

## **SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE AS SHAPED BY FACEBOOK USE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

With the 21<sup>st</sup> century increasing globalization and advent in technology, social media has become an integral part of the everyday life of many students. Various websites and mobile applications dedicated to social media notably twitter, Facebook and instagram are popular. As a matter of fact, Facebook is the most ubiquitous social networking site in students' life; it offers an online platform on which users create profiles, interact and exchange content, share pictures and videos, discuss subjects, follow news, publish advertisements for group events, or play different games. This fact compels us to study its effects on their life. How Facebook shapes students' life has been the focus of educators and researchers in the last decade. For instance, extensive research has recently been conducted on the effects of this social media on students' well-being and academic achievement. However, little research is found on its effect on social intelligence, a critical aspect of students' social life. As such, the present study investigated how Facebook use shapes students' social intelligence. Specifically, we were interested in exploring how students understand and manage emotions and relationships via the virtual world of Facebook. Subjects were ninety-two (92) students from different Algerian universities. Data was collected via an online survey which aimed at exploring students' use of facebook: intensity, awareness, attitudes and management. Results indicated a significant relation between Facebook use and students' social intelligence. The findings also reported the benefits the students experience via Facebook. However, the participants voiced some concerns regarding its effects. As an outcome of the study, a number of implications were developed.

**Key words:** Algerian students, attitudes, Facebook, social intelligence, social media

### **INTRODUCTION**

With the increasing advent in communication, media and technology, social networking websites have increasingly become prominent in students' daily life, Facebook; twitter, instagram, to name a few. This explosive growth in the use of social media has led to substantial shifts in the ways students' study, interact and use information. Facebook is considered the most popular and widely used social networking site among students. Students

spend much time surfing on Facebook; nevertheless, the way they use this technology depends on their objectives, either for entertainment, communicative or educational purposes. Researchers have recently focused on exploring students' use of Facebook and how this affects different aspects of their life.

### **Facebook Use**

As Facebook use has increased tremendously all over the world, it has inevitably become the subject of much research, investigating both the positive and negative aspects bound to its use. One of the prominent facets of this body of research is the study of the effect of this social network on students' academic and social life. Previous research has demonstrated its potential to provide considerable social and psychological benefits to users. First, Facebook provides a platform that allows people to maintain existing relationships and establish new communications easily with other network members and with the posting and sharing functions, Facebook users interact directly with shared information and react to it with comments and likes. In addition to promoting social relationships, Facebook use has been reported to have psychological benefits for users. At this time, some research has identified links between Facebook use and well-being (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). For instance, some studies have identified boosts in self-esteem (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Toma, 2013). Moreover, Valenzuela, Park and Kee (2009) found in their study positive relationships between intensity of Facebook use and students' life satisfaction, social trust and civic engagement.

Nevertheless, there is growing evidence on the contrary; some researchers demonstrated that the extended time spent on Facebook has a harmful effect on students' leaning progress (e.g. Rouis, Limayem & Salehi-Sangari, 2011; Wanjohi, Mwebi & Nyang'ara, 2015) and their well-being (Chou & Edge, 2012; Chen & Lee, 2013; Kross et al., 2013). Students spend much time using Facebook for personal purposes and their pleasure like commenting on others' posts, sharing pictures and videos and playing different games. This usually interferes with their homework and study time. As regards well-being, Bevan, Gomez and Sparks (2014) examined the relationship between general levels of stress, quality life and social networking sites and found that people spending much time on Facebook experience higher stress and lower life satisfaction compared to those who use Facebook less. In another study, Fox and Moreland (2015) found that Facebook can trigger many minor and major negative emotional experiences which include: managing inappropriate or annoying content, being tethered, lack of privacy and control, social comparison and jealousy and relationship tension and conflict. Moreover, Burke, Marlow and Lento (2010) found that students who use Facebook to observe others' activities and interactions reported increased loneliness.

### **Social Intelligence**

Social intelligence is a psychological construct that has gained increased attention in different domains: psychology, sociology, education and so on. Emmerling and Boyatzis

(2012, p. 8) describe it as the ability to recognise, understand and act on emotional information about others that leads to effective social performance. Noticeably, the concept of social intelligence is closely related to emotional intelligence. This relationship was pointed by Bar-On (2006, p.3) who claimed that both emotional and social intelligence concern awareness, management and coping with emotions, but the former is at the individual or intrapersonal level, whereas the latter one concerns others (interpersonal). It should be mentioned here that social intelligence entails emotional intelligence. Social intelligence is multidimensional as it entails interrelated competencies and skills that determine social interaction. These competencies and skills, according to Bar-On (2006, p.3) include five (5) key components:

- (a) the ability to recognize, understand and express one's emotions and feelings;
- (b) the ability to understand how others feel and relate with them;
- (c) the ability to manage and control emotions;
- (d) the ability to manage change, adapt and solve problems of a intrapersonal and interpersonal nature;
- (e) the ability to generate positive affect and be self-motivated.

This means that to be socially intelligent is to be fully aware of one's own emotions and those of others, to effectively understand and relate well with others and to successfully establish and maintain relationships and cope with social demands and challenges.

Ample evidence from recent literature is available on the benefits of social intelligence or the problems associated with a lack of it. Among the benefits suggested by research findings, social intelligence relates positively to satisfaction with life and happiness (Hooda, Sharma & Yadava, 2009). Nevertheless, the lack of social intelligence has been found to result in a lack of empathy and social problems. Given the purpose of this study, what is missing from the literature are studies investigating social intelligence in relation to Facebook use, notably in Algeria.

Previous research has investigated the effects of Facebook use on different aspects of students' life, but little attention has been given to social intelligence. The Facebook environment can be conducive to social intelligence as it can decrease it. There is, in fact, little known evidential support for how cognitive and emotional emersion on Facebook affects social intelligence. This study aimed at filling this research gap. Accordingly, the central problem of the present study was to explore the relationship between Facebook and social intelligence among Algerian students. Specifically, a multitude of factors were examined: Facebook intensity and purpose of use, awareness, attitudes management and social skills. These factors are crucial to increase one's social intelligence.

To achieve our aim, some research questions needed to be answered:

1. To which extent do Algerian students use Facebook?
2. What are Algerian students' attitudes towards Facebook utility?
3. What effects does Facebook have on Algerian students' social intelligence?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

This investigation was carried out in Algeria; 92 students from different universities participated (notably Bejaia, Algiers, Blida, Constantine, Oran and Annaba), of which 67 (72.8%) were female and 25 (27.2%) were male. The participants' age ranges between 17 to 31 years old. The participants were studying different branches at different levels, B.A., master and doctorate.

### **Techniques and procedures**

This study used a quantitative, non-experimental design. An online survey was constructed combining the Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS) as a measure of social intelligence with a questionnaire on facebook use (the scale was based on Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007). The direct link to the survey was sent, via Facebook, to some of our students who answered then forwarded the link to further potential students via Facebook too. This eventually generated a fairly satisfactory number of responses from students from different Algerian universities.

The first part of the survey is devoted to the collection of personal information about the participants, notably age, gender and university studies. The Facebook questionnaire focuses on students' frequent use of Facebook, the purposes for this use and the activities they enjoy more. It also explores the participants' attitudes towards this social network as concerns the benefits and challenges associated with its use and its impact on their lives. As regards the social intelligence scale, it uncovers three important dimensions: awareness, management and social skills which represent the components of social intelligence: cognitive, affective and behavioural intelligence. The scale employs a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1-describes me very well to 5-describes me very poorly. A copy of the survey is shown in the appendix. Data was analysed quantitatively and reported in terms of frequencies and percentages.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Facebook use**

This section concerns the participants' answers to the questions about Facebook intensity and activities, perceived benefits and drawbacks.

### **Intensity**

The analysis of the questionnaire revealed that the majority of the participants are active Facebook users; 38% of participants reported they spend more than two hours surfing on Facebook and 39% indicated they are online most of the time. The rest of the students spend between 15 to 60 minutes on Facebook. The vast majority of students indicated they are addicted to this social media with 26.1% of answers for sometimes and 21.7% of answers for always.

**Activities**

As regards the question, the participants reported that they use facebook for the following purposes:

- 1) Chatting
- 2) Getting news
- 3) Entertainment

The aforementioned activities are reported in terms of high frequency and order of importance. On the top of the list appeared chatting and getting news; we can see that the vast majority of the students use Facebook for the sake of communication (70%) and to stay tuned with the latest news (40%). Only a couple of students reported that they use it for educational purposes. Therefore, the use of Facebook is predominantly in social rather than academic activities.

**Perceived benefits of facebook**

The participants’ answers to this open-ended question showed that the majority of students (70%) indicated that Facebook allows them to communicate with different friends and relatives; so they save time and money of calls or texts. They also establish new relationships with people across the world despite the distance. The participants also mentioned that they keep themselves up-dated with the latest news and learn new things (40%).

**Perceived drawbacks of Facebook**

Table 1  
 Frequencies and percentages of the attitudes sub-scale.

Item	Scale										Total of answers	
	1		2		3		4		5			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Facebook is a distraction	22	23.9	15	16.3	20	21.7	18	19.6	16	17.4	91	98.9
Lack of authenticity	13	14.1	15	16.3	28	30.4	17	18.5	17	18.5	90	97.8
Interference with family	22	23.9	47	51.1	24	26.1	4	4.4	1	1.1	92	100

Note. Scale: 1-describes me very well. 5. describes me very poorly

Despite the potential benefits reported, the majority of the participants revealed Facebook to be a waste of time. Many explained that they even became addicted as explained earlier. Twenty-three point nine percent (23.9%) of participants see Facebook as a daily distraction. They explained that Facebook interferes with their study time and private life. Moreover, 30.4% of participants admitted that although they communicate with their friends, most of their relations are not authentic, a fact that worsens real-life interaction. They (51.1%) further argued that because of Facebook people spend less time with their family as they live in a virtual world.

**Social Intelligence skills**  
**Awareness of the self**

Table 2  
 Frequencies and percentages of the self-awareness sub-scale.

Item	Scale										Total of answers	
	1		2		3		4		5			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Awareness of strengths	<b>32</b>	<b>34.8</b>	27	29.4	23	25	7	7.6	2	2.2	91	98.9
Awareness of emotions	19	20.7	17	18.5	<b>30</b>	<b>32.6</b>	14	15.2	12	13	92	100
Awareness of one's impact	23	25	<b>33</b>	<b>35.9</b>	16	17.4	15	16.3	4	4.3	91	98.9
Self-evaluation	<b>23</b>	<b>25</b>	21	22.8	20	21.7	14	15.2	14	15.2	92	100

Note. Scale: 1-describes me very well. 5. Describes me very poorly

Table 2 reports the frequencies and percentages obtained in the social intelligence scale regarding awareness of one's own emotions. As we can see, 34.8% of participants are fully aware of their strengths and 32.6% of them reported they understand their emotions at times. Besides, 35.9 % of students reported that they are very aware of the impact of their emotions on people. A last point, 25% of participants indicated that they get inspiration from others' lives to reflect on and evaluate their own life.

**Awareness of others**

Table 3  
 Frequencies and percentages of the awareness sub-scale.

Item	Scale										Total of answers	
	1		2		3		4		5			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Awareness of peoples' emotions	29	31.5	<b>32</b>	<b>34.8</b>	21	22.8	6	6.5	3	3.3	91	98.9
Awareness of people's intentions	25	27.2	<b>34</b>	<b>37</b>	19	20.7	11	12	2	2.2	91	98.9
Prediction of people's behaviour	23	25	25	27.2	<b>29</b>	<b>31.5</b>	10	10.9	4	4.3	91	98.9

Note. Scale: 1-describes me very well. 5. describes me very poorly

The statistics obtained in the social intelligence scale regarding awareness of one's emotions are displayed in Table 3. It is clear from the numerical data that the participants are also aware of people's emotions (34.8% of answers) and recognise people's intentions towards them (37%). The participants (31.5%) added that they sometimes succeed to predict people's behaviour.

### Management of emotions

Table 4  
 Frequencies and percentages of the management sub-scale

Item	Scale										Total of answers	
	1		2		3		4		5			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Difficulty to control emotions	10	10.9	12	13	8	8.7	20	21.7	<b>41</b>	<b>44.6</b>	91	98.9
Difficulty to remain calm	12	13	15	16.3	20	21.7	16	17.4	<b>27</b>	<b>29.3</b>	90	97.8
Difficulty to manage misunderstanding	6	6.5	20	21.7	<b>27</b>	<b>29.3</b>	18	19.6	20	21.7	91	98.9

Note. Scale: 1-describes me very well. 5. describes me very poorly

A statistical reading of Table 4 indicates that many students (44.6%) do not find any difficulty to control their emotions via Facebook; they manage to remain calm when facing provocative situations. Nevertheless, 29.3% of participants revealed they sometimes struggle to manage misunderstandings. This is in fact obvious given the absence of body language which is a vital element in effective communication.

### Management of relationships

Table 5  
 Frequencies and percentages of the management sub-scale

Item	Scale										Total of answers	
	1		2		3		4		5			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Getting along with people	19	20.7	23	25	<b>31</b>	<b>33.7</b>	8	8.7	10	10.9	91	98.9
Adaptation to new relations	19	20.7	<b>29</b>	<b>31.5</b>	20	21.7	13	14.1	9	9.8	90	97.8
Establishing new relations	22	23.9	<b>29</b>	<b>31.5</b>	18	19.6	11	12	11	12	91	98.9
Acting in accordance to others	23	25	23	25	<b>29</b>	<b>31.5</b>	10	10.9	5	5.4	90	97.8

Note. Scale: 1-describes me very well. 5. describes me very poorly

As far as management of relationships is concerned, it can be estimated from Table 5 that the students tend to manage their social relationships quite well. Thirty-three point seven percent (33.7%) of participants indicated they sometimes get well along with people and the same number of respondents (31.5%) reported they are fairly competent at establishing new relations and adapting to new people and new situations. They further reported that they sometimes tend to act in accordance with others.

**Social activities**

Table 6  
 Frequencies and percentages of the social skills sub-scale.

Item	Scale										Total of answers	
	1		2		3		4		5		F	%
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Organising groups	17	18.5	11	12	12	13	19	20.7	<b>32</b>	<b>34.8</b>	91	98.9
Joining groups	18	19.6	16	17.4	<b>24</b>	<b>26.1</b>	13	14.1	20	21.7	91	98.9
Sharing emotions	12	13	14	15.2	20	21.7	20	21.7	<b>25</b>	<b>27.2</b>	91	98.9
Sharing experiences	<b>25</b>	<b>27.2</b>	20	21.7	22	23.9	13	14.1	11	12	91	98.9
Complimenting	<b>52</b>	<b>56.5</b>	28	30.4	6	6.5	2	2.2	4	4.3	92	100
Helping others	<b>41</b>	<b>44.6</b>	26	28.3	14	15.2	6	6.5	5	5.4	92	100

Note. Scale: 1-describes me very well. 5. describes me very poorly

Table 6 summarises the frequencies and percentages of answers regarding social skills. The statistics show that the participants do not like to organise groups (34.8% of answers), but they occasionally enjoy joining them (26.1% of answers). The second point is that the participants do not share their emotions, but they always do share their experiences as indicated by 27.2% of students. The last information collected concerns the students' high tendency to compliment (56.5%) and help people (44.6%) on Facebook.

In this study, we sought to explore the relationship between Facebook and social intelligence among Algerian students. The results that emerged from the quantitative analysis of the questionnaire revealed that the vast majority of the students are active Facebook users; many of them spend most of their time using this social network. There are participants who admitted that this emersion on Facebook affects negatively their studies and private life. This finding differs from those reported by Hew (2011) in his article which reviewed empirical studies done on Facebook use. Hew (2011) stressed that in most studies students spent 10 to 60 min a day using Facebook and this did not distract them very much from learning as far as time is concerned. In terms of perceived benefits, the students reported communicating and getting news as the two major, and even only, positive outcomes of Facebook. The participants



revealed they use Facebook mostly to interact with friends and family and establish new friendships. That is, Facebook is considered a means to maintain existing relationships and a way to establish new links. Similarly, Burke and Lente reported that Facebook allows people to reinforce distant relations. Hew (2011) also reported that, in most studies conducted, students used Facebook mainly for social interaction rather than academic purposes. Accordingly, our findings match those found in earlier studies; Park, Kee and Valenzuela (2009), for instance, reported communication is the major activity carried out via Facebook.

Nevertheless, many participants voiced some concerns about this social network service. They seem not to value Facebook and believe it is a total waste of time as it consumes all their time and prevents them from completing important tasks. This is indeed the biggest challenge of Facebook: addiction. Another important finding is that the participants claim the lack of authenticity in relationships via Facebook as these relationships are superficial. As a matter of fact, the lack of body language is one of the inconvenient aspects of technology. In addition, as many people create profiles with pseudonyms and do not provide true information on their demographic or cultural background, communication is considered fake and even dangerous. In fact, the issue of privacy in Facebook has long been a matter of discussion. The importance of these findings is that the students are perfectly aware of both the benefits and limitations associated with this social media.

As far as social intelligence is concerned, the statistics obtained in the scale demonstrate that the students are aware of their emotions and those of others and are quite capable of managing both their emotions and relationships. The participants also reported their tendency to adapt to new relations and situations; this is a significant finding. Specifically, the students seem to get well with people and adapt to novelty. They also reported helping people via this technology. The findings demonstrate a significant relationship between Facebook and social intelligence among the students. As such, our finding supports previous research (e.g. Tang, Chen, Yang, Chung & Lee, 2015) in which Facebook and interpersonal relationships were reported to be positively associated.

However, the participants seem to sometimes find difficulty to manage misunderstanding. This is quite logical given the virtual world through which communication occurs.

## CONCLUSION

The current study reports a positive relationship between Facebook and social intelligence among Algerian students. Our findings have practical applications for students (Facebook users) and teachers. As regards the benefits of this social media, educators can take advantage of it to help students develop more social skills through workshops on **social media intelligence**. Teachers can create Facebook groups with pre-established criteria to take advantage of students' connectivity and help them use it as both a social and a learning tool. One example is the use of e-conferences to discuss issues related to students' progress. Students can also post questions related to their studies and discuss the answers with both the teacher and peers. We also recommend teachers to encourage and engage students in civic education activities as our participants reported they enjoy helping others via Facebook.

Given the drawbacks reported in our study, our findings suggest, first, that users should become more aware of the time and effort they sink into Facebook. They should remember that it is just a social networking tool and therefore reduce the number of hours spent chatting, sharing and commenting on posts. The use of a week planner can be very useful to students to manage their time. Second, we suggest forbidding internet connexion at university. It has unfortunately become a habit for students to use messenger and other entertainment applications during classes, the thing that distracts them from the lessons and decreases their attention. We also believe that students should be involved in extra-curricular activities at university (as mandatory) so as to occupy them with more beneficial tasks. For instance, students can create debate groups and events or join associations to make use of their spare time.

In sum, this study revealed that there are many positive aspects to using Facebook including high social intelligence as there are many drawbacks. Managing Facebook and its role in our relationships should be an essential part of media literacy education.

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