1. Introduction

The profession of social work depends on a scientific foundation. It is based on theories derived from different disciplines, humanities and social ranks to provide importance to the social work practices. Theories provide a mechanism to understand the psychological and the social characteristics of personality. In addition, theories elucidate different approaches to deal with individuals, families, institutions and societies at preventive, therapeutic and developmental levels. Given that there are many social work theories, a professional social worker would be able to exploit some theories and exclude others as deemed appropriate in order to interpret problems and develop balanced intervention strategies according to available data and possibilities. There is, indeed, no specific theory that could comprehensively explain human behavior; therefore a good social worker would employ one or more theories to understand his client’s behavior.

General Systems Theory (GST) is widely used in the field of social work (Rodway, 1986). Most practices in social work utilize concepts stemmed from GST. For example, feedback, client system and helping system became well-established concepts in the field. Moreover, GTS serves as a theoretical framework for many approaches such as family therapy approach. This approach is based on GST where the goal is to understand the dynamics, relationships and roles within families and how these things affect individuals therein.

GST has significant impacts on the practices of social workers. It helps them, for instance, to develop the “person-in-situation” approach to a broader “person-in-environment” approach. The former has failed to integrate the concept into the
practice while the latter has worked out successfully. This approach enables social workers to understand clients within a bio-psychological and spiritual framework and allows them to integrate remedies and related issues into the helping process (Dziegielewski, 2009). Having said that, the researcher will undertake to examine the GST since it is related to the study.

2. General System Theory Definition

A contemporary approach in social work is to look at social units such as individuals, families, group of persons, institutions, or societies as a system. Skyttner (2005) claims that a system is a set of interacting units or elements that form an integrated whole intended to perform some functions. Derek Hitchins (as cited by Skyttner, 2005) has emphasized that a system is a collection of interrelated entities such that both the collection and the interrelationships together reduce local entropy. Generally, a system is concerned with interaction between two or more units.

General Systems Theory is the interdisciplinary study of complex systems. It is a process of theory construction which focuses on building universal concepts, postulates, and principles. In this context, the term systems refer to self-regulating systems that are self-correcting through feedback. The basic notion of GST is derived from the concept of tissue that is made up of cells working together to perform a specific function. Any disorder in cells will have negative effects on the tissue and consequently on the body. Therefore, every cell has to interact with other cells to save the body. GST tends to view any system as the result of a dynamic interrelationship between its component parts and its whole. It
views the parts as mutually determinate with the whole. Thus, the systems theory is an organizational theory that looks at interactions between systems.

Ludwig von Bertalanffy is a biologist known as one of the founders of GST in 1920. He came up with the final form of GST in 1956 (Dakhil, 2006).

GST is that all living organisms are made up of highly complex systems, which are in turn composed of various subsystems. Bertalanffy criticized theories that try to understand the behavior of the whole from the isolated parts. To further substantiate his argument Bertalanffy stated that you have to take into account the relations between the various subordinate systems which are super-ordinated to them in order to understand the behavior of the parts (Bertalanffy, 1968). He linked GST to a science of wholeness and advocated an organismic conception in biology which emphasizes consideration of the organism as a whole or system. This led to the basic assumption that the whole is more than sum of its parts (Bertalanffy, 1968).

Parsons (1902-1979), an American sociologist, is one of the well-known figures in social work. He authored a book in 1951 entitled “The Social System”. The book attempted to present Parsons’s theory of general social system. Parsons tried to apply his theory on communicative actions where he paid attention to what called a symbolic culture system. Parsons’s theory implied that symbols acquire common meaning and in turn become important means of communication. There is a relationship between means of communication and social control.

Parsons recognized interdependence or mutual influences that aim to achieve certain functions among individuals who perform specific roles. These roles could be different depending on social situations and subject to complicated rules. However, the roles interact with each other within the community in a harmonized way
(Minqirius, 2008). Parsons suggested the four basic functions that all social systems must perform if they are to persist as follows (Parsons, 1970):

1. Adaptation: The capacity of society to interact with the environment.

2. Goal attainment: The capability to set goals for the future and make decisions accordingly.

3. Integration: The harmonization of the entire society is a demand that the values and norms of society are solid and sufficiently convergent.

4. Latency: Latent pattern maintenance, challenges society to maintain the integrative elements of the integration requirement above.

In this regard, the theory assumes that individuals should be directed towards a particular goal in order to attain it because there is always a motivation behind individual behavior. Through social action, the individual is restricted within a group of social values and norms. He, therefore, is not totally free to act out of that values and norms.

2.1 Concept of Social System

According to Parsons (1970), social system is group of individuals interacting together or organizations integrated together in a frame of common culture and values. G. Hearn (1979) defined it as an organized framework of reciprocal relationships between functions and ends, and between ends and its means and motives.

A system is a self-organized thing comprising of interrelated relationships within certain entities (Sadhan, 1991). Othman et al. (1993) argued that a system is a
set of integrated units aiming to achieve an object in social frame. Al-Dakhil (2006) suggested that a system is a set of components have interrelated and mutual relationships and boundaries. The system can be physical, mechanic, social or a combination of two or more. Afifi (2012) concludes the system as a whole which consists of subsystems interacting together to save the whole system. To sum up, the research will define a system as a meaningful interaction between two or more things where each one of them clearly affects the other.

2.2 Types of System

There are two types of systems as follows:

1. Open system: it is a system in exchange of matter with its environment, presenting import and export, building-up and breaking-down of its material components (Bertalanffy, 1968).

2. Closed system: it is a system that exchanges energy, but not matter, with its environment (Bertalanffy, 1968).

2.3 Elements of the System

In order to study the systems present in our society within the framework of General System Theory, it is essential that each element within the systems are properly scrutinized. The systems are generally made of elements such as environment, output, input, throughput, feedback, equilibrium and boundaries.

Environment: The elements outside a system that could potentially affect all or part of the system. It is made up of various other systems outside a particular system
therefore its impact on a system should not be disregarded in understanding the processes within a system.

Input: what has been put into a system to achieve an output. Open systems import energy from surrounding environment. Human body as a biology system takes inputs such as air and food from surrounding the environment. Like the body, social units work to get inputs e.g. financial resource from around the environment. That indicates there is a continuous interaction between the systems and the environment (Abdullatif, 2008).

Output: information and energy produced by the system from inputs. Outputs are the obtained results which reflect the capability of system to achieve its objectives. The more objectives achieved, the more efficient the system is (al-Damigh, n.a).

Input-transformation-output process (Throughput) : a process transferring inputs e.g. material, energy or data into outputs. In other words, it is a process which enables system to achieve goals.

Feedback: information concerning the outputs or the process of the system is fed back as an input into the system. Feedback is a path of communication in a system. Equilibrium: refers to homogeneity of internal structures of the system and cooperation amongst its parts. The system should be adapted into surrounding environment.

Boundaries: parametric conditions demarcate and define the system and set it apart from its environment and from other systems.

In general system theory, it can be said that:
1. Every system has unique boundaries that distinguish it from other systems.

2. Inputs interact with the system, which leads to growth in positive and negative goals. In turn, this growth would appear as an input to another system.

3. Inputs loop back into the system as feedback.

4. Every system has subsystems that work together to execute functions. Any disturbance in the functions will have ramifications throughout subsystems.

5. There are inactive subsystems that retard human systems (Othman et al. (1993)).
2.4 Characteristics of the System

In general system theory, every social system has its own set of smaller systems with different characteristics. These characteristics distinguish the identity and nature of a particular system with another. The characteristics as established in general system theory are:

a. The system as a whole is different from units.

b. Change in a unit has consequences on other units.

c. Relationships among units of system are spontaneous.

d. System is a self-order.
2.5 Weakness in Human System

The theory suggests that individuals represent a social system. Individuals always try to satisfy their own needs and interrelate with different systems in the society. As a result, human systems have some problems such as follows:

1) Inborn or acquired inability to utilize energy.

2) Inborn or acquired inability in subsystems.

3) Mismatch between inputs and outputs of the system such as inhibition or tendency to isolation.

2.6 General Systems Theory and Social Work

The influence of GST to social work is significant. Many sociologists have made contributions in developing GST in the social work. Their contributions were to create models for practices and understand situations in order to provide valid diagnosis for social problems (Dakhil, 2006). For example, Pincus and Minahan (1973) developed a model based on GST. The model will be briefly explained in the next section.

2.7 Pincus-Minahan Model

The model emphasizes looking beyond a client's presented problems to assess the complexities and interrelationships of problems. Through a system analysis of a case, the most effective intervention targets and strategies can usually be identified.
Pincus and Minahan theorize that there are four basic systems in social work practice as follows:

1) Change agent system: is composed of professionals who are employed specifically for the purpose of creating planned change.

2) Client system: is composed of the people who sanction or ask for the change from agents’ services, who are the expected beneficiaries of the service, and who have a working agreement or contract with the change agent.

3) Target system: is composed of the people, agencies, and organizational practices that the worker wishes to change in some measurable way to reach the goals of the change agent.

4) Action system: to describe those with whom the social workers works to accomplish the tasks and achieve the goals of the change effort.

To help in apprehending problems, the model suggests a strategy to make a planned intervention in social work. Intervention aims to help individuals, families and groups to meet their needs and issues. The intervention follows steps such as assessing problem, collecting data, making initial contact, negotiations and contracts, and executing the action system. To further understand, the next section explains these steps.

**2.8 Intervention Steps of Pincus-Minahan Model in Social Work on the Light of GST**

GST would be of great help if related to the practice. Intervention is the approach that reflects practice in social work. Social workers should precisely define
intervention to provide a pivotal result for his intervention. For effective intervention, a social worker should apply following steps:

1) Assessing problem: To assess the problem, one must organize it into steps and correctly carry out steps. These steps are:

   a. Identifying the problem.

   b. Identifying the objectives for intervention.

   c. Identifying the tasks that help to achieve the objectives.

   d. Identifying an approach to assess the expected outcome.

2) Data Collection: An important step to reach a valid outcome. Data-gathering methods usually involve direct or indirect interactions with individuals. Direct interactions are such as interviews and observations while indirect interactions use secondary data methods to collect data.

3) Initial contact: In a professional realm, individuals may be conservative where the individual is not easy accepting changes around him. Social workers should make strategies to help individual accept changes. Therefore, initial contact is important to give a good impression which would make the individual comfortable enough to accept instructions given by the social worker.

4) Negotiation and contract: After communicating with the individual, the social worker should persuade the individual to implement objectives. This should be done on the basis of mutual negotiation to contract while finding appropriate means for implementing objectives.
5) Actions system: To determine suitable procedures and actions in order to achieve the objectives. Furthermore, the social worker should establish responsibilities and point out the benefits that could be gained from efforts to attain the objectives.

6) Coordinate the action systems to facilitate relationships among individuals and exploit the situation in the favor of them.

7) Execute alternative procedures in case that things get out of control due to unseen circumstances.

8) Termination: The social worker should end intervention at the most suitable time to strengthen the effectiveness of change. He should also establish mechanisms to assess outcomes on continuous basis.

In certain cases, a social worker needs to align the system according to surrounding circumstances. He should select the best theories and approaches that fit into the particular situation.

In the light of the above discussion, this study tries to:

1) Determine the concept of social system.

2) Examine to what extent social system and other systems are interrelated.

3) Examine to what extent social system and other systems are mutually influenced.

In this regard, the study suggests that a university student is a unique human system that interacts in certain ways with surrounding systems to achieve a kind of
balance that may not be perfect. Tensions may accompany relationships during interaction between the student and other social system networks, for instance, Facebook and twitter. As a result, the student as human system receives inappropriate inputs which consequently will have negative outputs. These outputs affect the student’s social relationships. In turn, that would have ramifications on the self-system of the student. The social worker should try to harmonize between the student system and other systems in order to rebalance the inputs and outputs. In such cases, the social worker can play an important role to assess the overall case in the frame of whole. He should follow a systematic approach by assessing the problem and collecting data. Then he should take further action by intervening to modify systems and utilize different methods e.g. negotiation and contract. In an event that student system suffers from inertia, where inputs do not match outputs, the social worker should utilize psychology of self to align the personality.

The researcher concludes that the profession of social work in the frame of GST has influential impacts on student’s social relationships because it controls inputs and outputs.

2.9 Importance of General Systems Theory (GST) as a Framework of Inquiry

General Systems Theory contributes a trans-disciplinary framework to study the simultaneous and normative interactions between the perception and conception in numerous contexts in the society (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998). This approach is gaining importance particularly in the research of development based on cognitions and human perceptions (Nisbett et al., 2001). The observation of different social as well as natural phenomena in their natural environments and contexts involves complicated interactions and often requires the expertise of numerous disciplines. Therefore, the
use of a holistic and multi-disciplined approach is crucial in the study of such interactions. The General Systems Theory contributes as a multidiscipline framework to enable social work researchers to transcend their boundaries in studying different phenomena of the society (Greene, 1999). As such, the theory is also regarded as a field or framework of inquiry instead of a collection of different disciplines. For the application in research of human perception, General Systems Theory models complicate interactions within and between individuals as well as between groups without having to reduce the phenomenon of perceptions to individual simulative levels (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998). The theory enables the capitalization of parallelism in various explanations across disciplines and is used as a medium in conducting an integrated study regarding the complexity in the area of social interactions (Laszlo & Laszlo, 1997).

General Systems Theory brings an important contribution to social work. It exhibits the highest clarity in the field of social work as compared to other theoretical frameworks through a few concepts that draw the light on complementary interactions that forms the whole constitution of a system (Parsons et al., 2001). In the aspect of social interactions, the theory focuses on the interactions between individuals, groups and communities as well as the factors that influence their environments (Rooney & Rooney, 2010). For the contemporary practices of social work, the holistic approach of this theory is commonly being implemented into their strategy and techniques of intervention. This is due to the recognition of the importance of acknowledging the inter-relation of individuals with their natural environment as well as their anthropogenic environments such as the virtual social networkings (Turner, 2011).
2.10 Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework is defined as the principal design of the undergoing research which is comprised of a set of concepts, theories, presumptions, predictions and ideas that form the support and source of information in the research (Maxwell, 2012). Other authors have defined it as a set of diagram or written concepts that describe the main objects and components to be studied such as the main elements, theories, variables and the relationships among these variables. Conceptual frameworks are presented either in the form of diagrams or charts of narrations (Entwistle, 2003). Based on these definitions, it can be deduced that conceptual frameworks are tools used to reflect the actual concepts and expectations about the subject of the study; therefore, it can also be defined as the ‘idea context’ or the ‘theoretical framework’ of a study.

Conceptual frameworks play a significant role in the field of research. For instance, without an accurately drafted set of underlying concepts and theories, it may end in misleading results even though data was collected using the correct protocol (Maxwell, 2012). The most important function of conceptual frameworks is its role as the primary concept or model for researchers to plan the topics to be studied, the tentative concept and the current investigation of the subject under investigation. By constructing a conceptual framework, the research design can be used and referred to in helping with the assessment and the refinement of research objectives as well as the development of research questions that are relevant to the topic under investigation (Leshem & Trafford, 2007). A properly constructed conceptual framework also helps in the selection of appropriate research methodologies and in identifying potential research limitations (Berg & Lune, 2004). In addition, a properly constructed conceptual framework contributes in the justification of researches. The formulated
research questions are part of the research problem and therefore, the formulation of the research questions is a main process when designing the conceptual framework. The combination of research objectives and research problems is used for the justification of the research and to highlight the significance of the study (Järvinen, 2000).

From the review of literature in the previous chapter, a conceptual framework has been formed in this study. The conceptual model of this study hypothesizes that the social media intervention such as the social network sites (Facebook and Twitter) has an impact on the formation of social relations among the university students in Saudi Arabia and the strengthening of their cultural and religious identity. In addition, it has been hypothesized that social communication networks such as Facebook and Twitter offer elements that could be used to enhance social support interventions and in developing social policy to strengthen the social relations among the members of the community, which include the participation in contributing and distribution of users’ personal information revealed to other users. Based on this theory, an assumption has been formed that social communication networks are significant and efficient on supporting different functions of the society and in the development of social policy due to the high volume of usage and participation of the members of the society contributed by the proliferation of Internet usage and the growth in the information technology and mobile devices industry.

The framework includes a discussion of the research design using the holistic approach of General Systems Theory (GST) to evaluate the intervention of social media on the interactions between individuals, groups and communities. GST is an interdisciplinary approach used to study complex systems (Skyttner, 2005). In the
field of social works, the theory enables social work researchers to transcend their boundaries in studying different phenomena of the society (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998). It is due to the challenge of observing different social phenomena in their natural environments and contexts which involve complicated interactions. Therefore, the approach enables the integration of different disciplines using a holistic and multidiscipline approach to study such interactions (Parsons et al., 2001). Using a more holistic approach, the impact of social network sites (Facebook and Twitter) on the formation of social relations among the university students in Saudi Arabia is determined from various aspects of the social communication among the research subjects namely, intrapersonal, interpersonal and inter-group and community factors.
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Figure 1 : The model of general system theory(palaeos.com/cosmic)