your self-directed learning? What encourage you to use social media for self-directed learning?

Q3: Do you note any problems or difficulties of using social media on your learning and engagement?

Q4: What are your expectations, needs, and suggestions in light of your experience?

### **Part Four: Closure**

Do you have anything to add?

Thank you for participating in this research. You have the right to contact me at any time if you wish to receive a copy of the findings.

### 3. Students' Reflective Diary Report

Department		Level
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As a student who has a learning experience in higher education in this college and from your own personal use of social media such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, etc. Feel free to share all your feelings and opinions about your own experience and personal uses and its relation to your engagement in social and academic life. Your responses will be treated anonymously, and your identity will be protected in research. Please if you feel you are under stress to answer any question or to complete the diary, let me know.

**On a normal day, think about how you have used Social Media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, What's App, etc.) and write your reflection:**

1-Reflect on the time you spend daily on Social Media? What sites you regularly use? Why?

2- Describe your purposes from daily browsing social media? Describe the activities you do? Do you use social media to communicate with students and teachers?

3- What social media have you used for independent study? Why?

5- From your own daily uses of social media, write an essay to reflect on how social media impact your academic and personal development?



## Appendix E: Final Method Guide in Arabic

### مخطط أسئلة المقابلة الشخصية باللغة العربية

#### الجزء الأول : تقديم المقابلة والبيانات الشخصية ( 5 دقائق):

يهدف هذا البحث إلى معرفة أثر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على التعلم الذاتي في حياة الطالبة الشخصية و الاجتماعية و الأكاديمية. أشكر تطوعك للمشاركة في البحث من خلال مشاركتك بتجربتك الخاصة للإجابة عن أسئلة المقابلة والتي ستسهم مساهمة فعالة في إنجاز البحث . أود تذكيرك بأن إجاباتك وكافة بياناتك ستعامل بسرية تامة لأغراض البحث. في حال شعورك أنك تحت ضغط لإجابة أي سؤال يمكنك التوقف وإبلاغي بذلك. **تعريف المصطلحات :** مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي مثل (يوتيوب، تويتر، فيس بوك، انستاجرام، سناب شات، بلوجز (مدونات) واتس أب إلخ....) **الترحيب بالطالبة و التعرف على بياناتها**

#### الجزء الثاني : الاستخدام، الوعي، الاتجاهات ( مواقع التواصل في الحياة الاجتماعية وتطوير الذات)

- ما الدور الذي تلعبه وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في حياتك اليومية و الاجتماعية؟ ما أهمية وسائل التواصل بالنسبة لك؟
- هل يمكنك التحدث عن أهدافك من تصفح وسائل التواصل ؟
- هل يمكنك التحدث عن استخدامك لوسائل التواصل في تطوير ذاتك؟
- برأيك ما أثر مواقع التواصل على حياتك الاجتماعية وتطويرك الذاتي؟
- كيف تشعرين حيال استخدام وسائل التواصل في حياتك الشخصية؟
- ما الأسباب التي شجعت على استخدامك وسائل التواصل في التطوير الذاتي؟ وما العوائق؟
- هل يمكنك التحدث كيف بدأت استخدام وسائل التواصل ؟
- كيف يمكنك وصف أثر وسائل التواصل على اندماجك الشخصي في التطوير الذاتي والحياة الاجتماعية؟
- ماذا يعني لك استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي بشكل شخصي؟

#### الجزء الثالث : الاستخدام، الوعي، الاتجاهات ( مواقع التواصل في الحياة الأكاديمية والتعلم الذاتي )

- ما الدور الذي تلعبه وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في دراستك و حياتك الأكاديمية ؟ ما أهمية وسائل التواصل بالنسبة لدراستك الأكاديمية؟
- هل يمكنك وصف الأغراض الأكاديمية والدراسية من استخدامك لوسائل التواصل؟
- ما الأسباب التي شجعت على استخدامك وسائل التواصل في الدراسة الشخصية للمقررات والتطور الأكاديمي؟
- ماذا يعني لك استخدام الوسائل في تعلمك الأكاديمي؟ هل تعتقدين هناك علاقة بين استخدام وسائل التواصل و تطويرك الأكاديمي؟
- كيف تستخدمين الوسائل في الاتصال بزميلتك في الفصل وما أثر ذلك عليك؟ (فعال لماذا؟ غير فعال لماذا؟)
- كيف تشعرين حيال دورك الشخصي في الدراسة ؟ برأيك ما أثر مواقع التواصل على دورك كمتعلمة؟
- هل يمكنك وصف ما العامل الأكثر فعالية لإبقائك مندمجة في الفصل و في الدراسة الأكاديمية؟
- ماذا يعني لك استخدام وسائل التواصل بشكل أكاديمي؟

#### الجزء الرابع : تقييم التجربة التعليمية بشكل عام

- من خلال تجربتك التعليمية في وسائل التواصل ما تقييمك لأهمية وسائل التواصل وأثرها على دورك في التعلم الذاتي( مميزات ، معوقات )
- ما توقعاتك ، احتياجاتك و اقتراحاتك في ضوء تجربتك بالتعلم في وسائل التواصل؟

#### الجزء الخامس : خاتمة

- هل لديك إضافة أو تعليق أو مشاركة ؟
- أشكر لك مشاركتك ، يمكنك الاتصال بالباحثة في أي وقت للحصول على نسخة من النتائج إذا رغبت.

**الجزء الأول : تقديم المقابلة والإجراءات العامة للمشاركة ( 5 دقائق):**

يهدف هذا البحث إلى معرفة أثر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على التعلم الذاتي في حياة الطالبة الشخصية و الاجتماعية والأكاديمية. أشكر تطوعك للمشاركة في البحث من خلال مشاركتك بتجربتك الخاصة للإجابة عن أسئلة المقابلة والتي ستسهم مساهمة فعالة في إنجاز البحث . أود تذكيرك بأن إجاباتك وكافة بياناتك ستعامل بسرية تامة لأغراض البحث.في حال شعورك أنك تحت ضغط لإجابة أي سؤال يمكنك التوقف وإبلاغي بذلك. جميع المشاركات مهمة بدون أي استثناء ، كل طالبة لها الحق في المشاركة وتقديم رأيها.

**تعريف المصطلحات :** مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي مثل (يوتيوب، تويتر، فيس بوك، انستاجرام، سناب شات، بلوجز (مدونات) واتس أب الخ....)

**الجزء الثاني : التعرف بالطالبات والبيانات الشخصية (10 دقائق) :**

الرجاء من كل طالبة التعريف بنفسها

**الجزء الثالث : المناقشة**

**من خلال تجربتك الشخصية في استخدام مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي:**

- ما أهمية وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي للتطوير والتعلم الذاتي من وجهة نظرك؟ ماذا يعني لك استخدام وسائل التواصل في حياتك الشخصية و تطوير الذات؟ هل تعتقدين لها أثر في تعلمك الأكاديمي الذاتي و تطورك؟
- ما مميزات استخدام وسائل التواصل في التعلم الذاتي و تطورك الاجتماعي والأكاديمي؟ ما الأسباب التي شجعتك على التعلم الذاتي في وسائل التواصل؟
- ما معوقات و صعوبات التعلم الذاتي في ظل استخدام وسائل لتواصل الاجتماعي ؟
- كيف يمكنك تقييم تجربتك التعليمية في ظل وجود وسائل التواصل ؟ ما توقعاتك في ضوء تجربتك ؟ ما احتياجاتك ؟

**الجزء الرابع : الخاتمة**

هل يوجد إضافة أو تعليق أو اقتراح ؟

أشكر لك مشاركتك ، يمكنك الاتصال بالباحثة في أي وقت للحصول على نسخة من النتائج إذا رغبت.





## Appendix F: Participants' demographics

### Individual interviews and Diaries Participants' Backgrounds

No	Pseudonym	Department	Age	Year	Way of choosing and back ground
1	PS1	PS	20	3	Blogger and students' clubs
2	PS2	PS	23	4	Part time job
3	PS3	PS	19	2	Media production and design experiences
4	Ps4	PS	19	4	Internship student
5	E1	E	19	2	Photographing career
6	E2	E	19	1	Teacher choice
7	E3	E	21	3	Design and Media production and translation experience
8	E4	E	1	19	Teacher choice
9	E5	E		4	Internship Student
10	ICT1	ICT	20	2	Teacher choice
11	ICT2	ICT	19	2	Design and media production
12	ICT3	ICT	20	2	Blogger and active in clubs
13	ICT4	ICT	18	2	Design and media production
14	ICT5		4		Teacher choice
15	M1	M	20	3	Teacher choice
16	M2	M	19	2	Students' clubs experience
17	SE1	SE	19	1	Teacher choice
18	SE2	SE	19	2	Transmitted to college from far area
19	SE3	SE	19	1	Teacher choice
20	Ph1	PH	22	3	Teacher choice

## Focus Group interviews Participants

### FG1 Participants

No	Pseudonym	Department	Age	Yr.
1	S1	Special Needs Education	20	3
2	S2	Pre School Education	20	3
3	S3	Pre School Education	19	3
4	S4	Special Needs Education	19	3
5	S5	English Language	20	4
6	S6	Special Needs Education	20	4

### FG 2 Participants

No	Pseudonym	Department	Age	Yr
1	S1	Special Needs Education	19	3
2	S2	English Language	19	2
3	S3	Pre School Education	19	3
4	S4	English Language	20	3
5	S1	Special Needs Education	19	3
6	S3	Pre School Education	19	3

## Appendix G: Final Themes List

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Category	Code
Motivations and drivers for students' engagement in independent learning and personal development	Positive attitudes based on personal factor	Self-efficacy and reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perceived confidence and awareness of personal abilities</li> <li>The prospect of enhanced performance</li> <li>Self-awareness of needs and self-evaluations</li> <li>Control of behavioural engagement (effort)</li> <li>Time management</li> <li>Coping strategies</li> </ul>
		Personal values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hobbies and interests (things they value)</li> <li>Mastery of skills and performance (doing their best)</li> <li>Exploration and its relation to independence</li> <li>Originality and its relation to creativity</li> <li>Helping others and spreading knowledge</li> <li>Religion and family influences</li> </ul>
		Awareness of opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enriching and updating information</li> <li>Self-regulated learning and its relation to availability of different methods and forms</li> <li>Strengthen social skills and relationships</li> <li>Emotional regulation</li> <li>Self-presentation and self and career development</li> <li>Differences and multi-cultural Awareness</li> <li>Collective decision-making and interactive voting</li> </ul>
	Positive attitudes based on social and contextual factors	Challenges and transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transition and university adjustment</li> <li>Academic requirements</li> </ul>
		Social inclusion and learning from others experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community influence</li> <li>University influence</li> <li>Teacher influence</li> <li>Peer influence:</li> </ul>
		Freedom of choice and independent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empowerment in social life</li> <li>Empowerment in academic life</li> <li>Empowerment for identity</li> </ul>



### Final Themes List

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Category	Code
Barriers and difficulties for students' engagement in independent learning and personal development	Negative attitudes based on personal factor	Negative attitudes towards social media and their relation to personal and academic difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detecting academic difficulties from social media use</li> <li>• Variations and gaps in students' attitudes and experiences</li> <li>• Depression and disconnection</li> <li>• Perceived lack of support</li> </ul>
		Perceived social media risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of social media risks (Openness Vs. Risk)</li> <li>• Awareness of potential risks in social media</li> </ul>
	Negative attitudes caused by social and organisational contextual factors	Distraction and Overload	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disorientation</li> <li>• The influence of disorganised behaviour on the networks</li> </ul>
		Curriculum and educational organisational culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of inclusive pedagogy and organisation plans</li> <li>• Lack of personal support and feedback</li> <li>• Focus of assessment method</li> </ul>
		Lack of social inclusion	
		Technical Problems and its relation to fears	
		Time and cost issues	
Benefits of Social media on students engagement in personal development		Perceived Change in attitudes and development of self-confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived Development of life skills:</li> <li>• Perceived Development in awareness and openness:</li> <li>• Perceived Development of confidence in social engagement and relationships</li> </ul>
		Perceived Change in attitudes and development of academic/career confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived academic performance and achievement</li> <li>• Perceived change in attitudes and motivation</li> <li>• Perceived engagement in career development:</li> </ul>
Educational Issues raised from students experiences and perceptions			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived differences amongst students' abilities and knowledge</li> <li>• Views with respect to teachers</li> <li>• Views with respect to curriculum</li> </ul>

## Appendix H: Preliminary Emergent Themes Tree on MAXQDA

The screenshot displays the MAXQDA 12 software interface. The window title is "/Users/SaharAcc/Desktop/New project.mx12 - MAXQDA 12 (Release 12.1.0)". The interface includes a toolbar with various icons, a timeline at the bottom left showing "00:00:00/00:00:00", and a main workspace showing a "Code System" tree. The tree is organized as follows:

- Code System (971)
  - Opportunities for learner role in general (informal learning) (48)
    - positive emotional effect (77)
    - views on using social media informally (68)
    - Perceived increased openness (48)
    - Increased confidence in different skills and learning new things (52)
    - Increased Motivation for learning and self development (52)
  - Opportunities for formal learning and learning strategies (60)
    - different learning strategies and styles (tailored learning) (68)
    - Asking questions and social learning (55)
    - Independent study (7)
    - Increased engagement with college and their studies (114)
    - creative assignments (81)
    - professional learning and communities (46)
  - Perceived challenges (23)
    - expectation from teachers (36)
    - Language, cultural and technical barriers (83)
    - Uncertainty of information and trust issues (53)
    - group and teamwork problems (0)
    - emotional depression (0)
    - effect on F2F communication and interpersonal relationships (0)
    - lack of digital literacy skills (2)
    - lack of time management and attitudes (9)
  - Sets (0)

## Appendix I: Example of one case (in-depth interview) analysis on MAXQDA

The screenshot displays the MAXQDA 12 software interface. The main window shows a document titled 'Shohood' with Arabic text. The text is segmented into numbered sections (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and contains several highlighted passages. A sidebar on the left shows color-coded tags such as 'life style and gen', 'invest my free t', 'environment fa', 'youtube essent', and 'language barrik'. On the right, a 'Code System' panel lists categories like 'Opportunities for learner role in general (informal learning)', 'Opportunities for formal learning and learning strategies', 'Perceived challenges', and 'Sets' with corresponding counts. The bottom status bar indicates 'Simple Coding Query (OR combination of codes)'.

الاسم	المستوى	التخصص

**الباحثة : ممكن تحكي لي كيف تستخدمين المواقع ؟**

**الباحثة : كيف أثر عليك استخدام مواقع التواصل؟**

**الباحثة : اعطيتكم مة ، كيف اذ عليك ؟**

## Appendix J: Example of final multiple level manual analysis of an in-depth interview script in English

### Part one: defining the goals of the study and introductions

This study aims to determine the impact of social media on independent learning in the student's personal, social and academic life.

I thank you for volunteering to participate in this study by sharing your personal experience to answer interview questions. This will make an important contribution to the completion of the study.

I would like to remind you that your answers and personal data will be handled with the utmost confidentiality and only be used for the purposes of this study.

If you feel under pressure to answer any question, you can abstain from answering and inform me of this.

Researcher: can you introduce yourself to me?

Student: .....

### Part 2: (personal use: awareness and trends)

Researcher: what role social media play in your personal and social life? For example, how do you use it?

*she feels positive about social media because she learn about other cultures*

Student: I use social media for multiple purposes. I benefit from it and use it a lot for beneficial things. Sure I use it for fun but I also use it to explore knowledge, so we can learn more about the civilizations of the world while we are at home. This is the most effective way to inform ourselves about other civilizations and their ways of life, so if I travel there one day I will have full knowledge about the place from social media. Also from an educational standpoint, anything I have difficulty with in my studies, I use social media to help me understand better.

*Positive Attitude driven caused by Personal Factor Opprobriety awareness*

*Positive because she can overcome difficulties*

Researcher: Can you give me an example of your goals when surfing social media on an ordinary day?

Student: The first thing I do is check current events, if anything has happened suddenly, today's current affairs. I check accounts of prominent personalities in our society, for example ..... and ..... (famous local personalities). I can read the comments and people's interactions with the content.

She feels positive because she has values to do best

Researcher: Ok, what does this mean for you? What is its impact on your learning and your life?

Student: Education, as in, for example educating yourself in multiple things, and more generally [personal] development. For example, to clarify for you, things such as fashions, like make up, things like that, like I knew how to use it but I didn't know how to use it well. From the amount of content I see on Youtube or even Snapchat et cetera I have come to understand and be skilful and do it proficiently, despite previously not knowing anything or maybe only simple things. It's not just fashion and makeup, I have learnt many, many things, for example in terms of language, I learn from clips that I watch in English to improve my language skill. They [English-speakers] make videos about anything in life in their language and in their style, so this is great for developing language skills.

personal driver  
↓  
doing the best  
↓  
mastery

drivers

↑  
personal values

personal value

Researcher: can you tell me how you started using social media for independent learning and what impact that has had on you?

Student: In middle school I picked up the hobby of reading illustrated stories on social media, and was reading them in English. When I saw people were translating them into Arabic, I thought I could also help with translating. I entered courses for English and I then started to help the translators. We used Blogger to exhibit out translated stories on the internet, and we gained followers, some downloaded the stories, some viewed them, and shared comments and opinions.

learn from others

awareness of opportunities

Researcher: Can you explain how this translation impacted you? And what does it mean to you personally?

Student: The most meaningful thing to me was the support that we received in our translation projects. Firstly, we found people following our stories and working with us more on the translation. We were able to discover mistakes in our previous work as people would comment saying things like "don't use this word, use this one instead" or "your Arabic language is weak, take this information and benefit from it" or "this word in English is slang, it's not like the translation that you have used". Another effect of my love for these illustrated stories in middle school was that I gradually came to love the English language, and when I came to secondary school, I entered English language courses. This even impacted my choice [of university course], and I entered humanities so I could study English, despite my grades being higher in the sciences.

social driver  
social inclusion

↓  
support  
↓  
immediate feedback

she feels positive because of feedback and support  
social driver

Researcher: In your opinion, what encouraged you to learn independently through social media?

Student: My ambition is to specialise in the English language, the things I learnt from social media have made me feel this should be my field and that I can be creative in it. This is what attracted me and opened me up to the world more. This is not just for the English language, but for everything, even if I have homework I search in Google, it all comes together, I can search in Google and find images and videos to watch, it's easier.

Researcher: do you have other motives for using social media in independent learning?

Student: I think the thing that motivated me most to do the translations was other people sharing the same interest. I found people from other countries with the same interest, which

social driver

Personal value ⇒ driver  
 ↓  
 hobby

driver  
 ↓  
 family

driver  
 time

increased my love for this hobby. It's fun when you share your hobby with other people, particularly if this hobby is something new for your society and people may not have heard of it before, it's fun when you find people who do know it. Also, my family helped me and bought programs which assisted in the translations, for example Atlas and things like that, and they also gave me the time I needed. Through this hobby I also learnt how to use Photoshop, as I need to erase writing in English from the image, so now I can design images on Photoshop, and can design prayers and slogans on banners and posters. Only through this hobby was I able to become a Photoshop designer. I can also go to the library and print my Photoshop designs, for example I even created seven slogan banners for clubs at the my university faculty.

Personal driver  
 ↓  
 use of strategies  
 ↓  
 time management

Researcher: How would you describe the role of social media in your life in general?  
 Student: It is fundamental, now I am coming from .... (location one hour away from the College), and my computer is in my bag and I have my phone, so that I can work during the journey. The time is split between entertainment and studying. I personally rely on the internet for 90% of my learning because most of the courses I take are online, for example a full course on English speaking and listening with foreign teachers that I take on the ..... website. I have taken several courses in drawing and all my certificates are from internet courses.

feeling positive  
 she can learn because she is self motivated self-efficacy

**Part two: (Academic independent learning: awareness, use and trends)**

positive  
 ↓  
 self efficacy

Researcher: Can you tell me how you use social media in academic independent learning?  
 Student: During the exam period, for studying, I use social media more, particularly Youtube. Now there are people on Youtube who have made channels and will explain subjects, for example, explanations for mathematics, English or anything really. Anything that I find difficulty with, I go to Youtube to have it explained to me, then I study it. Also there are many translators even on Snapchat, for example if I need a point explained to me, on Youtube there are specialized teachers from all nationalities who create specific channels to explain all subjects. Each of these channels focuses on one particular academic subject. Therefore I just type in the address of the channel to get what I want, and several videos appear, and I watch the exact one I want.

self-efficacy

she makes time management

Researcher: Do you find these videos immediately, and do you have enough time? How do you choose?

Student: It can take time but not a lot, I find what I want straight away, and it is easy to understand and easier than the [real life] teacher's explanation. I check how long the video is and see if the person posting the video has a verified channel specialised in the subject, for example if his name is well-known and if he has a good style of explanation.

feeling positive  
 ↓  
 she don't waste time

choice

Researcher: Does that mean that you have come to prefer independent learning with multiple options?

Student: In terms of studying, I prefer one choice. For example, with independent learning, I independently learn things that I choose, I don't want someone to impose independent learning on me in a class, as there are certain subjects I choose to learn in class. This is my view, independent learning depends on you and your desire to learn, so if I choose to learn

Freedom of choice

more about a subject, I will automatically go and do so, but that depends on your desire to learn.

pedagogical driver for engagement  
Feeling positive when social media used in the class

Researcher: Do you find that social media impacts your engagement in studying and in class?

pedagogical barriers to engagement negative attitude towards traditional teaching

Student: Yes, for example, in my last class, students used four videos in the ..... syllabus, which were inserted as a quick preparatory presentation and the videos were interactive. The videos included personality tests, and quick intelligence tests from social media, as well as a memory test. The video was interactive as it involved Twitter voting in class. Once, the display was very special and increased my engagement and focus on the academic subject. On the contrary, if the lesson was presented in a normal way, it won't be impactful or draw the student in, because class starts an hour after we start the day, in the middle of the day, by which time we are tired / bored. As soon as they displayed the intelligence test on Twitter, the class suddenly came back to life. Most of the girls in the class with me have reached their limit and are tired, the class is usually long and arduous so when they did things this way [with technology] I felt more energized.

Researcher: can you explain more about this experience? How did they start using Youtube in the class and how did that effect you?

diver personal values driver doing the best

Student: In the beginning, the group was required to do a presentation as part of the syllabus requirements. The subject of my presentation was adolescence, and how teenagers require care and attention. So I began by searching "role of parents in raising teenagers" on Youtube. I tried looking for videos by professionals such as PhD holders, for example Dr. .... (academic in psychology) appeared, other people also appeared (famous people) and I watched their videos. After that, I thought these videos would only be people talking, and I decided that I wanted to present something more educational with pictures and colors, which would be better for the presentation. I found a video of a doctor talking about the same subject, but the video was presented in a nice way and he explained through cartoon drawings, which was suitable for the presentation, easy and clear. So when I first saw the video, I memorized its content for the final exam as I found the video, but in the presentation we work by ourselves.

independence

Researcher: In your opinion, what does using social media mean for independent learning in general?

personal driver  
Feeling positive  
Studying  
Self-regulated Learning

Student: The first advantage is the ease of understanding concepts clearly, as they are presented in a way more appropriate for our thinking, age and preferences. When you go on social media for studying, this is suitable for our preferences as students of our age, so we come to like these things as we are bored of rote learning. Learning through social media stirs something within us, particularly Youtube, which has well-presented, logical videos giving a clear picture. Its more suitable for us girls and helps us memorize better. Furthermore, I find girls interact more with presentations which feature Twitter. We can also use Twitter in class like in implementing the intelligence test when the student chooses answers they appear on the projector screen and we can select answers with her through voting. We measured her IQ and we really absorbed the ideas. The presentation was effective in drawing the attention of all the girls, who interacted and understood in a great and practical manner. Things like this from social media are fun and get entrenched in the mind, there are things which draw ones attention by the method of presentation, and it contains much new information.

**Part three: Conclusion**

Student is disinterested about having choices and need for teacher experience

Researcher: Do you have anything to add or suggest?

Student: I personally support the use of social media for independent use, but it need not be imposed. For instance, I don't support classes being entirely based on social media, in secondary school, I studied syllabuses which each involved five strategies. It got to a point where even hearing the word "strategy" would annoy us. In the end, generally when things are overused in class they become boring and we just think about how to get out early. We come to class because we want the teacher to explain. For example, we have a teacher in secondary school who would make us draw conceptual maps each class. In the first week or first month it was fun but after that it became too much and final exams were approaching, and we started to rely on videos for studying, we felt it was more fun and saved time. We discovered things we could use on social media which were fun, exciting and stayed in our memory more than other methods, as it was brief and contained things that focused our attention. The method of style of presentation in these videos were light-hearted.

Freedom and choices in curriculum



## Appendix K: Examples illustrating the multiple level coding analysis using IP

Case	Frequently Words used by the student	Descriptive Words From students words	Conceptual understanding Of researcher	Emergent theme
FG1S5	I do not use I am not a user I do not know these things I do not know what is going on	Feeling frustrated by the educational process because there is a lack of perceived support for her needs when other students present different knowledge in social media	Lack of inclusive teaching strategies	Barriers and difficulties caused by the social and organisational context
SE2 Interview	I am not from this college I do not know anyone I was shy to ask My school has not offered me this training	Shy from asking the teachers because she felt that other students do not need the support she needs and she felt they do not expect her to ask	Lack of personal support	Barriers and difficulties caused by the social and organisational context
ICT5 Reflective diary	I know I am sure I feel positive I rarely brow without a goal There are chances Some people can not get benefits	Feeling positive because she is confidant about her ability to achieve goals and to control how much time in terms of life priorities	Confidence Self-efficacy combined with self-regulation and achievement	Personal motivations and drivers

### **FG1S5 (focus group):**

*“ I don’t use social media a lot. I mean, I am not a user. And I do not know these things on social media The students in their presentation refer to social media sites, experts and events as examples that I do not have any background about it, when this happens, which is often, I feel like I do not know what is going on. “*

### **SE2 (in-depth interview):**

*“I am not from this college, I mean when I came I did not know anyone I found difficult to find friends and to go on with my study, because the university is different from school. My school has not offered me this training I was not introduced to networks and computers, so I was very slow and felt frustrated. However, I was shy to ask for support, because all students seemed talented and used to using these networks for study from their school. So I used social media to learn independently.”*

### **ICT5 (reflective diary):**

*“ Social media has a positive influence on me because I can control when and I know how much time in relation to my religious, family and study priorities. Then I think about my hobbies and future and life after, so I rarely browse without a benefit or goal. I am sure that these sites provide golden chances for people who employ it in a right way; however, unfortunately, some people in spite of having these chances in front of them, they cannot get benefit from it. The reason is that their family may not encourage them or because of their friends, and they are not getting advice on how to use it.”*

## Appendix L Summary of the main theoretical contributions of research

Main Theoretical contributions	Description				Implication on individual, organisational curriculum and pedagogical levels
Detecting difficulties from social media use	Negative Attitudes	Negative Attitudes	Positive Attitudes	Positive Attitudes	Students' attitudes and experiences of using social media can detect personal learning difficulties and organisational pedagogical difficulties in the context.
	Based on negative influence of social media on personal development = personal and academic difficulties	Influenced by social and organizational factors = barriers and difficulties in the organisational and pedagogical context	Based on positive influence of social media on personal development = personal drivers and motivations	Influenced by social and organisational factors= social and organizational drivers	
Personal drivers and motivations for engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-efficacy and skills</li> <li>• Personal values</li> <li>• Awareness of opportunity</li> </ul>				Personal drivers identify challenges for engagement and present knowledge about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Students' preparation and support</li> <li>-Self-assessment to raise students' self-awareness and reflection of learning process, encourage self-evaluation.</li> <li>-Personal drivers can also be used to understand individuals engagement in personal development from other groups</li> </ul>
Social and organizational pedagogical drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges and transitions</li> <li>• Social inclusion and learning from others' experiences</li> <li>• Independence and freedom of choice</li> </ul>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Providing of learning choices supports students' independence</li> <li>-Learning form sharing others' experience including teacher and peer influence</li> </ul>
Personal barriers and difficulties for students' engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of awareness of the learning process</li> <li>• Perceived social media risk</li> </ul>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Students' learning skills and self-awareness need to be assessed regularly through self-assessment e-quizzes to prevent negative influence on personal and academic development under social media risk.</li> <li>-Improve awareness of learning and teaching process underlies technology use.</li> </ul>
Social, organizational and pedagogical barriers and difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distraction and overload</li> <li>• Need for organisation and policy plans</li> <li>• Lack for inclusive pedagogy</li> <li>• Lack of continuous personal support and feedback</li> <li>• Focus of assessment method</li> </ul>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Improve organization through policies to decrease distraction.</li> <li>-Teacher training on issues related to assessment, mentoring of student progress, personal development, continuous feedback and inclusive pedagogy.</li> </ul>
Benefits of social media as tool for supporting students' engagement and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change in attitudes and development of self-confidence</li> <li>• Change in attitudes and development of academic and career confidence</li> </ul>				Personal support and feedback through social media (or any online format) can change students' attitudes and awareness and improve their engagement and motivation.
Issues raised in the educational context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived differences amongst students' abilities and knowledge</li> <li>• Views with respect to curriculum</li> <li>• Views with respect to teachers</li> </ul>				There is a need to listen to the self-directed learners with respect to issues related to curriculum and pedagogy.