

Awareness and Use of Academic Social Networking Sites by the Academic Staff at the South Valley University in Egypt

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Abstract

Although there are a number of social networking sites that are widely used by academic and non-academic people mostly for entertainment, the academic social networking sites (ASNSs) specifically target scholars. The ASNSs are the virtual platform where researchers can create a profile and communicate with others sharing similar research interests. The current study attempts to explore the awareness and use of five famous ASNSs; namely ResearchGate, Acedemia.edu, LinkedIn, Mendeley and Scholastica by the South Valley University (SVU) academic staff. A structured questionnaire was sent to different categories of the SVU academics via email and Facebook. Data analysis revealed that most of the respondents were aware of and using the ASNSs. ResearchGate demonstrated the highest level of awareness and usage followed by LinkedIn, Acedemi.edu, Mendeley and Scholastica, respectively. Further studies are required to explore the use of the SVU academic staff to other ASNSs and the effects of these sites on their professional performance.

Keywords: Academic social Networking Sites, Academic staff, Awareness & usage.

Introduction

The World Wide Web (WWW) or "web" is one of the most useful services provided by the Internet. The web is viewed by using different. The Web 1.0 or read-only web is the first generation of the web and it is a non-interactive static web. Thus, the users of Web 1.0 can only view and read the information. The Web 2.0 or read-write web is the second generation of the Web. It makes the users work in an interactive two-way communication environments. It enables editing and producing information or shrinking views with friends and colleagues, and encourages collaboration (Aghaei. et al., 2012). With the advanced Web 2.0, many Social Networking Sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Twitter, Orkut and others were introduced and became widely used by general public internet users (Nentwich, 2010).

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These SNSs allow users to create a personal profile and make personal connections with other users (boyd and Ellison, 2007). Although the SNSs are commonly used for non-scientific purposes and can be used by academic people (Gruzd and Goertzen, 2013, Eke et al., 2014), the nature of SNSs as entertainment networks made them unconfidential for research and development scientific expertise sharing. The academic Social Networking Sites (ASNSs) are websites that seek to harness the social web mostly for academics (Thelwall and Kousha, 2014, Ortega, 2015). These sites are preferred to bring scholars from diverse disciplines together in an academic community. They improve collaborative scientific activity and increase the ability to publicize research output (Thelwall and Kousha, 2013). On the top of these ASNSs are ResearchGate, Acedemic.edu and Mendeley, which attract millions of researchers (Giglia, 2011, Jordan, 2014) and some of non-popular sites such as Mynetresearch.com, Lameresearch.com, Academic.com and Lallslo.com that have less than 500.000 users for each of them (Jordan, 2014).

On general, the ASNSs provide similar features and benefits to their users. These sites allow uploading publication files, follow and being followed by peers. However, some of sites have some specific services not found in others. For example, ResearchGate and Academia.edu connect the users with non-academic SNSs such as Facebook and Twitter. ResearchGate provides a score for evaluating researchers depending upon publication downloads, citation counts, participation in discussion board and a number of views as well as question and answer platform in addition to the service of job searching services (Alheyasat, 2015). Mendeley facilitates uploading document library and allows importing and exporting citations to other similar tools such as EndNote and Zotero (Vasquez. and Bastidas., 2015). LinkedIn was established basically for business purposes, however it is being widely used by academic groups as one of the ASNSs ("ResearchGate", 2015). Scholastica is a new ASNS but no data about this site is currently available. However, it is like other ASNSs mainly is included in the communication of scholars and publication delivery.

The South Valley University (SVU) is a governmental university that covers a large area in the Upper Egypt and distributed in three Governorates (Qena, Luxor, and the Red Sea). According to the short description of the statistical data of university education in Egypt for the year 2013-2014 provided by the Egyptian Supreme Council of Universities (ESCU), the SVU have a total of 1235 academic staff (486 female and 729 male). The academic staff is divided into five position categories; 72 professors, 143 Assistant Professors, 334 lecturers, 336 Assistant Lecturers and 241 Demonstrators.

It is expected that in the future, the ASNSs will be an important tool to measure scholar's impact (Ben Jabeur et al., 2010, Kelly and Delasalle, 2013) and to strengthen the institutional collaboration and that will certainly affect the scientific rank of the researcher's institutions.

There is surprisingly little research about use of ASNSs in the Arab University's academics generally (Elsayed, 2015) and there is no study about the awareness and using of the academic staff at the SVU to these sites specifically. Thus, the current study aimed to investigate the awareness and use of the ASNSs by the SVU staff.

Methodology

This study was carried out by using a web-based online questionnaire created through Google Form. The survey was designed in a way that participant was not able to send more than one response but can edit his submitted response. Over the period from August 2015 to October 2015, a link to the questionnaire was sent via personal email and Facebook messages to academic staff at the SVU from different age ranges, designations, gender and faculties. The researcher targeted the people mostly shared at the SVU staff member official group on the Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/groups/svu2011/> as well as added the link to this site. In addition, emails were sent to the staff who are not members at the SVU Facebook group. The research target 400 staff members from the SVU to share the current study. Five reminders were sent to the participants after the initial contact by daily messages through Facebook and by phone calls.

The researcher preferred to use questionnaire because it is the most suitable quantitative method for obtaining data from a representative sample of people which could be used to describe or analyze a large population. The questionnaire entitled "the use and awareness of academic staffs at the SVU to the ASNSs" and consisted of four clusters of questions. The first cluster was about the demographic characteristics. The second cluster focused on the awareness and use of the ASNSs, while the third cluster was about the benefits and obstacles of using the ASNSs. The fourth cluster reflected the way to improve the awareness and use of the academic staff at the SVU to the ASNSs. The questionnaire included a letter explaining the ASNSs examined (ResearchGate, Acedemi.edu, Mendeley, LinkedIN and Scholastica). Ninety respondents shared this online questionnaire, with a response rate of 22.5% and that represents 7.3% of the total populations (1235) of the academic staffs of the SVU. The data were analyzed and presented using the mean and percentages. More than one answer was permitted in some questions as shown in the Tables or Figure' titles. To avoid repetition, results and discussion were presented within the same section below.

Results and Discussion

1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Data analysis of the first cluster of the questionnaire summarized the basic information of the respondents shared in the current study (table 1).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents (n= 90)

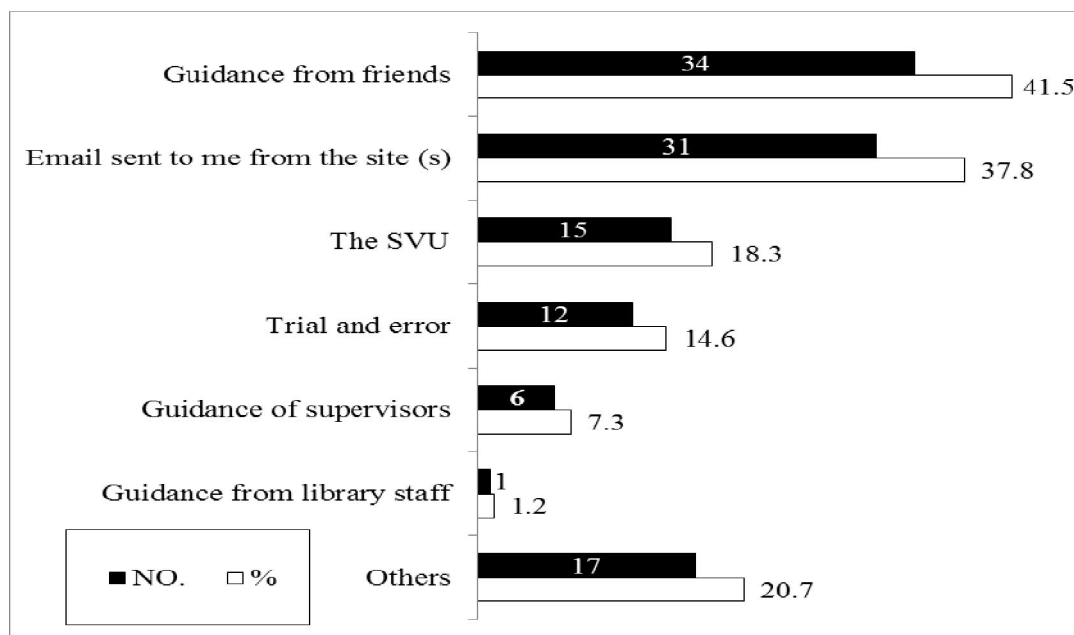
Demographic characteristics		NO.	%
Age Range	25-34	4	9.4
	35-44	29	32.6
	45-45	12	13.5
	55-60	4	4.5
Gender	Men	79	88.8
	Women	10	11.2
Designation	Demonstrator	3	3.4
	Lecturer Assistant	28	31.5
	Lecturer	32	36.0
	Assistant Professor	17	19.1
	Professor	9	10.1
Affiliation of last academic degree	Egypt	67	75.3
	Foreign country	22	24.7
Faculty study type	Applied sciences	64	71.9
	Social sciences and humanities	25	28.1

The Table-1 shows that the majority of respondents were from the group of "25-34" which means that younger researchers are more likely to join technology including the ASNSs. Men responded more than women in this study as majority of the academics of the SVU are men (<http://www.scu.eun.eg/wps/portal>). Another limitation was the low representation of demonstrator, and that may due to they have less experiences in research process as this is the first step in the designation positions. Most of the respondents were from the faculties of applied sciences such as Medicine, Nursing, Veterinary Medicine, Science, Agricultures and Engineering. However fewer respondents were from the faculties of social sciences and humanities such as Arts, Education, Archeology, Tourism & Hotels, Fine Arts and Specific Education. A similar result was presented in an another study (Elsayed, 2015).

2- Awareness and use of the academic staff at the SVU to the ASNSs

The second cluster began with a question if respondents heard of one or more of the ASNSs (ResearchGate, Acedemi.edu, Mendeley, LinkedIN and Scholastica) . The most of respondents; 82 respondents (92.1%) reported that they having heard of these sites, then they were asked to continue answering the following questions. However, only 7 respondents (7.9%) did not have any idea about these sites, and were asked to submit the survey at this stage. The 82 academic staff who was allowed to answer the following questions indicated that their information about ASNSs came through a variety of sources as shown in Fig. 1.

Figure 1: Source (s) of knowledge of academic staff in the SVU about the ASNSs.

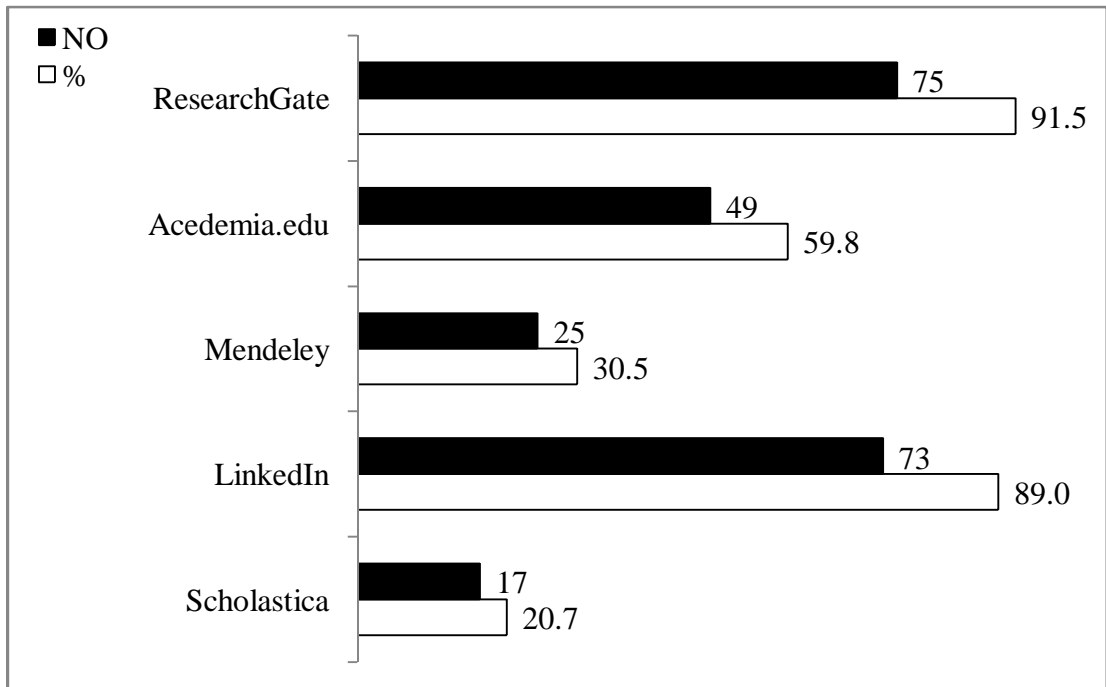


Note, multiple answers were permitted (n=82).

From Fig. 1, it is clear that the most common cited source was guidance from friends. This result is in agreement with that of (Elsayed, 2015), who mentioned that friends are the most source delivering the ASNSs knowledge. In the second, was the choice "by email sent to them from these ASNSs" followed by the SVU; trial and error, guideless of supervisors, guidance from library staff and other sources not listed in the questionnaire like training workshop, searching through the internet, other social networking sites, search engines, conferences, the public media and finally the foreign university when some of them traveled overseas for research.

These sources should be considered by the authorities of the SVU to invite and support their academic to use the ASNSs. The respondents were asked to select the ASNS(s) they were aware about. The collected data was analyzed and presented as a number and percentages of respondents and shown in Fig. 2.

Figure 2: Awareness of the SVU academic staff of the ASNS.



Note, multiple answers were permitted (n=82).

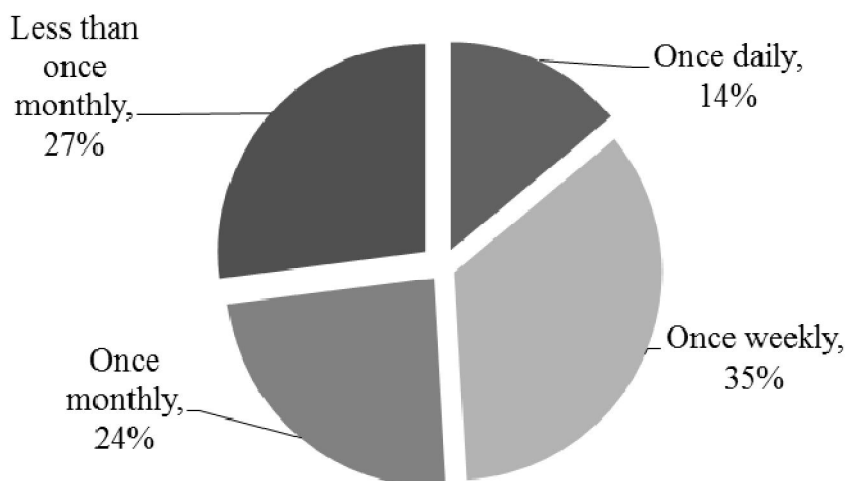
About 91.5% of the respondents chosen the ResearchGate to be the most common site they were aware about and followed by LinkedIn (77.5%), Acedemi.com (55.8%), Mendeley (30.1%) and the less popular site was Scholastica (20%). In another study of about 160 universities in Delhi in India, it was found that the most common used ASNSs were as follow ResearchGate (54%), Academia (51%), LinkedIn (39%), and CiteULike (35%) (Madhusudhan, 2012). Also, it was reported that the most frequently used ASNSs among the Arabic academics is the ResearchGate followed by Acedemi.edu and then Mendeley (Elsayed, 2015).

The SVU academic staff were asked to tell about the visiting frequency of the ASNSs. The analyzed data was presented in table 2.

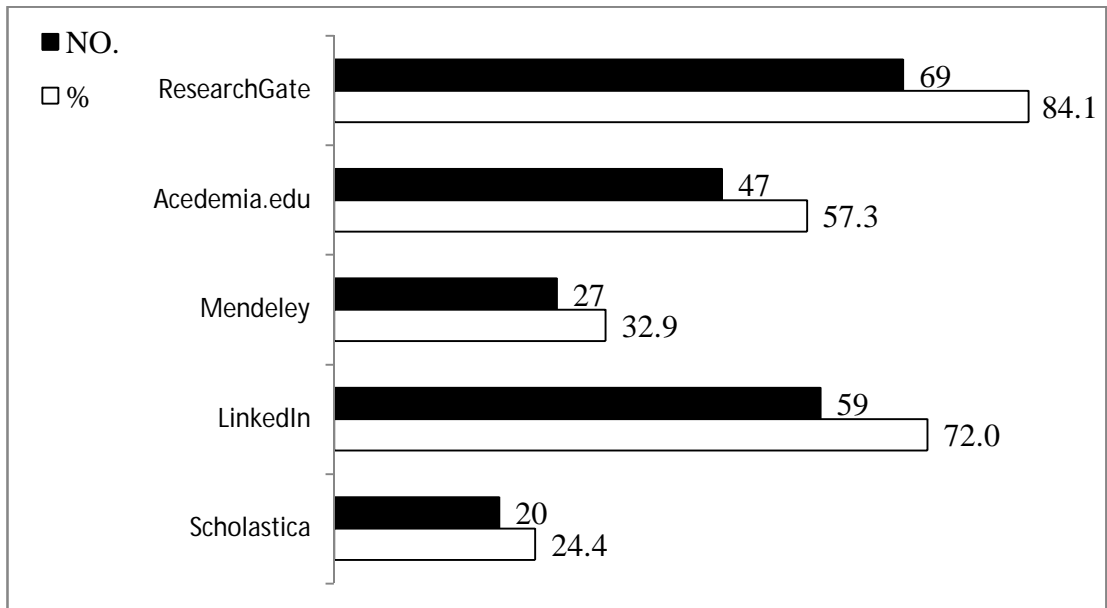
Table 2: Visit frequency of the ASNSs (n=82).

Frequency	Once daily	Once weekly	Once monthly	Less than once monthly	Total visiting frequently		Not visiting this site	
					NO.	%	NO.	%
ResearchGate	17	30	16	6	69	84.1	13	15.9
Acedemia.edu	6	15	11	15	47	57.3	35	42.7
Mendeley	2	5	7	13	27	32.9	55	67
LinkedIn	4	21	17	17	59	71.6	23	28
Scholastica	2	7	2	9	20	24.4	62	75.6
Total	31	78	53	60	222	54.1	188	45.9
%	14.0%	35.1%	23.9%	27%				

The Table-2 shows that there were variations in the frequency of visiting the studied ASNSs. More than one-third (35%) of the academics at the SVU visited these sites weekly and some of them visited less than once every month (27%) or monthly (24%) and the fewest of them (14%) visited these sites daily (Fig. 3). That indicates the ASNSs became an important part of the scientific life of the SVU academic staff.

Figure 3: Visit frequency to the ASNS (data retrieved from table 2).

Furthermore, it was clear that the most frequently visited site was ResearchGate (84.1%) followed by LinkedIn (72%), Acedemia.edu (57.3%), Mendeley (27%) and then Scholastica (20%) (Fig. 4). This is in a synchronizing with the results presented above (Fig. 2) about the awareness of the SVU academics to the ASNSs.

Figure 4: Preference of the ASNSs (data retrieved from table 2).

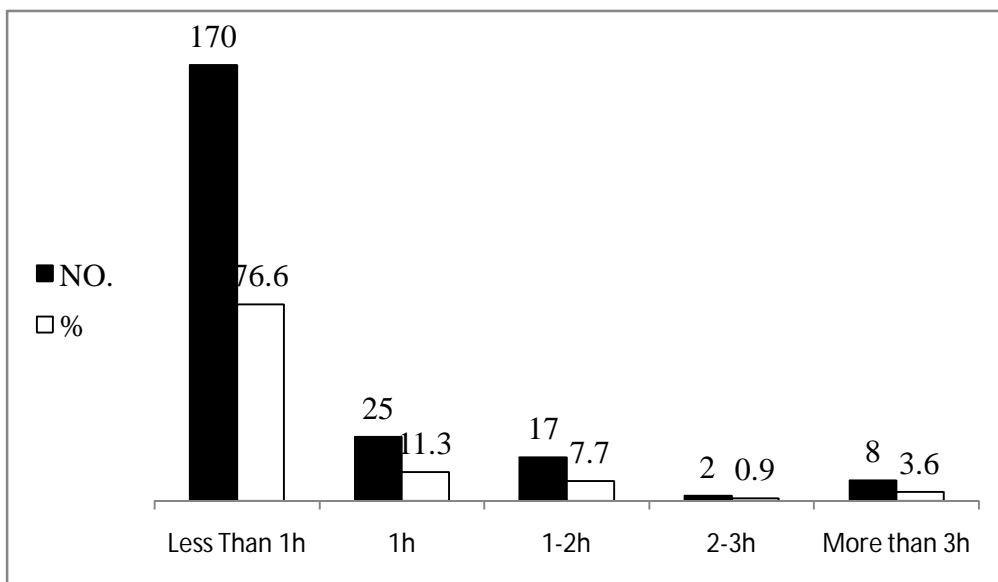
The academic staff of the SVU who visited the ASNSs regularly as shown in table 2 responded a question about average time spent during their visit, and their answers were varied as summarized in table 3.

Table 3: Time spent during visits of the ASNSs (n = 82).

Time	Less than 1h	1h	1-2h	2-3h	More than 3h	Total
ResearchGate	48	12	6	1	2	69
Acedemia.edu	33	5	6	1	2	47
Mendeley	24	1	1	0	1	27
LinkedIn	49	5	3	0	2	59
Scholastica	16	2	1	0	1	20
Total	170	25	17	2	8	222
%	76.6	11.3	7.7	0.9	3.6	

From table 3, it is clear that more than three-fourth of all respondents reported visiting time to their preferable site for less than 1 h, while the rest one-fourth varies from 1-2 h (11.3%), 2-3h (0.9%) and more than 3h (3.6%). This is an indication of the limited time spend on the ASNSs, as the visitors of these sites usually have specific needs with no time to spend in long communication as in the case of entertainment SNSs. As well as the academics at the SVU are usually occupied with both teaching and research.

Figure 5: Time spent on the ASNS (n =82).



The respondents answered a question about if they have a profile page on which of the ASNSs and from how long? The data was shown in table 4.

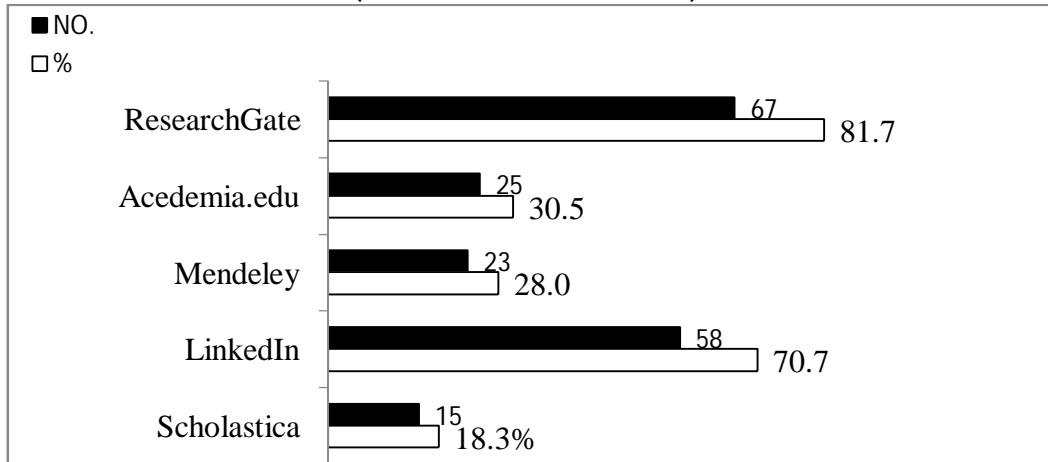
Table 4: Profile page of the staff member of the SVU on the ASNSs (n=82).

	ResearchGate		Acedemia.edu		Mendeley		LinkedIn		Scholastica	
	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%
Longer than 2 years	25	30.5	18	22.2	4	4.9	22	26.8	3	3.7
1-2 years	15	18.3	9	11.1	5	6.1	17	20.7	0	0.0
3 months-1 year	8	9.8	10	12.3	5	6.1	5	6.1	1	1.2
less than 3 months	19	23.2	6	7.4	9	11.0	14	17.1	11	13.4
I do not have a profile on this site	15	18.3	39	48.1	62	75.6	24	29.3	68	82.9

The Table-4 demonstrates that the ResearchGate was the first choice for the SVU academic staff as the 81.7% respondents indicated that they had a profile page on this site, followed by LinkedIn (70.7%), Academia (30.5%), Mendeley (28%) and finally Scholastic (18.3%) (Fig. 6).

Again this results confirmed the results in Figs. 2 & 4. As it is a logic that the SVU member staff having a profile on an ASNS to be aware of and visiting it.

Figure 6: Profile page of the SVU academic staff on the ASNSs
(data retrieved from table 4).



In a study about the disciplinary differences of the users of the ASNSs, it was reported that ResearchGate is preferred by the biologists, while Acedemi.edu is used mostly by the social scholar and humanists (Thelwall and Kousha, 2014, Ortega, 2015). In the current study the author did not go in depth to look at the prevalence site for each category of the respondents, however the more respondents shared in this study from academics of the applied sciences than humanities and social science, may be correlated to the increased number of people using the ResearchGate. ResearchGate is an online ASNS targets scientific researchers from all disciplines of science. It was reported more than 3 million users of this site and one-third of them visit the site monthly (Thelwall and Kousha, 2015).

It allows access specific topics and conversations of researchers with similar interests all over the world (Leeder, 2008). Furthermore, it offers the ResearchGate Score "RG Score" for each researcher. The RG Score is a metric that measures the scientific reputation and based on total publications, follower/following downloads and views, and another score is the Total Impact, which depends on the impact factor of the journal of publications they uploaded. Interestingly, the RG present a ranked list of institution according to the RG Score and Impact Score (<https://www.researchgate.net/institutions/worldwide>). The SVU ranked 4204 in this scoring list; with a RG Score of 1,124,95 from 298 members having 670 publications and Impact Score was 1,114.34. To understand the level of the SVU in comparison to the top Egyptian university (Cairo), it worth to know that Cairo University was on the top of the Egyptian University and the second on the African list.

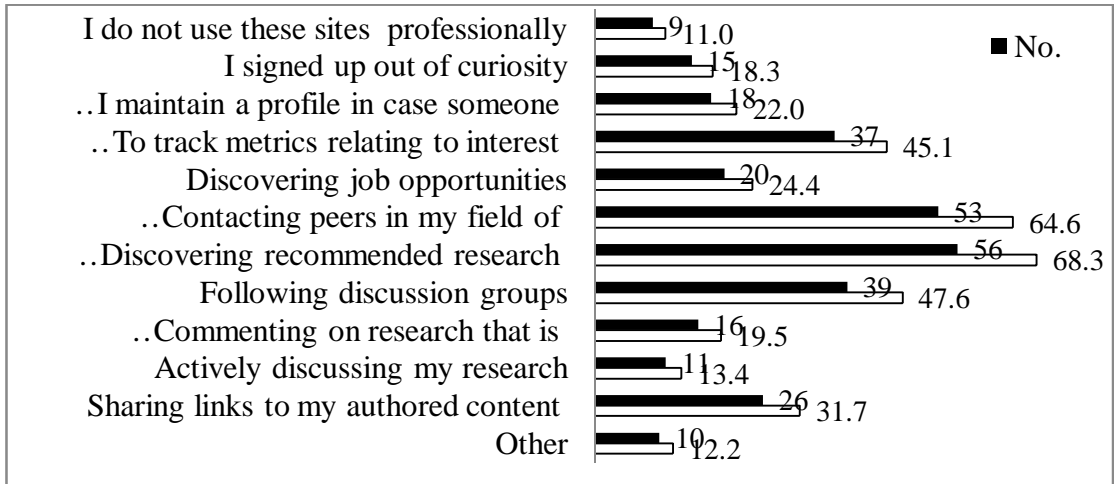
Cairo university has a RG Score of 20,916,13 from 4943 members and 11464 publications with impact point 19,419.05. The ResearchGate can be used as a scientific indicator to compare researcher, institution and countries (Thelwall and Kousha, 2014). Thus it is very important the SVU authorities to support and encourage their academics to join the ResearchGate and populated their profiles to improve the ranking of the university.

The second on top was the LinkedIn, and that was surprising as this site is mostly supports the business relationship communication and provides few academic-professional services (Skeels and Grudin, 2009). That is likely due to the feature added in 2013, which allow scholars to upload their papers (Thelwall and Kousha, 2014). Among the ASNSs, LinkedIn and researchGate show researcher's skills, which can be endorsed by other users (Jordan, 2015, Vasquez. and Bastidas., 2015). Acedemi.edu was the third of choice of the respondents. This site provides interesting webometric statistics such as the total number of profile views, total count of paper downloads. (Thelwall and Kousha, 2014). Mendeley was the fourth selected ASNS by the SVU academic staff. This site, is the only ASNS that provides advanced group collaboration tools like a shared library and references (Henning and Reichelt, 2008, Vasquez. and Bastidas., 2015). Finally, the Scholastica was of the lowest site voted by the SVU academics. The future study may exclude this site from any survey provided to the ASNSs as the current study shown most of the academics (81%) at the SVU do not have a profile on this site.

Most of the SVU academic staff had profile on ResearchGate, Acedemi.edu and LinkedIn (30.5%, 22.2, 26.8 respectively) as longer as 2 years ago, while most of those with a profile on Mendeley and Scholastica (11% and 13.4% respectively) owned their profile more recently, as less than 3 months ago.

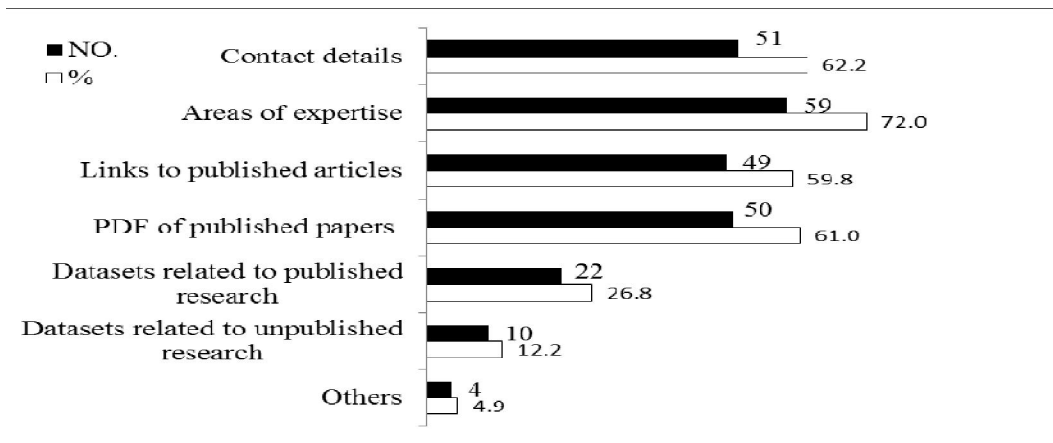
People who have a profile on the ASNSs were asked about professional purposes of using these sites (Fig. 7). Most (68.3%) used the ASNSs for discovering recommended research papers followed by contacting peers in their field of research (64.6%), following discussion groups (47.6%), tracking metrics relating to interest in their work (45.1%), sharing links to their authored contents such as paper articles (31.7%), discovering jobs (24.4%), in case of someone wishes to contact them (22%), commenting on research relevant to their field of study (19.5%), signed up out of curiosity (18.3%), use it for actively discussion their research (13.4%) or for other causes not in the list (12.2%) such as asking questions and having answers or answering some questions from other colleagues in these sites, seeking specific information, referencing especially with Mendeley, contacting professors, getting information about metrics of some scientific sites and journals, getting help to solve research problems. Lowest respondents (11%) do not use these sites professionally.

Figure7: Professional use of the ASNSs (multiple answers were permitted, n=82)

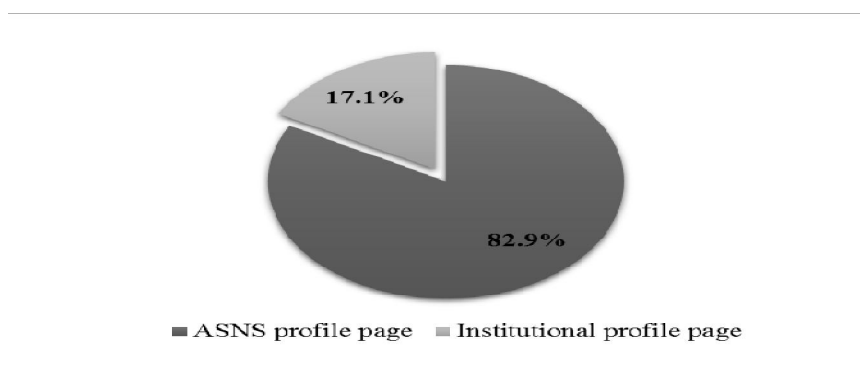


It was reported that the Arab academics use the ASNSs with many aims. Most of them use these sites to share publications and communicate with other researchers (Elsayed, 2015). The profile owners responded a question about the professional information they make publicly available online (Fig. 8). All the causes presented were related to either communication or publications.

Figure 8: Online public available information of the SVU academics on the ASNSs (multiple answers were permitted, n =82).



Then the respondents were asked to choose which one of their profile pages on the ASNSs or their institutions site, they were more keeping up to date. About 82.9% chosen those at the ASNSs, while 17.1% voted to their institutional profile page (Fig. 9). That is an indication of the importance of the profile on the ASNSs to the academics at the SVU.

Figure 9: The site more updatable by the respondents (n = 82).

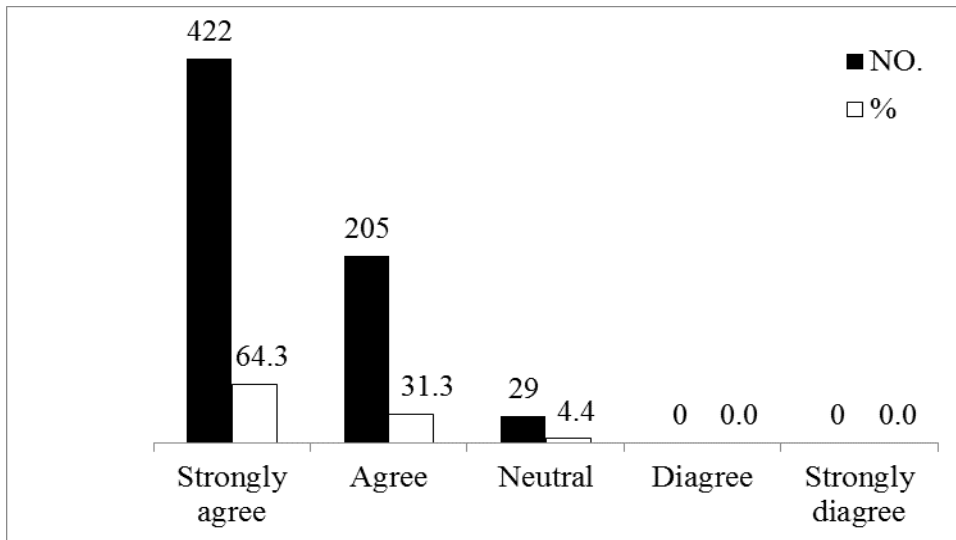
To know more about the way the SVU academic scholar think about the ASNSs, The respondents received a set of questions to indicate their level of agreement with the some items on a scale of strongly agree'/agree'/neutral'/disagree'/strongly disagree. The distribution of responses as a total and a percentage out of total was summarized in table 5.

Table 5: How the academic staff at the SVU thinks about the ASNSs

	Strongly agree		Agree		Neural		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
"Viewing other researchers' professional profiles on online networks is a useful way of determining what research I should be reading"	59	72	21	25.6	2	2.4	0	0	0	0
"I feel I should probably do more to promote my research using online networks"	41	50	34	41.5	7	8.5	0	0	0	0
"I do think having a professional profile on an online network is very important for a researcher"	51	62.2	29	35.4	2	2.4	0	0	0	0
"I believe it has become a necessary to take advantage of ASNSs for the dissemination of research and scientific papers and ideas of the academic staff of the SVU"	53	64.6	26	31.7	3	3.7	0	0	0	0
"I think dissemination of research and scientific papers of the SVU will increase the chances of the spread of this research and facilitate its access to engines, thereby increasing the citation opportunities "	62	75.6	18	22	2	2.4	0	0	0	0
I believe in the importance of integrating the ASNSs in educational institutions and encourage academic staff to use these sites in the educational process and student courses, projects and others, and guide students to use them in a scientific manner "	52	63.4	24	29.3	6	7.3	0	0	0	0
I believe in the need for introducing new courses concerning the ethics of information in the ASNSs to cover aspects relating to privacy, electronic crimes, intellectual property rights and other "	49	59.8	27	35.4	6	7.3	0	0	0	0
"I see that the expansion in the use of the ASNSs in academic universities will play an important role in the future in raising the rating of these universities"	55	67.1	26	31.7	1	1.2	0	0	0	0

From the table it was revealed that all items showed a skew toward agreement (Fig. 10) and that strongly support the view of that the academics of the SVU think positively toward the ASNSs.

Figure 10: Responses to different agreement levels (data retrieved for table 5).



3. Benefits and obstacles of using the ASNSs

In the third cluster of the questionnaire, the SVU academics were asked about the benefits they may get and the obstacles they faced when they used the ASNSs, and their answers were analyzed in table 6.

Table 6: Benefits and obstacles of suing the ASNSs by the SVU academics.

Note. Multiple answers were available (n= 82).

Points		NO.	%
Benefits	Increase self-esteem and well being	56	68.3
	Interaction with expert researchers from around the world	79	96.3
	View published researches for researchers of similar discipline or interests	75	91.5
	Openness to the world and viewing educational developments	69	84.1
		47	57.3
	Being informed of researchers quoting from my studies	8	9.8
	Easy location of previous studies for the interest of research	64	78.0
	View and identify prestigious and certified scientific journals	43	52.4
	Offers information about the university's proceeding toward global ranking, and world classifications for internationally accredited universities	25	30.5
	Identify placement or ranking of the researcher among other researchers	32	39.0
	Enhance English language competency	31	37.8
	View research activities of university	30	36.6
	View recommend research articles	36	43.9
	Others	46	56.1
Obstacles	Many colleagues are not informed about the site	63	76.8
	Shortage of computers	19	23.2
	Weakness of the internet	42	51.2
	The site is confined only to English language	16	19.5
	Shortage of time	19	23.2
	There are other competitive engines to the site	21	25.6
	Doubt or fear of incoming messages to be a source of hacking or spreading viruses	37	45.1
	Is not adaptable to the needs of my scientific needs	11	13.4
	Others	4	4.9

Table 6 showed that "interaction with expert researchers from around the world" was a common benefit for respondents (96.3%) and the lowest was being informed of researchers quoting from my studies. Some of the respondents selected "other causes" but none of them mentioned to any other benefits. The most common selected obstacles (76.8%) were "many colleagues are not informed about the site" and the lowest choice was "others" and again no mention of any obstacle was added to those in the survey.

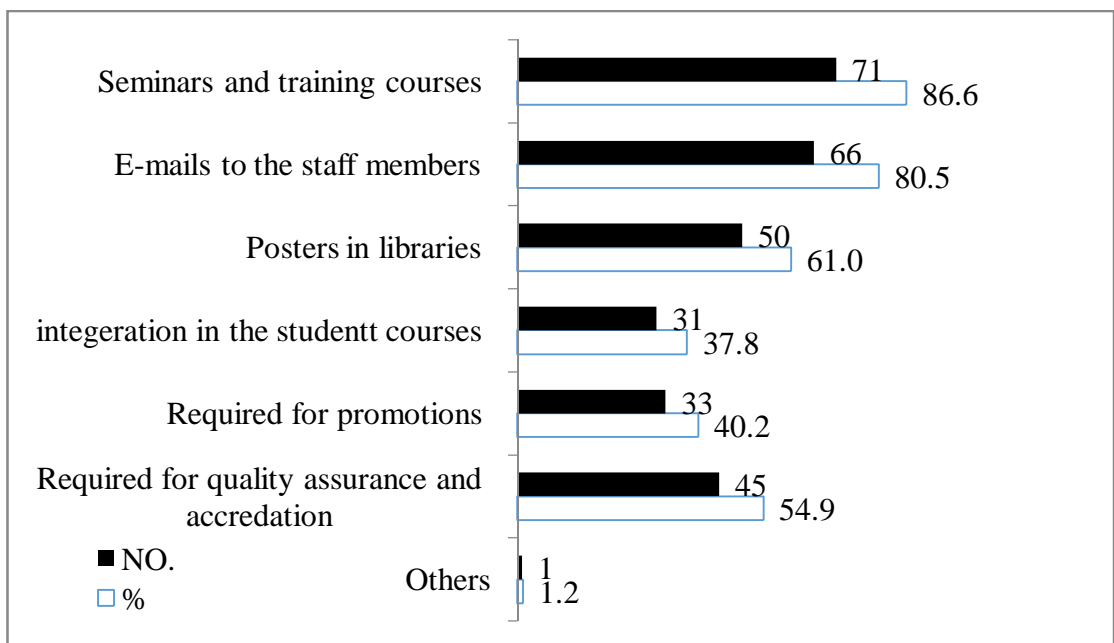
4. Suggestions to increase the awareness and using of the ASNSs

Finally in the fourth cluster of the questionnaire, about 97.5% of respondents indicated that it is necessary for the SVU authorities to increase the awareness of their academic staff to the ASNSs and to motivate them to use these sites frequently.

The majority of the respondents think that it is important to increase the awareness and use of the ASNSs and they suggested ways to achieve that. One of the important results of increased the ASNSs use by the SVU academics is the increased visibility and citation of their publications (Jingfeng et al., 2011) and that will certainly has its positive effects on improvement the scholar and institution impact.

The respondents explained that the SVU can encourage their academic staff to increase their awareness and use of the ASNSs through many activities. The most frequent ways of academies at the SVU of finding out about the ASNSs are the invitation to seminars and workshops about the importance of the ASNSs (86.6%), then by sending emails to academic staff including information about these sites (80.5%). Some of them thought that it is better if the information could be included in posters shown to the academic staff in their faculty libraries (61%), or considered as one of the requirements for quality insurance and accreditation of faculties (54.9%), or required for promotion of the academic staff through their scientific committee (40.2%). About 37.8% of the respondents believed that it is important to integrate basic information about these sites in the integrated into the student's courses especially those in the Department of Library and Information technology. Only 1.2% chosen "other sources" but did not mention any of these sources. Fig. 11 showed the total counts and percentages for each suggestion.

Figure 11: Suggestions to increase the use and awareness of the SVU staff of ASNSs (multiple answers were permitted), n= 82.



Conclusion

The ASNSs has become a part of most of the scholar's scientific life. Researchers are accessing the ASNSs with two main aims; communication and collaboration. Through these platforms they can meet the peers in their specific disciplines and upload or download articles, books or other scientific materials. The current study was undertaken with the aim of analyzing the awareness and use of the SVU academics of some ASNSs, ResearchGate, Acedemia.edu, Mendeley and Scholatics.com.

ResearchGate and LinkedIn appear to be of most particular value to the academic staff of the SVU followed by Acedemi.edu then Mendeley. In contrast they showed a relatively low level of awareness and use of the Scholastica. The awareness and use results were supported with profile having and visiting results presented in this study. It would be interesting to repeat the study using samples from a range of different Arab countries in order to investigate the relation between the scientific achievements of academic of Arab universities and their use of ASNSs. The SVU is to encourage and support the use of their academic staff to the ASNSs to increase its visibility and representation as a tool to increase the academic ranking among other universities in the Arab area.

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