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Pupils who spend time on Facebook do worse in exams, study shows

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Experts have confirmed what parents and teachers already feared - youngsters who use Facebook do worse in exams.

A study showed that most pupils who regularly surf the social networking site under-perform in tests - some by as much as a grade.

The American research found that Facebook rituals, including building an empire of friends, adding applications, joining groups and 'poking' other users, can swallow up hours of study time.

Some users were spending as little as an hour a week on academic work.



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Some students were spending as little as an hour a week on academic work as they were too busy surfing Facebook

'Our study shows people who spend more time on Facebook spend less time studying,' said Aryn Karpinski, a researcher in the education department at Ohio State University.

'Every generation has its distractions, but I think Facebook is a unique phenomenon.'

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While it focused on Facebook, the findings are also thought to hold true for other social networking sites.

It involved only university students, but usage among younger children is high and growing.

For the study, the researchers quizzed 219 undergraduates and postgraduates about their study habits and time spent on Facebook.

They found that 65 per cent of Facebook users accessed their account daily, often checking it several times to see if they had received new messages.

Some spent just a couple of minutes during each log-in but others were surfing for more than an hour.

The study said that 68 per cent of students who used Facebook had a 'significantly' lower grade point average - the marking system used in US universities - than those who did not use the site.

'It is the equivalent of the difference between getting an A and a B,' said Ms Karpinski, who will present her findings this week to the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association.

However students appeared to be in denial about the effect of their usage on their academic performance. The majority did not feel it had an impact on their work.

In Britain, 83 per cent of 16 to 24-year-olds use social networking sites such as Facebook, Bebo and MySpace.

University student Daisy Jones, 21, said: 'I was in the library trying to write a 2,000-word essay when I realised my Facebook habit had got out of hand.

'I couldn't resist going online. You do that, then someone's photo catches your eye.

'Before you know it, a couple of minutes has turned into a couple of hours and you haven't written a thing.'

A study by the National Literacy Trust recently showed that one in five youngsters aged seven to 15 never reads books outside school because websites and blogs are becoming their reading matter of choice.

Pupils ranked social networking sites, blogs, general websites and magazines above books in a survey of their reading habits.

A quarter of youngsters did not believe that being a proficient reader would help them achieve success in future.

Research has also shown that youngsters are spending up to six hours a day in front of a screen.

They are turning their bedrooms into multi-media 'hubs' with TVs, computers, games consoles, MP3 players and mobile phones all within easy reach.

A spokesman for Facebook said: 'There is also academic research that shows the benefits of services like Facebook.

'It's in the hands of students, in consultation with their parents, to decide how to spend their time.'