

# **AN EXPLORATION OF THE PERCIEVED IMPLICATIONS OF ONLINE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY AND SATISFACTION IN THE WORKPLACE**

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**A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF AN IT COMPANY IN KZN.**

By

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# Declaration- Plagiarism

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# Acknowledgements

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## Abstract

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The following study focuses on a form of information and communication technology known as, online social media. Forms of online social media have not only influenced the way in which we live and work but have also transformed the traditional norms of the political, economic and educational arena. This particular research study will be conducted within a specific unit of the economic arena; the workplace. The objective of this study was to explore the perceived implications of online social media on productivity and job satisfaction in the workplace.

An exploration of employees' experiences was explored within an IT company in KZN through eight one-on-one semi-structured discussions conducted in September 2018. The case study rooted in qualitative analysis assisted in understanding employees' perceptions and experience of utilizing online social media within the workplace. This was uncovered through the extraction of insights from employees (as they experience it). Additionally, themes as well as sub-themes were explored in relation to the uses and gratifications theory as well as the connectivism theory. A review of literature and the analysis of interview data indicated the conflicting nature of online social media platforms within the workplace. Moreover, it highlights the potential of online social media to enhance human capacities which can assist in improving what employees know, levels of efficiency and the overall work experience of employees. Notwithstanding, these abilities, forms of online social media reportedly can influence levels of presenteeism and engagement on work related tasks and responsibilities.

Keywords: Employee, online social media, platforms, networks, productivity, job satisfaction, organization.

# List of Acronyms

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KZN      Kwa-Zulu Natal

IT        Information Technology

HR        Human Resources

SNS      Social Networking Sites

| U [&and](#) G    Users and Gratifications Theory

GO        Gratification Obtained

GS        Gratification Sought

IPA       Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

CoP's    Communities of Practice

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# Chapter One

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## 1.1 Introduction

Throughout history the nature of work has changed drastically. There has been a multitude of evolutions as well as developments such as, the industrialization, marketization and the rapid growth of information and communication technologies which have allowed for the shift from traditional forms of work (Scarborough, 1996). Additionally, the globalization of the economy, the changing structure of the workforce; as there are now younger, higher educated individuals in the workplace, the flexible nature of work and the popularization of team-based work have led to new demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century employee.

Traditionally, organizations were institutions which were “formal, vertical, hierarchic, static and rigid”; forms of online social media defy these traditional norms and create platforms for “spontaneous, informal, horizontal, dynamic and ever shifting” environments (Fraser & Dutta, 2010, p.18). This boundary-less platform allows individuals across numerous nationalities, geographical zones, ages and occupations to engage in rich networks online.

The following study attempts to explore, employees’ perceptions and experience of utilizing online social media within the workplace and the implications, if any, for job satisfaction and productivity. Before delving deeper into the understandings of productivity or job satisfaction, it is important to understand how the world of work got to where it is today.

## 1.2 Historical Global Context: Work and Productivity

Traditional norms of work have been constructed around principles of Taylorism and “Psychotechnics” which attempted to optimize the utility of the worker. The utility of the worker was further driven by the mental hygiene movement which advocated the transparency of mental health disorders within society (Meyer, 1915). This particular movement was important as it allowed employers to divide labor, according to those concerned with the “technical matter of design of production arrangements and those concerned with personal problems of the employee” (Miller & Rose, 1995, p.434). The compartmentalization of work was further ratified by the Hawthorne studies as well as findings by Brown and Taylor which laid the foundation to the Human relations movement.

This concern with the “human factor in industry” paved the way for employer’s desire to understand employee thinking and group dynamics while treating them with respect and rewarding them appropriately to receive maximum employee output (Gale, 2004; Bruce & Nyland, 2011, p.384). One of the core achievements of the movement was the realization that humans are not “utilitarian, economic animals of mainstream economics” but rather have other “psycho-social needs as well as social relationships which play an important role in their productivity” (Bruce & Nyland, 2011, p.385). This deduction allowed for a new understanding of productivity as it indicated the role of the worker and the democratic identity of individuals (as citizens) could co-exist (Miller & Rose, 1995). Additionally, employees would be more inclined to increase efforts to achieve organizational goals if they were able to conduct tasks autonomously, retain levels of satisfaction and stability within the organization (Bruce & Nyland, 2011; Park, Axtell & Turner, 2001).

Soon there was a realization that workers had life outside of work. This was intensified by the desire to increase employees’ quality of work life (Miller & Rose, 1995). In the 1960’s there was a drive towards flexible working hours and worker representation as it was believed this would result in a democratic, *productive* and innovative self (Miller & Rose, 1995). The concept “quality of work life” had now expanded, not only including understandings from previous reform movements but also now highlighted the importance of fair job compensation, safe working conditions, opportunities to use and develop human capacities, job security as well as the constitutionalism of the working environment (Walton, 1973). As a result, workers were encouraged to find dignity in work by taking responsibility and finding worth rooted in the quality of work as both a product and experience (Miller & Rose, 1995).

These movements have shaped the conceptualization of productivity and job satisfaction. This becomes evident when examining the general definition of an employee and the workplace (see page 5). Additionally, work-life balance strategies within organizations incorporate fundamentals of the human relations movement as well as quality of work life which have shaped the modern understanding of a productive, satisfied employee.

### 1.3 Online Social Media in the Workplace

Online social media has been a contentious topic within the workplace for a number of years. As a result, engagement on such platforms during working hours is often perceived as a threat to the organizations ability to function and *'get the best out of their people'*. Subsequently, some organizations have chosen to employ protective measures which monitor employee internet usage whilst others have completely banned third party networking sites. Conversely, other organizations have eased accessibility of the internet to support in-house proprietary solutions or public systems which facilitate forms of communication among employees (Chen, Chen [and](#) Yang, 2008).

Despite the perceived apprehension, online social media has many perceived benefits in the workplace. This includes but is not limited to, its ability to provide platforms for; interaction, support, marketing and research and development, knowledge building and collaboration amongst employers, contractors, consultants and partners (Artherton [and](#) Saghafi, 2010). Moreover, forms of online social media can enhance communication channels, foster innovation, improve problem solving ability and inspire employees while sharpening strategic focus, employee morale and productivity (Bennet, Pitt [and](#) Owers, 2010).

The positive influence of online social media in the workplace was buttressed by a study conducted by Fahmy (2009) which revealed, individuals who utilized online social media platforms develop improved interpersonal and problem-solving skills, making them more efficient and productive in the workplace (Aguenza, Al-Kassem [and](#) Som, 2012). On the contrary, online social media is perceived as a time waster which results in distracted and defocused employees (North, 2010). This was further perpetuated by a study in Taiwan which stated; “about 5 to 10 percent of adults” have an internet obsession problem (Chen et al., 2008, p.88). However, this is a significantly small number considering the size of their population as well as the protective measures employers can employ to minimize the negative effects of online social media in the workplace. Nevertheless, this illustrates how the platform is perceived as a two-edged sword which can result in organizational improvements, if managed correctly (Fraser [and](#) Dutta, 2010).

Previously, research indicated that improving working conditions would reduce absenteeism while improving aspects of productivity and job satisfaction. However, other studies revealed unsatisfied employees display counter-productive behavior and are likely to leave an

organization if they feel unsatisfied (Charoensukmongkol, 2014). Such dissatisfaction may be fueled from a variety of sources. For the purpose of this study, we will merely focus on the implications of online social media for employee productivity and job satisfaction.

This will be studied among employees in the workplace as it is only them who can unearth their experience of utilizing online social within this setting. Such experiences will actively create and shape meaning within the given context. It is important then, to note that these experiences and perceptions are subjective to the participant and meaning is constructed through interpretations by the participant and researcher. The participants experience or perception assists in providing the basis for meaning. However, no two realities are the same, as each individual experiences the phenomena, online social media differently. Henceforth, implying there are multiple realities which exist in multiple constructions.

#### **1.4 Study Aim**

The following study aims to explore what forms of online social media employees use in the workplace as well as their perceptions of online social media in the workplace; to understand if online social media has influenced their perceived levels of job satisfaction and productivity in the workplace; and to understand their experience of using online social media within the work environment.

In order to achieve this, this case study is being conducted with an IT company within Kwa-Zulu Natal. [An IT company was selected as these companies are often at the forefront of technological advancements. Given this, I \(the researcher\) was curious to investigate whether such companies would embrace forms of online social media within the workplace.](#)

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

1. What forms of online social media do employees engage in while at work?
2. What impact has online social media had on their perceived levels of satisfaction at work?
3. Has online social media fostered or hindered their perceived levels of productivity?
4. Do employees feel their working experience would be more pleasant if they made use of online social media? [This question was perceived as relevant as I \(the researcher\) wanted to](#)

understand employee's sentiments towards online social media in the workplace. In essence then, whether this tool could create a more pleasant or enhanced working experience.

## 1.6 Definition of Terms

**Online social media;media:** defined as, internet-based applications which build on the philosophical and technological foundations of web-2 and allow the user to share or generate content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

**Employee:** According to the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995; Section 213; an employee can be defined as a person, excluding an independent contractor, who works for another person or the state and who receives, or is entitled to receive, remuneration and any other person who assists in conducting the business of the employer.

**Productivity:** defined as how much and how well individuals produce from resources utilized (Ferreira & Du Plessis, 2009).

**Job satisfaction:** defined as an experience of pleasure or a positive emotional state, resulting from the appraisal of important aspects of a job which include; remuneration and mobility within the organization (Wright & Kim, 2004).

**Workplace:** According to the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995; Section 213; a workplace can be defined as, the place or places where the employees of an employer work.

## 1.7 Structure of Chapters

**Table 1.7.1- Outline of content within each chapter**

Chapters	Outline
1 Introduction	This provides an overview on the research study. It explains the research topic and objectives as well as providing the reader with a historical synopsis of work which has informed the conceptualization of productivity.
2 Literature-Review and Theoretical Framework	A synthesis of literature is provided in relation to the three main constructs; online social media, productivity and job satisfaction. A description of the theories which informed the study is also provided while making inferences to the subject matter.
3 Research Methodology	A description of the research; objectives, design, approach and methods are discussed. Additionally, methods of data collection and analysis are highlighted, along with ethical considerations.
4 Analysis and Discussion	A qualitative analysis of results are presented and discussed while making inferences to previous literature as well as the Uses and Gratification theory and Connectivism theory.
5 Conclusions, Recommendations Limitations	Conclusions from Chapter 4 are summarized. Additionally, limitations are highlighted while providing recommendations for future research.

# Chapter Two

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## 2. 1 Introduction

The following chapter attempts to explore literature surrounding the research topic. This will assist in providing a detailed description of online social media, productivity and job satisfaction as well as focusing on current studies which explore online social media within varying contexts. A discussion of these central tenets will ratify the significance of the study as well as provide a foundation for unearthing employees experience and perceptions of utilizing online social media in the workplace. Once this understanding has been established, key insights into the theoretical framework relating to the research questions will be elucidated.

## 2. 2 Literature Review

### 2.2.1 Social Networking Sites (Online Social Media)

Since the invention of the internet online social media has evolved with new capabilities beyond its nascent social aspect (Ellison, Steinfield [&and](#) Lampe, 2007). Before unpacking this any [furtherfurther](#), it is important to understand the evolution of such a phenomena and the precedent of online social media within the workplace.

According to Leftheriotis [&and](#) Giannakos (2014) online social media can be described as “web and mobile based technologies which are used to turn communication into interactive dialogue amongst organizations, communities and individuals”. Similarly, another author describes online social media as “a group of internet-based applications which allow for the creation and exchange of user generated content” (Kaplan [&and](#) Haenlein, 2010, p.61). This can include the “ability to post, edit and sort text, files, images linked to themselves or others (Leonardi, Haysman [&and](#) Steinfield, 2013, p.2).

Additionally, forms of online social media may allow individuals to display a visible profile which display a “friends”<sup>1</sup> list whilst traversing the network and viewing other connections on their “friends” list (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

### ***2.2.1.1 The Evolution of Online Social Media***

In 1997, an AOL executive, Ted Leonsis is believed to be the first documented individual to utilize the term, ‘social media’ within an organizational setting (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). He encouraged organizations to provide customers with a platform where they can connect and take part in a social environment (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). In the very same year (1997) Google; SNS and sixdegrees.com was released. This included features such as a friends list and individual profiles (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). However, during this period online social media’s capabilities were limited as internet infrastructure was developing and catching up to the idea of networking online.

In the decades that followed, several other social networking sites (SNS) were released, this included major developments such as; blogging platforms, released in 1999, Wikipedia released in 2001, My Space, LinkedIn and Skype released in 2003, Facebook (Harvard students only), Flickr and Gmail released in 2004, Yahoo, YouTube and Facebook (for high school networks) released in 2005, Twitter as well as Facebook (for corporate networks and the public) released in 2006, WhatsApp Messenger released in 2009, Instagram and Pinterest released in 2010, Snapchat and WeChat released in 2011 and Tumblr released in 2013 (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

According to Statista, there are 2.77 billion social media users around the globe (Clement, 2019). This development was described as one of the most significant business developments within the 21st century (Artherton & Saghafi, 2010). Despite online social media’s significance in the workplace the infiltration of these platforms is a site of bewilderment for many companies. This two-edged sword and site of bewilderment will further be explored in the sections to follow (Fraser & Dutta, 2010).

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<sup>1</sup>The terms “friends” can be misleading as individuals may form connections with other individuals for varying reasons (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

## 2.2.2 Online Social Media in Practice

Corporations have varying stances of online social media usage in the workplace. Some establishments have chosen to have an open policy regarding the use of online social media in the workplace. USSA is one of these companies which integrate social media in many aspects of work (Leidner, Koch & Gonzalez, 2010). Sites such as Facebook are used to build relationships with customers, solve customer concerns and monitor the company reputation (Leidner et al., 2010). Additionally, employees' ability to access such sites during working hours had a positive effect on their emotive state (Leidner et al., 2010). An IT manager within the company stated; "management recognized...if they wanted to keep the workforce, they need to be given time to take care of personal business from their computers. It helps us balance our lives, makes us more productive and helps USSA" (Leidner et al., 2010, p.231). Consequently, assisting individuals in maintaining a presence within their social and institutional spheres of life (Fraser & Dutta, 2010).

Contrary to this, other establishments have chosen to employ acceptable policies and defense technologies to manage internet access and use during working hours (Ferreira & Du Plessis, 2009). Initially, USSA was one of these companies which banned third- party social networking sites, internet browsing and had strict controls regarding internet usage in the workplace (Leidner et al., 2010). In doing so, employers are able to protect their reputation and mitigate the leakage of important information. However, preventing employees from using such tools "stops employees from recognizing potential business opportunities, stops collaborative working and stops employees from developing key business skills that can be honed in other virtual environments" (Artherton & Saghafi, 2010, p.66).

International cooperation's such as, but not limited to; Apple, Microsoft and Amazon have realized the need for such policies and have included best practice codes regarding the use of online social media in the workplace. Moreover, progressive corporations such as, but not limited to; Shell and Mac Donald's have integrated social networking into their organizational strategy (Fraser & Dutta, 2010).

From the above discussion, it is clear corporations have varying perspectives on how to manage online social media within the workplace. This may be attributed to varying factors when deciding the feasibility and applicability of such mediums within varying work contexts, as the need for such a tool may differ from organization to organization as well as their needs, priorities

and risk tolerance (Aguenza et al., 2012). Additionally, this provides insight into both the employers' and employees' perspective of online social media usage within the workplace.

### ***2.2.2.1 Applicability of Online Social Media in the Workplace***

According to Treem and Leonardi (2012) there are three major systems, in which online social media is prevalent within the workplace. Firstly, *public systems*, allow individuals to create connections with other individuals including experts or individuals they hold in high regard (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). These include systems such as, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Myspace which can enhance business intelligence by assisting organizations in identifying gaps in the market as well as creating positive affiliations between the organizational brand and consumers (Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Marquès, Merigó & Sota-Acosta, 2015).

Individuals are able to strengthen weak ties, foster new connections and promote professional knowledge sharing through such platforms (Leftheriotis & Giannakos, 2014). This can serve as a valuable tool which can foster employee collaboration as well as accessibility to tactic knowledge and knowledge conversations (Leiner, Cerf, Clark, Kahn, Kleinrock, Lynch, Postel, Roberts & Wolff, 1997; Bennet, Pitt & Owers, 2010). These continuous conversations can enhance how employees approach work tasks and inspire new ways of being and doing as well as encourage ingenuity and transparency amongst all regardless of status (Majchrzak, Faraj, Kane & Azad, 2013; Nardi et al., 2002; Voght & Laher, 2009).

Secondly, corporations may develop their own in-house application system which facilitates communication within their organization only (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Such *private systems* are “excellent format for large and geographically dispersed organizations” as it fosters networking and innovation amongst employees (Atherton & Saghafi, 2010, p.64).

Employees are able to gain feedback on ideas, receive assistance with problems and foster interconnectedness as employees feel they are a part of a community (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Additionally, it can save employees time as individuals are able to avoid irrelevant emails and messages by selecting what content they want to engage in, “without being intrusive or annoying” (Atherton & Saghafi, 2010, p.64).

Thirdly, corporations may build *in-house proprietary solution systems* (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). However, it should be noted that most of these prototypes have a limited lifespan and are

generally utilized to “inform other internal systems and commercial products” (Treem & Leonardi, 2012, p.6).

All three systems can potentially reduce social isolation for individuals who are introverted and less likely to participate in group initiatives. Additionally, it can create a sense of belonging and group cohesiveness amongst removed employees as well as foster transparency amongst top, middle and lower employees (Golden, 2007; Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz, 2002; Artherton & Saghafi, 2010).

### **2.2.2.2 Legislation and Online Social Media**

According to Hofmeyer (2019), within South Africa there are no explicit laws regulating the use of online social media in the workplace. However, there are intersecting laws which are applicable; *Section 14 of the Constitution of South Africa* states that every individual has the right to privacy. However, this is not absolute. When an individual shifts into any form of communal relations or activities such as social or business interactions their scope of their personal space shrinks<sup>2</sup> (Hofmeyer, 2019). Additionally, *Section 14* states every individual has a right to privacy (Hofmeyer, 2019). However, once again this is not absolute as illustrated in the case of *Dewoonarain Vs Prestige car sales (PTY) LTD T/A Hyundai Ladysmith 2014*. On Facebook an employee stated, “Working for and with Indians is pits; they treat their own as dirt” (Hofmeyer, 2019). She argued this was her constitutional right and a form of her freedom of expression (Hofmeyer, 2019). However, the arbitrator highlighted making such comments is unjustifiable and harms the employer as it brought about disrepute to the company’s name (Hofmeyer, 2019).

The *Protected Disclosures Act No 26 of 2000* states an employee may disclose unlawful information or activities of an employee or employer (Protected Disclosures Act, 2000). However, the internet is not considered an appropriate forum for such disclosures (Hofmeyer, 2019). This once again highlights the importance of developing codes of practices within organizations. Forms of training or workshops can assist employees in understanding the gravity of using online social media within the wrong context.

In the USA, the Electronic Communications Act regulates the use of online social media in the workplace. It introduces three ways in which companies can legally enforce forms of monitoring

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<sup>2</sup>As in the case of *Gaertner & Other V Minister of finance & others 2014(1) BCLR 38 CC* (Hofmeyer, 2019)

and surveillance; firstly, employers may monitor employee communication to ensure effective quality control and to mitigate the use of unauthorized equipment (Baker, Buoni, Fee & Vitale 2011). Secondly, employees may be fired if they are found being unproductive, abusing the company's resources or making abusive remarks regarding the employer (Baker et al., 2011). Thirdly, it advocates, the "provider exception" which states if an employer own tools such as email or internet services this releases the employer's liability (Baker et al., 2011).

### **2. 2.3 Online Social Media: Distraction or Enhancer**

"Employee productivity" is rooted in Taylorist's principles which have extended into the modern-day workplace (Haynes, 2007). The division of labour, job rotation as well as forms of work enrichment have allowed for a more productive employee (Drucker, 1999). In the most general sense, productivity can be defined as the ratio between output and input (Colford, 2016). Increasing productivity requires improved efficiency from any form of input (Colford, 2016). This may include labour, capital or materials (Colford, 2016).

Today, organizations are part of complex, dynamic and ever-changing environments. Haynes (2007) highlights how this general definition of employee productivity has extended to include other aspects of work, such as; the ability to meet targets while producing quantity, profitable and quality outputs.

Additionally, the ability to be innovative and the inclusion of psycho-social aspects of employee work-life has found to influence employee output (Haynes, 2007). These other factors which may influence employee output include; workspace comfort, adequate space for work equipment, access to technology and support as well as easy accessibility to other co-workers, day light, quality lighting, air and temperature control (Kupritz, 2002).

Employees were traditionally required to work for an organization for several years before becoming experts in their field (Nardi et al., 2002). However, employees today can now become experts on almost any topic with the accessibility and transmission of knowledge online (Nardi et al., 2002). Moreover, they are seeking flexi-work as well as opting to become consultants within their fields (Nardi et al., 2002). [It is noteworthy to mention that this 'flexibility' may be limited depending on the nature of work individuals engage in.](#)

[In Workaddition, work](#) is now organized in teams, allowing multiple individuals, across multiple sectors and boundaries to work towards a common objective (Stoner [&and](#) Hartman, 1993; McGregor, 2000). This provides a wealth of experience and perspective while fostering innovation and allowing for collaborative problem solving (Stoner [&and](#) Hartman, 1993). Furthermore, employees are able to work from home, making it easier to balance their work-life commitments (Vos [&and](#) Voordt, 2002).

The modernization of production systems through computers and enhanced forms of communication<sup>3</sup> has not only changed the way in which employees work but also as society, we are beginning to look like a “planetary nervous system” that cannot be isolated rather we are a part of “nerve cells of an awakening global brain” which is constantly interacting and exchanging information (Castells, 1999; Nardi, et al., 2002, p.209). This requires a new modus of operation as there is a shift from a brawn worker to a knowledge worker, within an economy that places emphasis on knowledge value and intangible outcomes (Galbraith, 1973).

According to Drucker (1999), this type of employee dominates the workforce and can be described as individuals with knowledge capital. They add value to organizations through their creative contributions and incremental knowledge they possess (Zhang, Ackerman [&and](#) Adamic, 2007). Although it should be noted there will always be a demand for manual forms of labour, Drucker (1999) argues underdeveloped countries will assist in meeting this demand as most individuals within these countries do not have the means to educate and develop themselves professionally. However, the advancements in technology and machinery may decrease the demand for this form of labour as decades pass.

### ***2.2.3.1 Preceding Studies in College Settings***

Currently, there is a surfeit of literature exploring online social media within college settings. Although the studies were conducted in varying contexts, the findings are still relevant as they explore individuals’ motives for engaging with content on varying online social media platforms. Furthermore, it can assist in understanding if there are similarities when engaging on such platforms for personal versus workplace usage.

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<sup>3</sup>Such as, “ Chat, groupware, computer conferencing systems, blogs, wiki’s and internet telephony” (Harden,2012,p.3888).

A study conducted by Cheung, Chiu and Lee (2011) aimed to explore why students engage in forms of social networking using the users and gratifications theory, social theory as well as the social presence theory. The authors used the term we-intention to describe individuals' motivations to join and engage in forms of social networking sites (SNS). Their results indicated that social presence was the strongest indicator of engagement on SNS such as Facebook (Cheung, Chiu & Lee, 2011). Additionally, group norms had a significant impact on the *We intention* to utilize such sites (Cheung et al., 2011). Other significant values for utilizing SNS included; “maintaining interpersonal, social connectivity and entertainment value” (Cheung et al., 2011, p.1340).

Another study by Park, Kee and Valenzuela (2009) conducted a web survey among 1715 college students and attempted to examine Facebook users' gratifications and civic and political engagement online. Their findings revealed gratifications are dependent on the users: age, gender, location and year of schooling. The factor analysis of the data indicated that, socializing, entertainment, self-seeking status and information seeking were significant when examining Facebook group usage. However, the most significant factor being; *socializing*, this included an individual's ability to; “get peer support from others, meet interesting people, feel like they belong to a community, talk about something with others and stay in touch with people they know”(Park, Kee & Valenzuela, 2009, p.730).

A study conducted by Xu, Ryan, Prybutok and Wen (2012) administered 148 questionnaires among graduate and post-graduate students within the United States of America, in an attempt to determine why individuals', engage in social networking sites. Their findings revealed, the prevalence of smart devices allows users to engage on platforms “24/7” (Xu, Ryan, Prybutok & Wen, 2012, p.213). Moreover, a user's ability to co-ordinate and easily access content had a positive impact on SNS usage. In addition, social networking sites had a positive effect on social presence, leisure and affection to others which in turn permits users the ability to fulfill some socio-psychological needs. The authors also deduced SNS can support four types of organizational activities which include; sales, branding, product development and customer service and support.

Another study conducted by Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) attempted to explore the relationship between Facebook and the maintenance of social capital amongst university students. According to the aforementioned authors' findings, “there is a positive relationship

between certain kinds of Facebook use and the maintenance and creation of social capital” which enhances weak ties with friends and an online community at large thus improving the psychological well-being, self-esteem and overall life satisfaction of individuals (Ellison et al., 2007, p.1161). This coincides with the findings by Boyd and Ellison (2008) which posit that students utilize Facebook to maintain connections with old friends.

A study conducted by Agarwal & Mital (2009) had a similar objective to Cheung et al., (2011) however, their findings revealed, “students do not only use social networking websites for leisure and personal socialization but also as a platform for more meaningful and serious deliberations” (Agarwal & Mital, 2009, p.107). This includes the sharing of opinions and ideas globally (Agarwal & Mital, 2009). This may then demonstrate how society is like “a planetary nervous system” and a part of a “global brain” which shatters traditional boundaries of connecting and communicating (Nardi et al., 2002, p.209).

### ***2.2.3.2 Correlated Studies on Online Social Media in the Workplace***

Research conducted by Nucleus research revealed 77 % of employees check social media sites during working hours resulting in a 15% decline in productivity (Aguenza et al., 2012). However, a European study commissioned by A & T revealed 65% of their employees believed social media sites enhanced their efficiency in the workplace (Moqbel, Nevo & Kock, 2013). Additionally, 46% of employees believed it enhanced their creativity, 38% believed it assisted with information building and creative problem solving, 32% believed it facilitated and fostered a team spirit while 36% believed it assisted with the collection of knowledge about customers as well as employees (Aguenza et al., 2012).

An additional study conducted by North (2010) aimed to explore the degree to which employees’ attitudes will influence their decision to utilize social networking sites in the workplace. Of 59 respondents, 81 % admitted their use or intent to use online social media in the workplace, within this 81%, only 13% engaged on such platforms for work related tasks (North, 2010). This highlights the general consensus, that online social media platforms are a distraction to employees in the workplace. Potentially resulting in decreased employee productivity and poor quality of work output (North, 2010).

A study conducted by Munene & Nyaribo (2013) attempted to investigate the effects of online social media on employee productivity, in order to achieve their objective, questionnaires were administered to a sample group and findings were analyzed utilizing quantitative analysis methods. Their findings revealed that 100% of their sample regularly engaged on Facebook, 77.5% on YouTube, 57.5% on Google Plus, 40% on Twitter and 42% on LinkedIn for both work and non-related work reasons which include; remaining in contact with friends, creating personal networks, building business networks, sharing information with colleagues and seeking work related content which promotes a culture of sharing and translates into “productivity gain” (Munene & Nyaribo, 2013, p.144).

Additionally, social media participation within the workplace was not a result of feeling unsatisfied or unchallenged within their vocations but rather attributed to boredom and proved to be a strong indicator of job performance, as online social media had a direct negative and positive impact on productivity (Munene & Nyaribo, 2013).

Furthermore, the authors claimed, “social media participation has a more negative than positive impact on productivity” as employees are more likely to traverse on their personal networks during working hours (Munene & Nyaribo, 2013, p.148; Kidwell, 2010). Moreover, this improved ability to communicate can provide an easy distraction which can diminish an employee’s efficiency within the workplace (Munene & Nyaribo, 2013, p.148; Warr & Inceoglu, 2012). Saks (2006) describes these less engaged encounters as individuals which exert less energy to their job roles and duties which in turn may reduce levels of productivity in the workplace.

Another study conducted by Hassan, Nevo and Wade (2015) conducted 240 surveys within a multinational IT company which attempted to explore the social, hedonic and cognitive effect of online social media on job performance. Their findings revealed that online social media can have a negative effect on job function, particularly routine tasks. However, it has the ability to enhance performance within job functions which include innovative and creative tasks. Additionally, online social media was positively linked to the formation of social capital (a source of knowledge and support) as well as social (building and maintaining relationships) and cognitive (seeking knowledge and creating and sharing content) gratifications, potentially enhancing individual job performance. However, the effect of social capital on job performance may vary depending on the gratification each individual is attempting to obtain. Furthermore,

users who engaged with online social media platforms for hedonic motives; to relax, pass time or escape, were found to devote less time to their assigned duties. This again may compromise job performance within the workplace.

However, an Australian study conducted by the University of Melbourne revealed that regardless of occupation forms, online social media can benefit all employees as “all people need to zone out for a bit to get their concentration back” (Fahmy, 2009, par.4). Subsequently, leaving the “brain refreshed and renewed” (Aguenza et al., 2012, p.23). These short breaks serve as a reset mechanism which improves their concentration levels and results in increased levels of productivity (Fahmy, 2009). According to, Aguenza, Al-Kassem and Som (2012) online social media is not necessarily the cause for unproductivity as “unproductive employees will find a way to be unproductive even without the internet” (Aguenza et al., 2012, p.25). This was further ratified by an article published by Shepard (2011), who posited that companies have nothing to gain by banning such platforms as “time doesn’t magically convert to work” (Shepard, 2011, p.3). Thus, highlighting the freedom employees have when seeking a diversion in the workplace (Shepard, 2011).

Another study conducted by Leftheriotis [&and](#) Giannakos (2014) attempted to understand employee’s usage of online social media within the workplace. In an attempt to achieve this 1799 surveys were administered to employees and employers within the insurance sector in Greece. Findings revealed, more than half of their sample utilized online social media to observe the market, competitors as well as keeping connected to customers (Leftheriotis [&and](#) Giannakos, 2014). Additionally, two of three participants reported utilizing forms of online social media for its entertainment value and collaborative features (Leftheriotis [&and](#) Giannakos, 2014). This ability reportedly strengthened weak ties and improved employee performance by providing mechanisms which can improve employee productivity (Leftheriotis [&and](#) Giannakos, 2014). The aforementioned was supported by Shepard (2011), who stated online social media platforms have the ability to enhance collaborative learning through mutual problem solving and sharing of experiences, subsequently, fostering a rich knowledge base which can be accessed at any time (Shepard, 2011). Perhaps then it is not the presence of online social media which makes employees unproductive but rather how it is used in the workplace (Leftheriotis [&and](#) Giannakos, 2014; Burkley [&and](#) Van Alstyne, 2004).

In addition, a study conducted by DiMicco, Millen, Geyer, Dugan, Brownholtz and Muller (2008) attempted to explore employees' motivations when utilizing an in-house proprietary solution system known as *Beehive*. Both qualitative interviews and supporting quantitative data was analyzed. Findings revealed employees did not use *Beehive* to socialize with fellow employees but rather to discover and connect with individuals they do not know and share common interests with (DiMicco et al., 2008). This ability to expand their reach not only enhanced employees' ability to express their ideas and opinions but also exposed them to content and opportunities which advocate forms of career advancement (DiMicco et al., 2008).

Another study conducted by Ferreira and Du Plessis (2009) attempted to examine the effect of social networking on employee productivity within organizations. In order to achieve their objective both interviews and a formal questionnaire was administered to employees within a South African university (Ferreira & Du Plessis, 2009). From 183 prospective participants, a total of 89 questionnaires were captured (Ferreira & Du Plessis, 2009). Their findings indicated that individuals visit online social media platforms both daily and weekly (Ferreira & Du Plessis, 2009). However, their level of engagement is "influenced by the contrasting nature" of these sites as some technology is more aligned to social functions when compared to work functions (Ferreira & Du Plessis, 2009, p.6). Additionally, the authors' discovered that the sharing of knowledge within these CoP's can stimulate forms of collaboration, knowledge sharing and improve the response rate to customers inquiries and needs, which can in turn increase levels of productivity within the workplace (Ferreira & Du Plessis, 2009). This correlates to Yeshambel, Belete & Muluaem (2016) findings who postulated that online social media usage is dependent on users interests and experiences (i.e. CoP's).

A synopsis of the above studies indicate that there are mixed findings regarding the use of online social media in the workplace. Findings indicate some motives are no different regardless of the context in which online social media is used. Individuals from tertiary institutions and the workplace make use of platforms to; strengthen existing relationships, establish new relationships and share opinions and ideas with known and unknown individuals. However, within the workplace, forms of online social media, provide platforms which can enhance employee retention, joint problem solving, creativity and collaborative learning. These effects may improve employee efficiency and performance, in turn, positively contributing to employee output as well as feelings of recognition within the workplace.

Contrary to this, other studies reveal some employees perceive online social media as a “time waster” as it can reduce employee retention and may result in unethical internet usage such as, the; copyrighting of trade secrets, distribution of offensive materials and intellectual property (North, 2010; Chen et al., 2008).

## 2. 2.4 Online Social Media and Job Satisfaction

According to Bettencourt & Brown (1997) job satisfaction can be described as “employee perceptions of righteousness of outcomes, procedures and interactions within the firm” (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997, p.40). Other traditional models of job satisfaction include;

- I. A combination of psychological, physiological and environmental conditions which lead individuals to believe that they are pleased with their current vocation. (Hoppock, 1935).
- II. How individuals feel about their vocation and its’ interrelating aspects (Spector, 1997).

These definitions indicate a strong correlation to the employee, their affective state in relation to their vocation and external factors relating to their vocation. This includes six components of what is perceived as a “good job”; remuneration, hours of work, future prospects, the difficulty of the work, job content and inter-personal relationships (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997). These “conditions”, “states” or “aspects” are perceived to have lasting effects on employee productivity (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997). However, Edmans (2012) suggests that job satisfaction is an attitudinal variable and varies according to what each employee values more (Edmans, 2012).

Additionally, it is not directly controlled by management but can be indirectly affected by human resource policies (Edmans, 2012). This includes; poor vertical and horizontal communication, perceived compensation and remuneration, poor interpersonal relationships with supervisors, perceived job security and limited developmental opportunities (Ruthankoon & Ogunlana, 2003; Haddud, Dugger & Gill, 2016). Notwithstanding the above, Wright and Kim (2004) argue that these factors do not have a direct impact on productivity but rather have an indirect influence on organizational productivity by reducing costs associated with absenteeism and turnover.

### ***2.2.4.1 Correlated Studies on Online Social Media in the Workplace***

A study conducted by Oh and Syn (2015) attempted to examine the most significant factors that motivate individuals to share their personal experiences on certain online social media platforms. A survey was administered across five different online social media platforms to 1056 participants (Oh & Syn, 2015). Their findings revealed all ten (enjoyment, efficacy, learning, personal gain, altruism, empathy, community interest, social engagement, reputation and reciprocity) motivational factors were significant (Oh & Syn, 2015). However, learning and social engagement were the most influential (Oh & Syn, 2015).

Research has revealed forms of online social media can assist in avoiding burnout as employees are able to “achieve balance by extending one’s virtual presence into the other realms and maintaining one’s role and responsibilities in “absentia” (Moqbel et al., 2013, p.245). Thus, assisting individuals in their quest to obtain a healthy work-life balance and contributing positively to their feelings of being satisfied within the workplace (Moqbel et al., 2013).

The particular motivations for using online social media individually, at an organizational and government level have been explored. Some of these included but are not limited to; a sense of belonging, fostering an innovative and stimulating environment, building knowledge capital and strengthening and creating new ties (Moqbel et al., 2013). Although these motives may enhance an employee’s perception of job satisfaction, the mere use of online social media will not directly influence job satisfaction (Charoensukmongkol, 2014). Rather there is a strong correlation between online social media and job performance which is mediated by the level of job satisfaction employees get from using social networking sites at work (Charoensukmongkol, 2014).

### **2.2.5 Significance of the Study**

Currently there are a surfeit of studies on online social media within college settings. Many of these studies focus on usage within a particular platform. However, since the development of online social media, a number of studies have emerged within the context of the workplace. Current research focuses on the ways in which employees utilize in-house proprietary systems (such as Beehive) whilst others focus on a few main aspects, such as; social capital benefits, network analysis, self-presentation, addiction and privacy issues (DiMicco et al., 2008). Despite

existing literature on the subject matter there is still a lack of literature which focuses on understanding online social media for work purposes (Leftheriotis & Giannakos, 2014).

The following study will contribute to the current body of knowledge by providing a lens which will enhance our understanding of online social media in relation to productivity and job satisfaction within the context of a South African organization. Firstly, this understanding may influence the effectiveness and efficiency within organizations. Secondly, there are limited studies which explore the use of online social media for work purposes. This study will provide an in-depth understanding of the applicability of online social media in the workplace, from the perspective of an employee. Thirdly, findings from the study may raise awareness on the importance of training or policy development to regulate online social media use within the workplace. Lastly, findings can provide significant insight, into whether online social media usage differs amongst varying sectors.

## **2.3 Theoretical Framework of the Study**

### **2.3.1 The Uses and Gratifications Theory**

The Uses and Gratifications (U & G) theory has been applied in many settings within mass communication research and can be traced back to the “beginning of empirical mass communication research” (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973, p.509). The U & G approach has been applied to a number of print media studies as well as within the context of radio, television and more recently new media such as the mobile phone, the internet and online social media (Dunne, Lawlor & Rowley, 2010). Simplistically, this allows researchers to deduce why individuals use particular forms of communication over others (Katz et al., 1973). Additionally, it enhances our understanding of the psychological needs that motivate individuals to utilize a particular medium (Cheung et al., 2011). This how and why theory will assist in providing the lens for the study and will inform decisions about how the research will be conducted. This will be explored at a later part of this chapter.

#### ***2.3.1.1 Basic Assumptions of the Uses and Gratifications Theory***

According to Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973), the fundamental elements of the U & G theory include the following assumptions;

- i. Individuals are not passive; rather they actively engage with content and make motivated choices (Ruggiero, 2002). This advocates goal- directed behavior as individuals are consciously aware of their needs and select appropriate means of gratification (Ko, Cho & Roberts, 2005). These purposeful choices demonstrate the active decision-making power users engage in when given the choice to select from different online social media platforms (Ko et al., 2005). A study conducted by Park, Kee and Valenzuela (2009) revealed individuals may join a particular group based on their shared interest. However, motivation may vary depending on their demographic characteristics. Furthermore, an individual's personal characteristics such as their income level may influence their ability to obtain an internet connection and in turn accessibility to forms of online social media (Park et al., 2009). In addition, some individuals may prefer content over the social context (chatting and forming connections) of online social media platforms (Ruggiero, 2000). An individual's social environment, such as their confinement to home and job role may also influence their attachment to forms of online social media platforms (Ruggiero, 2000).
- ii. The framework highlights how the audience is most active in this relationship, as it is the audience who is using social media rather than online social media using them. The audience is self- aware and can sustain their interests and motives (Katz et al., 1973). In essence then, users are able to “control what they want, when they want, and where they want” (Shao, 2008). Users then choose to utilize different types of online social media at varying times and settings. Once again highlighting how the individual has an active role and makes motivated choices when engaging on online social media platforms (Ruggiero, 2000).
- iii. Forms of media compete with other conventional forms of satisfaction (Katz et al., 1973). While not directly informing this research, it is important to acknowledge Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as it is a seminal theory on the conventional forms of satisfaction. In this regard, according to this theory, when basic survival requirements are met an individual transcends into secondary needs which includes; seeking a form of law and order, security as well as freedom from fear, stress and anxiety (Fraser, 1983). Once these stress levels are in a manageable state and the basic conditions of safety have been met (as defined by the individual), he or she is then able to transcend into the third group which has been identified as the social stage (Benson & Dundis, 2003). This includes; an individual's need for a sense of belonging, love, friendship and affection (Fraser,

1983). In a traditional sense this can be fulfilled through affiliations with co-workers, forming relationships with individuals who share common interests and forming new relationships through mutual friends (Golden, 2007). Thereafter, an individual will transcend into the fourth level which includes; the pursuit of self-actualization, self-esteem as well as feelings of achievement and the need to establish status and reputation (Fraser, 1983). According to Maslow, the first three needs are a necessity for the development of a healthy personality while the last two needs represent growth, allowing individuals to realize their full potential (Steers, Mowday & Shapiro, 2004).

- iv. The U & G theory adopts a user-level view and is explored in the context of the user, thereby emphasizing how the user (audience) is in control of the communicative process and their choice to be online, if at all (Stafford, Stafford & Schkade, 2004). This assists and shapes the researchers understanding the phenomena, online social media through the lens of the audience.

According to Katz et al., (1973) “audience gratifications can be derived from the following sources; media content, exposure to the media per se, and the social context that typifies the situation exposure to different media” (Katz et al., 1973, p.514). In essence then, individuals can utilize forms of media for a variety purposes. This includes; gathering information to be educated or informed about a particular subject matter; using it as a form of entertainment, escaping stressors and to strengthen or develop connections (Stafford et al., 2004). Additionally, individuals may use a form of media for the experience of the media process (Stafford et al., 2004). This includes playing with technology and browsing on different platforms (Stafford et al., 2004).

### ***2.3.1.2 Attributes of New Media***

Due to the rapid technological advancements in recent decades, the U & G theory was adapted to include elements of new media (Ruggiero, 2002). Ruggiero (2000) highlights that the internet has three different aspects of technology which are not associated with traditional forms of media. These include interactivity, demassification and asynchronicity (Ruggiero, 2000).

Interactivity can be described as “the degree to which participants in the communication process have control over and can exchange roles in their mutual discourse” (Ruggiero, 2000, p.15). This

allows the user control over content, its' use and the ability to respond to a source (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). This implies that users want “their media interfaces to be responsive to their actions” while expecting more choice and control (Sundar & Limperos, 2013, p.514). However, Ha & James (1998) argue that the definition of interactivity is flawed and should consider the users willingness to participate and facilitate each other's communicative needs. This may vary from individual to individual as each user has different communicative needs and motives for engaging on online social media platforms.

The five dimensions of interactivity include; “reciprocal communication, information collection, choice, connectedness and playfulness” (Ruggiero, 2000, p.15). Reciprocal communication permits collaborative communication between the user and the source (Ha & James, 1998). On the other hand, information collection serves as an effective tool for data gathering or sourcing of information (Ha & James, 1998). These two dimensions are considered to have higher levels of interactivity as they require a two-way exchange of messages from the user (audience) and source (communicator) (Ha & James, 1998). The latter three dimensions are considered audience orientated interactivity as the audience is mostly in control of the communication process (Ha & James, 1998).

Choice allows the user to select from a variety of networks which creates feelings of empowerment as users are able to interact with content online and enhance feelings of connectedness (Ha & James, 1998). Conversely, playfulness is considered a “break” from work and allows user to seek forms of entertainment online (Ha & James, 1998).

The demassification of media can be described as a user's ability to select from a wide range of media options to fulfill their needs (Langstedt, 2013). This can be illustrated by an individual who regularly purchased newspaper but now selects articles from multiple sources to fulfill their selective interests on any topic (Ruggiero, 2000). This may include the television, the radio, the internet or a magazine (Ruggiero, 2002).

Currently, there are a large number of social networking sites available to users. This affords users the ability to select one form of social networking over another. However, according to Haase & Young (2010) users do not embrace one form of online social media but rather integrate a number of communication platforms as each medium supports a unique need that other mediums cannot completely fulfill.

Additionally, communication platforms have a high degree of interactivity which increases a users' ability to satisfy their gratifications while enhancing a platforms ability to retain users (Munene & Nyaribo, 2013). According to Munene and Nyaribo (2013) this ability is particularly captivating for the audience and can result in potential internet abuse or addiction in the workplace.

Forms of instant messaging, email and the worldwide web have made asynchronicity (storing of information which can be accessed at any time) as well as internet abuse a possible reality for all users (Dunne et al., 2010). This can be illustrated when examining particular platforms such as, YouTube which allows users to view their favorite videos repeatedly across time and location shifts (Shao, 2008). Forms of email and other online activities also have an addictive quality of instantaneous positive feedback and provides users with delayed negative responses which can further contribute to its gratifying and addictive nature (Munene & Nyaribo, 2013).

The accessibility of content is often important to users as it allows individuals to access information, across borders and time zones, thus providing users with additional customization and control (Dunne et al., 2010). Users are spoilt for choice and utilize different mediums to satisfy different needs. According to Quan-Haase & Young (2010) users are likely to continue utilizing a medium when it provides the expected positive feedback or gratification. However, if the desired gratification is not met, users are likely to terminate the usage of the medium (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010).

### ***2.3.1.3 Forms of Gratifying Behavior***

According to previous studies conducted there are different gratifications obtained when compared to gratifications sought. Gratifications obtained (GO) can be described as “gratifications that audience members actually experience through the use of a particular medium” (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010, p.325). A study by DiMicco et al., (2008) examined an in-house proprietary system known as Beehive. Their findings revealed employees obtained the following gratifications when utilizing the system; connecting with fellow employees and other individuals they did not know as well as sharing personal and professional information. The experience employees gained from such a system is highlighted from the following extract within the study, “when a new person joins Beehive Ricardo often goes to look at their profile to see if he remembers having met them. If he knows the person directly or if he knows someone in

common with the person, he will comment on their profile and connect to them, adding them to his growing list of Beehive connections” (DiMicco et al., 2008, p.5). This is Ricardo’s experience of utilizing the medium, Beehive.

On the other hand, gratifications sought (GS) can be described as “the gratification that an audience member” expects a medium to fulfill “before they have actually come in to contact with it” (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010, p.325). Examples of gratifications sought include; identity creation, recognition, identity management, avoiding isolation, creating or maintaining social ties, diversion and surveillance (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). The gap between GO and GS can determine the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction a user has when engaging on a medium (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010).

### **2.3.2 Connectivism Theory**

The connectivism theory can be described as a learning theory which examines how learners take part in learning activities on a variety of digital networks (Siemans, 2004). Traditionally, learning occurs on two main levels; biologically, when two neurons are active at the same time and when learners utilize concepts through instructive means or by reading academic texts to create conceptual connections (Siemans, 2004). However, as technology advanced, a third level was procreated known as networked learning through external social spaces such as Twitter or Facebook (Siemans, 2004).

According to Downes and Siemens (2004) connectivism is not only applicable in online environments but comprises of the relationships between external and internal environments (Kop & Hill, 2008). Before delving deeper into the theory’s central principles, it is important to understand key terms which highlight the importance of socialization and technology within the theory (Goldie, 2016). The theory suggests that knowledge is accumulated through nodes or learning communities which interact and share dialogue in the form of words, images, videos or multimedia (Goldie, 2016). These nodes often form part of a larger network (two or more nodes) which create platforms of conversation and allow for participation and interaction (Goldie, 2016). Through the ability to form and traverse networks openly, knowledge is actuated by learners who connect and participate in a learning community (Goldie, 2016).

To illustrate this, let's examine Jamie, an employee in HCIE technologies. Jamie's primary role within the organization is to build and implement broadband networks. However, she is experiencing difficulty with a particular aspect of her job as a result she engages communities of interest on platforms such as; Facebook to engage IT groups and pages, YouTube to engage lectures or documentaries, Reddit and Google to engage discussion blogs or Wikipedia posts and her mobile device to engage a colleague who is well versed on her topic of interest.

Jamie's engagement on these platforms allowed her to apply the above resources to what she already knew (Siemans, 2004). This social connected process of learning allows for the diversity of opinions which fosters critical thinking while expanding existing knowledge bases (Siemans, 2004). This highlights how knowledge is interconnected and formed from the "experience and interactions between individuals, societies, organizations and the technologies that link them" (Goldie, 2016, p.1065).

### ***2.3.2.1 Principles of Connectivism***

According to Siemans (2004) connectivism comprises of the following principles;

- I. Learners are able to traverse a multitude of knowledge domains worldwide "allowing for interdisciplinary connections to be made" (Kop [&and](#) Hill, 2008, p.2). Thereby, influencing learning and knowledge due to the variety of opinions and content online (Siemans, 2004).
- II. Learning is a process of connecting nodes and information sources (Siemans, 2004). These nodes may be formed through human interaction or connectivity but also through 'non-human' applications such as the internet, specifically online social media (Facebook communities of interest, subscriptions to relevant YouTube channels etc.) (Siemans, 2004).
- III. Integral to the learning process is ones' ability to seek out knowledge (Siemans, 2004). Filtering through the unnecessary and irrelevant information (Kop [&and](#) Hill, 2008). In essence then, choosing what to learn at the right time.
- IV. Learning is not only a knowledge consumption process but also a knowledge creation process, thereby, placing emphasis on nurturing connections to facilitate constant learning (Kop [&and](#) Hill, 2008). According to Majchrzak, Faraj, Kane and Azad (2013) users may not always contribute to the knowledge creation process but instead chose to observe or absorb the network for its user utility.

- V. Accurate knowledge is the goal of all connectivism activity (Goldie, 2016). This implies that knowledge is fluid and constantly changing and updating. As a result, what is true today may not be true tomorrow.

The above principles of connectivism highlight how learning and subsequently knowledge is essentially a set of connections which is predominantly formed by experience and actions rather than logic and language (Kop & Hill, 2008). However, it has been argued that knowledge is not grounded in learning or education but in fact involves a higher thinking order which is currently inadequately explained in the connectivism theory (Kop & Hill, 2008). Furthermore, when connecting with others, humans tend to connect with like-minded individuals rather than “challenging transactions” which include experts or teachers in a particular field (Kop & Hill, 2008, p.10). It is believed that platforms which contain such expert facilitators or teachers may result in limited critical engagement, as some users may fear judgement or criticism from other individuals in such learning environments (Kop & Hill, 2008). While this is a major critic of the theory, the converse can be true as users are able to express their thoughts online without human engagement and therefore may be more inclined to critically engage with material. This ability may not only impact the expert and learner position but also the power distance between the two.

Additionally, it has been argued that the theory resembles theoretical principles which are similar to other constructivist theories such as (including but not limited to); Vygotsky’s formulation of social constructivism (1987), Clark’s theory of embodied action cognition (1997) and Bandura’s social cognitive theory (1986) which emphasize the distributive nature of knowledge as well as the “role of mediating artifacts” (Goldie, 2016, p.1067).

### **2.3.3 Theoretical Significance to the Study**

The U & G theory has informed the study in many ways. Firstly, the researcher assumes the audience is most active in the relationship. They decide which medium to utilize for what purpose (Ruggiero, 2000). This demonstrates how the user is in control of what content they engage in as well as their motivating factors for engagement (Ruggiero, 2000). Secondly, meaning is understood at a user-level and within the context of the workplace. Thus, placing

emphasis on the user's experience of utilizing online social media within the workplace (Qua-Haase & Young, 2010).

Thirdly, due to the context of the study users may have limited choices, as some companies may place restrictions on the usage of certain online social media platforms during working hours. Fourthly, the study attempts to understand the gratifications (if any) while at work, this may include; (but is not limited to) using online social media to gain a better understanding of a particular concept, networking with fellow employees (choice), avoiding isolation, enhancing feelings of recognition or escaping for a few brief moments (playfulness) while exploring the implications of such gratifications (if any) for job satisfaction and employee productivity (Cheung et al., 2011).

Despite the uses and gratifications theory being the main theoretical framework for the study, the connectivism theory was additionally examined to gain an in-depth understanding of learning and knowledge. In an attempt to do so, online social media will be explored in relation to knowledge building and learning in the workplace. Although this could be extended to “non-human appliances”, the researcher chose to focus on the above due to limited conceptualization of this principle, it should be noted that this is another critic of the theory (Goldie, 2016).

Notwithstanding the multitude of critics, the researcher engaged the connectivism theory for a number of reasons. Firstly, online networks have allowed for new ways of being. Humans are no longer isolated from the world but have the ability to connect with a variety of opinions and views worldwide. This ability has many implications for the traditional pedagogy of learning and knowledge.

As noted above, this will be explored in relation to knowledge building and learning in the workplace. Secondly, learning will be examined in relation to nodes and networks; this includes an employee's experience of being able to access these nodes within the workplace as well as their perceived effectiveness for learning. This will also be explored in relation to some of the five dimensions of interactivity within the U & G theory.

## **Chapter Three**

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### **3.1 Introduction**

The following chapter provides an overview of the methodological approach to be used in the study. The methodological approach guides the researcher with techniques to find answers to research questions (Kumar, 2011). This will assist in framing the overall study as well as shaping the manner in which data is collected and interpreted.

### **3.2 Research Objectives**

The following study attempts to explore, employees' perceptions and experience of utilizing online social media within the workplace and its implications, if any, for job satisfaction and productivity. In order to achieve this, a case study rooted in qualitative methods was conducted with an IT company in Kwa-Zulu Natal.

The following research questions were examined;

1. What forms of online social media do employees engage in while at work?

2. What impact has online social media had on their perceived levels of satisfaction at work?
3. Has online social media fostered or hindered their perceived levels of productivity?
4. Do employees feel their working experience would be more pleasant if they made use of online social media?

### 3.3 Research Design

According to Merriam and Associates (2002), a research design dictates the “philosophical or theoretical” stance of the researcher. This governs the research method a researcher will embark upon throughout the study. The following study can be described as an explorative, descriptive, contextual study rooted in qualitative research.

Qualitative research can be described as an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness, as part of a particular context and the interactions (Merriam [&and](#) associates, 2002, p.5). This highlights how researchers using this particular methodology are interested in understanding interpretations at a particular time and context (Merriam [&and](#) associates, 2002). Furthermore, qualitative research embodies several key principles, these include the following notions that researchers;

- I. Must strive to capture the true essence of how people make sense of their experience (Merriam [&and](#) associates, 2002). In this particular *case*, the researcher is interested in exploring employees’ experiences of using online social media (the *phenomena*) within the *context* of the workplace.
- II. Are the primary instruments for data collection and analysis (Merriam [&and](#) associates, 2002).
- III. Gather data to build concepts and inform generalizations, thus highlighting the inductive nature of such a research method (Merriam [&and](#) associates, 2002).
- IV. Find meaning through descriptions of content. For this particular study *meaning* will be derived from interviews conducted with participants. Their quotes will contribute to “the descriptive nature of qualitative research” (Merriam [&and](#) associates, 2002, p.5).

The above key characteristics have informed the researchers’ rationale when making sense of employee’s experiences of utilizing online social media within the workplace. This particular

(case) study was rooted within the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which was influenced by a distributive conceptualization of knowledge. This informed both the research methodology and design of the study.

### **3.3.1 Case Study Research**

A case study can be described as a unit in which there are boundaries (Merriam [and](#) associates, 2002). According to Yin (2014), case study research within psychological disciplines, focuses on gathering in-depth understanding of “single or a small number of cases within its real-world context” (Yin, 2014, p.209). This would aid insights on the phenomena; online social media within the context of the workplace. For this reason, a single case study was selected as multiple case studies (within various organizations) are beyond the scope of the research output.

The five rationales of case study research include; a longitudinal, critical, uncommon, revelatory and common case (Yin, 2014). This particular study can be described as a common case, as it attempts to capture the circumstances and conditions of everyday situations by providing insights as to what may motivate employees to engage in forms of online social media within the workplace (Yin,2014). Furthermore, it may provide useful insights to the 21<sup>st</sup> century employee and the implications, if any, of online social media within the workplace.

### **3.3.2 Researcher Approach : Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis**

The Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis is rooted within principles of phenomenology (Marriot [and](#) Thompson, 2008). This can be described as a philosophical approach which allows the researcher to study the experience of being humans (Smith, Flower [and](#) Larkin, 2009). The researcher explores participant’s experiences through dialogue, placing emphasis on each individual’s perception and experiences of using online social media within the workplace (Smith [and](#) Osborn, 2007).

The choice of semi structured interviews over other qualitative methods like forms of observation and focus groups were selected in an attempt to capture each participant’s unique experience of using online social media in the workplace. By doing this the researcher is then able to unearth each unique experience while attempting to make “sense of its appearance”

(Smith et al., 2009, p.12). The inductive nature of the study also allowed the researcher to focus on the variance of these perceptions and experiences while deriving rich and detailed meaning from the dialogue between the participants' and researcher (Smith et al., 2009).

### **3.3.3 Research Methods**

This includes a description of the sampling group, data collection procedures as well as methods of data collection. Additionally, it provides a description of the research procedures, ethical *considerations and limitations of the study.*

#### ***3.3.3.1 Sampling Strategy and Population***

According to Neuman (2014) sampling can be described as cases the researcher wants to examine in detail to reproduce features of interest which can be applied to the larger population. The case, in this study, was bonded by a form of non-probability known as purposive sampling.

Non- probability sampling can be described as a non-random sampling technique in which the researcher uses particular methods to reach a particular population (Nueman, 2014). This enabled the researcher to create boundaries and an inclusion criteria for the sample group. As a result, the case was bounded by;

- I. Time and place. The sample group was extracted within an IT company in KZN.
- II. Time and activity. All participants were interviewed on the company premises via a one on one interview which was recorded and transcribed. The same interview schedule was utilized as a basis for all interviews conducted.
- III. Definition and context. All participants had to utilize online social media and had to be transparent regarding their use of online social media within the workplace.

Participants were sourced from a number of partners within the company. This particular company was selected as it is a cutting-edge IT company that is innovative and progressive. Additionally, it is a large organization that operates globally within the gaming and computer programming sector.

### ***3.3.3.2 Entry and Establishing Researcher Roles***

Permission was granted from the company before obtaining ethical clearance from the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee. Please see the attached gatekeepers (Appendix 1) letter granting the researcher approval to conduct the study within their organization. Thereafter, a letter (Appendix 2) was distributed via team leaders among employees within different departments. If any employees within the above-mentioned departments showed interest in the study, they informed their team leader which notified human resources (HR). Once this occurred HR informed the researcher of their interest and a meeting was arranged in particular time slots on company property.

Upon meeting the participants, the information sheet was discussed as well as various ethical considerations such as; their voluntary participation, right to withdraw from the study at any stage, informed consent (Appendix 3) was discussed and signed in which all participants stated their stance on the recording of the interviews.

### ***3.3.3.3 Position of the Researcher***

As the researcher, I was an outsider and had no knowledge of the company's policy or stance of online social media within the workplace. As a result, I attempted to establish rapport with participants before commencing the interview. I was hopeful this would make participants feel comfortable considering the sensitive nature of the subject matter (online social media, within their working environments).

I attempted to be mindful and aware of my biases. This was vital in establishing an [understating understanding](#) of their outlook on online social media. According to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) this is imperative to any research output and requires the researcher to bracket-off any preconceptions he or she may have had. This process is vital to the research output and requires constant reflection as the researcher interprets the data.

Moreover, I attempted to actively listen, summarize, reflect and clarify what individuals expressed during their interviews (Yin, 2014, p.74). According to Yin (2014) active listening is not enough as researchers must take note of observations beyond auditory modality. This may involve reading in-between the lines and observing non-verbal cues which gives the researcher

the freedom to note interesting interactions or situations relating to the research questions (Yin, 2014).

The above research method and design was selected as it synchronized with the objective of the study. Additionally, it allowed the researcher to interact with participants and gain a subjective understanding of online social media in the context of work (Smith [&and](#) Osborn, 2007).

### **3.4 Data Collection**

Eight one-on-one, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with employees within the IT company. An interview schedule (Appendix 4) was utilized to assist the researcher when collecting data. This particular method was selected as it is a less rigid approach and allows the researcher to have a conversation with interviewees while probing where necessary. However, the length of each interview differed as some participants were more direct than others.

Moreover, face-to face-interviews allow the researcher to observe social cues which can enhance a researcher's ability to make observations beyond the actual interview (Opdenaker, 2006). It should also be noted different questions may have been asked when probing interviewees, as no two individuals are the same. The researcher and interviewees are active participants in data collection as they are viewed as "conscious beings interpreting and acting on the world around them" (Madill, Jordan [&and](#) Shirley, 2000, p.9).

#### **3.4.1 Instruments and Documents Used**

While conducting the study the following instruments were utilized to ensure confidentiality of participants as well as validity and reliability of the research output.

- Informed consent document
- Information sheet document
- Interview schedule
- Recording device

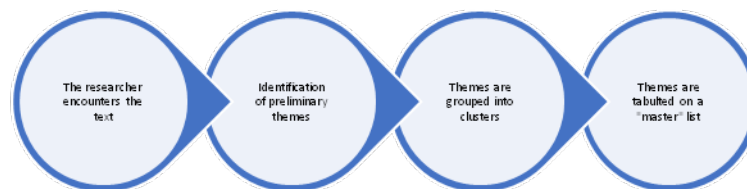
### 3.5 Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded and thereafter transcribed for analysis. Each interview was transcribed by the researcher, this involved listening to each interview and typing out the dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee. The interview text provides rich detailed data. However, it is the researcher's engagement with the text that informs the systematic understanding of the interview data (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). Once again, highlighting the importance of bracketing (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008).

The process of data analysis was informed by the IPA paradigm as well as thematic analysis. According to the IPA paradigm, analysis involves reading and re-reading the text (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). This allows the researcher to take note of their own emotions when reading the data as well as recurring phrases or observations made while conducting the interviews (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). This helps identify themes as well as possible connections between themes (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). Thereafter, these themes are grouped into clusters, this assists the researcher in identifying super-ordinate categories which may suggest a hierarchical relationship between themes (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008).

Once this is done a master list of themes is tabulated which includes supporting citations from the text (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). In essence the analysis of data involves the following "steps";

**Figure 3.5.1: Sequence of steps in data analysis**



*Adapted from Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008, p.218*

The content was further interpreted by a form of qualitative inquiry known as thematic analysis. This further assisted in providing a systematic approach when deducing meaning from the data (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Thematic analysis can be described as a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns which are known as themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.6). These themes are extracted from the text known which will now be referred to as data. This particular method assists in organizing and describing the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, it allows for the exploration and identification of associations within themes which may exist within thematic units. However, it is not bound to any pre-existing theoretical framework and can be considered an essentialist, realist, constructionist or contextualist method (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Conducting thematic analysis involves the following “steps”;

- I. Familiarization of data; the researcher looks for “patterns of meaning” within the data set by familiarizing themselves with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is an interactive process as it involves reading and re-reading the text. Transcribing the recorded interview into a text format also assists in this regard (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013).
- II. Coding of data; once familiarization occurs, the researcher can embark on the process of coding analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). This involves writing an initial list of ideas about the data and what is interesting about it (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thereafter, coding begins by writing out these units and assigning a number to each relevant word or sentence (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- III. Searching for themes- The researcher will have to revisit each code and sort them into potential themes (Clarke & Braun, 2013). According to Clarke and Braun (2013) a theme can be described as “a coherent and meaningful pattern in the data relevant to the research question” (Clarke & Braun, 2013, p.4).
- IV. Reviewing themes- This involves revisiting and refining themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). A thematic map can assist the researcher in finding links between codes, themes and relating themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- V. Defining and naming themes- this involves the identification of what each theme is about as well as “what aspect of the data each theme captures” (Clarke & Braun, 2013, p.22).

VI. Writing the report involves re-telling the story in a “concise, coherent and logical” manner (Braun [and](#) Clarke, 2006, p.23). This includes extracts within the narrative which will assist in illustrating how the research questions were answered (Braun [and](#) Clarke, 2006).

### **3.6 Validity and Reliability**

According to Neuman (2014) reliability can be described as the dependability or consistency of a research output. Within this study, the interview schedule assisted in this regard as it guided the conversation for all interviews (Biggerstaff [and](#) Thompson, 2008). Additionally, the researcher revisited and refined themes in an attempt to understand the true essence of employees’ experiences of online social media within the workplace. This assisted in validating the integrity of the data. Moreover, the researcher made use of “bracketing” when conducting the interviews as well as when interpreting the data. Failure to do so would have compromised the authenticity of the data analysis and findings of the study (Nueman, 2014).

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

Prior to commencing interviews all participants were given an information sheet which contained details of the study as well as the supervisor and ethics committee contact details. Additionally, informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Furthermore, each participant was briefed on the objective as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any stage if he or she desired. Permission was granted by each participant to record the interviews and they were advised their responses will be used for data analysis on the research topic. In addition, their names would not be published in an effort to protect their identities and [in an attempt](#) guarantee [anonymity](#)~~confidentiality~~.

However, true anonymity was impossible to achieve as interviews were utilized to collect data. As a result, the HR representative would be aware of who partook in the study. If necessary, fictitious names would be utilized to protect the identity of participants. All recordings and transcripts were treated confidentially and were only seen by the researcher and supervisor of the study.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

The following chapter assisted in demonstrating the logic and rationale of the study. Additionally, it attempted to display “a clear chain of evidence” which should allow “readers to reconstruct how the researcher went from the initial research question to the final conclusion”, thereby, improving the overall validity and reliability of the study (Gibbert, Winfried [&and](#) Wicki, 2008, p.1468).

# Chapter Four

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## 4.1 Introduction

The following chapter attempts to synthesize the findings of the research in a logical order. Findings were deduced based on eight one on one interviews conducted within an information technology company. In an attempt to achieve this, a careful examination of participants narrative was carried out using thematic analysis. The discovery of themes, as well as sub-themes assisted in providing a rich in- depth analysis of the participants experience of using online social media within the workplace. The themes uncovered are listed in the table below;

**Table 4.1.2 – Synopsis of research themes and sub-themes**

Theme	Sub-theme
The Multiple Facets of Online Social Media	Preferences; Personal Interests
Communication & Connectivity	-
Knowledge Bases, Conversations & Professional Connections	Innovation
Job Engagement & Perceived Productivity	-
Social Connection	-
The Virtual Workplace	Autonomy

The first theme noted was the diversity of online social media platforms within varying contexts. This was often based on an individual’s preferences and personal interests. Secondly, improved communicative channels strengthened professional connections and resulted in a wealth of information which enhanced knowledge bases and conversations as well as serving as a source of inspiration to employees. Thirdly, online social media platforms have the ability to entertain users. This may distract employees from their work resulting in less engaged individuals with reduced levels of retention. However, it can also provide a tool which re-charges individuals on the task at hand. Fourthly, the ability to connect enhances the comradery, as well as assists employees in balancing various work-life roles. Lastly, online social media enhances an employee’s ability to communicate and feel connected to the organizations culture. This is

particularly useful in organizations which are geographically dispersed and assists by avoiding isolation and enhancing feelings of autonomy and satisfaction.

Before embarking on an analysis of the above-mentioned themes, it is important to understand what is deemed online social media. This definition was informed by the participants' understandings of the phenomena and has informed the findings of the study. A formal definition was not adopted in an attempt to understand participants' interpretation of online social media as they experience it: within a particular time and context (Merriam [&and](#) associates, 2002).

Online social media, therefore, can be described as any platform which allows users to actively share or engage with content in a passive or active manner. This allows users to see content, share information, browse information and react or create content. These platforms are open to the public and share features such as a log in page, a timeline and connections- often referred to as friends and followers.

## **4.2 Analysis of Themes**

### **4.3 The Multiple Facets of Online Social Media**

The use of online social media within the workplace has been a contentious topic for a number of years. Many organizations have prohibited the use of such platforms in fear it would negatively influence work output. However, other organizations have regulated the use of such platforms by employing defense technologies to manage and govern internet usage in the workplace (Ferreira [&and](#) Du Plessis, 2009).

Within the study, participants expressed their awareness of such regulations and willingness to use a variety of these platforms in the workplace. The most popular platforms included (but are not limited to); Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, WhatsApp and YouTube. Moreover, participants expressed that the usage of such a platform is dependent on the relevance of the medium within a given context, in this case, the workplace.

*P3: "I'm thinking in terms of Facebook and browsing; the social aspect. I think more may be too much and that may have a negative impact...so where we are spending too much time doing stuff like that, it's gonna, it's gonna take a knock on the actual work that's meant to be produced".*

The above participant highlights the social nature of online social media platforms and fears this may take away from the work being produced. This “social aspect” of online social media defies the norms of *being productive* as it is mainly perceived as a networking tool which distracts employees from work activities. Despite this perception, Leftheriotis & Giannakos (2014) posit this feature of online social media allows employees the opportunity to strengthen weak ties, develop new connections and promote professional collaboration and knowledge sharing. Other participants shared this sentiment and felt such public systems can be beneficial. This was supported within the excerpts below;

*P1: “It depends what the purpose is for”.*

*P6: “It just depends on who we follow”.*

*P4: “I feel like it depends on what type of person you are, if you like listening to music in the background or watching certain videos because it helps you relax or calm down in a situation, that’s pretty cool”... “maybe they just want to put on their earphones and do their thing, like it just depends on what type of role you have”.*

This implies that online social media can positively or negatively influence work output. The determining factor is how the user perceives such a tool within the workplace as well as their purpose for engaging with content on such platforms. For some individuals listening to music or having the ability to browse an online social media platform occasionally helps them refocus which enhances work output. Conversely, for other individuals, the very same scenario or ability is perceived as a distraction which takes away from the work being produced. These scenarios will further be expanded upon in the themes to follow.

The aforementioned findings were supported by a study conducted by, Ferreira & Du Plessis (2009) who stated that, respondents’ preferences may have been reflected in the contrasting nature of listed OSN (online social networking) sites. Consequently, emphasizing how individual interests differ from individual to individual as no two needs and preferences are similar. This may then inform a user’s perceived function of online social media in the workplace as one individual may feel the need to utilize a particular social networking site to take a break whilst another may utilize the same platform to find out information on a particular topic.

### 4.3.1 Preferences

Online social media comprises of a number of different types of formats, which commonly include images, articles and audio files in the form of a videos, podcast or streaming services. Leonardi, Haysman [&and](#) Steinfield (2013) and Kaplan [&and](#) Haenlein (2010) posit typical features of online social media, includes the ability to, create, share, upload, edit and sort text as well as images which are directly linked to themselves or others. According to the Uses and Gratifications theory, users are conscious of their needs, even when engaging in forms of online social media (Ko et al., 2005). To achieve their needs, they actively engage with content and make motivated choices (Ruggiero, 2002). Whether on an active or passive level these choices indicate what type of content users engage with (Ruggiero, 2002). This can be exemplified by the following excerpts;

*P1: “There are a lot of words and I just want to see pictures; you know a bit of a break you can scroll and see”.*

*P2: “If it’s a video, I am not going to watch it, I am lazy like that” ...at least I can see the pictures, see the caption, the hashtags, get an idea of what is going on and then move along”.*

*P4: “I feel Insta it’s just easier for the eye, it just doesn’t take too much time. Facebook there is a lot going on, there is a lot of unnecessary content that you might not necessarily want to see or follow”.*

Participants expressed particular preferences which influenced their decision to use or not use a platform. This was also influenced by their personal preferences as expressed above by participant four. The gratification obtained: what audience members experience through the use of a medium is highlighted when participants make use of a particular form of online social media (Quan-Haase [&and](#) Young, 2010). They select the type of content they want to engage in, at specific times.

Additionally, the revolutionization of technology has allowed content to be customized in a dynamic manner which funnels a users’ content based on their requests, interests and data (Shao, 2008). Thus, saving the user time and energy (Quan-Haase [&and](#) Young, 2010).

Upon interviewing participants, they highlighted that business-orientated applications such as; Linda.com, Stack overflow, YouTube, Discord, Microsoft Teams, Skype for business and LinkedIn had preference over social-orientated applications such as; Facebook, Twitter,

Instagram, WhatsApp, Pinterest and Reddit. An aforementioned study conducted by Ferreira & Du Plessis (2009) made a similar distinction between such applications. According to Ferreira & Du Plessis (2009), certain social networking technologies are more applicable for social purposes when compared to business focused applications (such as LinkedIn or Skype for business) within the workplace.

This can be attributed to our traditional norms of work which promote the compartmentalization of the social self and institutional self which have informed our conceptualization of labour and what it means to be a productive employee (Fraser & Dutta, 2010). The separation between the social self and institutional self can be illustrated from the below excerpts;

*P2: "To be honest I prefer to have online social media open for updates on things which relate to work".*

*P4: "Well... people may feel it doesn't belong here, we here to work and not play around and stuff"*

The general perception is that such platforms have no place in the workplace as it defies the norms of optimal work functioning and output. Munene & Nyaribo (2013) sustain the notion that online social media can be utilized as a dual application for both business and social purposes in the workplace. The particular motives for engagement will now be explored in the following sub-theme.

#### **4.3.2 Personal Interests**

This 'need' to engage on an online social platform may vary from individual to individual. However, prior studies revealed gratifications for engaging on online social media platforms include, socializing, entertainment, self-seeking status and information seeking (Park et al., 2009). Additionally, Munene & Nyaribo (2013) suggest that such platforms assist in maintaining connections with friends, building business networks as well as sourcing work related information online (Munene & Nyaribo, 2013). Furthermore, online social media enhances a users' ability to fulfill a number of socio-psychological needs as well as improves leisure ability and affection to others (Xu et al., 2012). Participants demonstrated awareness of their needs and expressed this within the excerpts below;

*P6: "I use Facebook more of a diary of sorts and Facebook events suggestions are really good" ... "Instagram, I am into photography so any picture I don't dump into a portfolio or Flickr, I dump on there, like to mark a specific occasion" ... Twitter is a slightly different interaction, so art, racing news, FI news and that sort of thing, anything formula one related, Twitter is my go to".*

*P5: "For Facebook its always, its only close friends and family kind of thing, so it's very personal... Twitter is my go-to place for keeping up with news, trends going on and so on, and obviously for myself, because I chose who to follow... and Instagram and Reddit are just time killers, so if I have time to waste, I will go on and look at pretty pictures".*

From the above excerpts it is clear users make motivated choices when selecting to use one platform over another. Individuals join groups or engage with content based on their particular interests (Park et al., 2009). This notion coincides with findings from Yeshambel, Belete [&and](#) Mulualem (2016) whom postulated that the functionality of online social media is dependent on a number of factors which include, " finding people who had similar experiences, discussing common topics of interest and virtually meeting peers to discuss current issues or topics of interest" (Yeshambel et al., 2016, p.18).

According to Ferreira [&and](#) Du Plessis (2009) this is known as "communities of practice" (CoP's) or "communities of interest". These CoP's allow individuals to traverse networks, promote knowledge sharing and learning based on communities of common interests (Ferreira [&and](#) Du Plessis, 2009, p.3). The uses and gratifications theory states in the event a platform no longer gratifies a user's interests or needs, he or she will feel dissatisfied which will result in termination of the medium (Quaan-Haase [&and](#) Young, 2010). This can be exemplified in the extract below;

*P2: "Twitter just irritated me, it gave me anxiety....I used to use it to keep up with latest trends and technology and psychology stuff...eventually it would climb so quickly. I couldn't keep up and I am the type of person who needs to read everything".*

The above medium was utilized by the participant regularly as it gratified her need to keep up to date with trends. However, as time passed, her gratification sought no longer matched her gratification obtained, resulting in high levels of dissatisfaction and ultimately termination of the medium she once deemed valuable (Quaan-Haase [&and](#) Young, 2010). Participant 2 highlights a central tenet of the uses and gratifications theory. She illustrates how the audience is most active in the relationship: she decides what platform to use when and for what purpose (Ruggiero,

2000). Additionally, she validates the control she has within this relationship- as it is her (the audience) using online social media rather than online social media using her (Katz et al., 1973).

Participant 5 further highlights how one form of online social media is unable to gratify all of his needs. If one platform could gratify all a user's needs, there would be no market or need to gratify other forms of behavior on other online networks. This can be illustrated when examining his assuagement of online social media. According to the participant's narrative, he utilizes; Facebook as a means to maintain connections, Reddit and Instagram as a diversion, Twitter to keep up to date with trends, Stack Overflow to solve problems and YouTube to watch work and non-work-related videos. This example illustrates aforementioned tenets of the uses and gratifications theory as he constantly displays consciousness to fulfill his needs and selects the appropriate means to gratify them. Furthermore, like participant 2, he (the user) is in control of the communicative process and discerns what to use when. This illustrates how the audience is always self-aware and can sustain their interests and needs by making motivated choices, thus, displaying goal-directed behavior (Katz et al., 1973).

### **4.3.3 Summary**

The above theme and sub-themes draw attention to the consciousness individuals display when choosing to engage on or not engage on forms of online social media. Individuals are aware of their needs and display goal directed behavior when deciding to engage with content on particular platforms (to fulfill these needs). The "need" to engage on forms of online social media differed from one individual to another and was found to be based on the users' preferences and personal interests. This informed participants' value perception of the platform as well as its relevance within the workplace.

This can be illustrated upon examining how participants automatically clustered online social media platforms into two categories; business orientated applications which include platforms such as; LinkedIn, Stack overflow, YouTube, Discord, Microsoft Teams, Skype for business and social applications which include platforms such as; Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Pinterest and Reddit.

The aforementioned categorization illustrates the notion of acceptable ways of being within the workplace. Participants made clear distinctions between suitable business applications used to enhance day to day output vs. social orientated applications used to connect and keep in contact

with individuals within and out of the organization. However, examination of participants dialogue revealed employees made use of various forms of social orientated applications while at work and felt the ability to engage on such platforms gave them the opportunity to refocus while promulgating comradery amongst present and removed employees. Additionally, this highlights how a particular platform cannot gratify all a user's needs and why individuals engage on several platforms to gratify various needs.

#### **4.4 Communication and Connectivity**

Over the years forms of communication have evolved from; forms of letter writing, to telephonic conversations, fax machines and emails. Additionally, since the invention of the worldwide web and cellular phones, individuals are able to access content at any given time. This revolutionization of computers and communications in the workplace has not only changed the way employees work but as a society we are beginning to look like a “planetary nervous system” that cannot be isolated as we form part of “nerve cells” within a global brain (Nardi et al., 2002, p.209; Leiner et al., 1997). The notion of connectivity was communicated and expressed by participants within the below experts;

*P7: “We make friends on the networks with people we work with. That helps build team chemistry and stuff. In that way I think it is good because people see another side of you, and you get to learn about each other”.*

*P2: “It’s hard to keep the team close knit and understand what person x is doing, I don’t know what I would do if we wouldn’t have those lines of communication”.*

*P8: “It gives you a way of communicating with a person without having to be physically there and talk to them”*

These new avenues of communication open a gateway of opportunity as employees are able to engage in continuous ongoing conversations in and around the micro, meso and macro environments of the organization (Majchrzak et al., 2013). Furthermore, this ability to connect and network with colleagues breaks through traditional channels of communication and enhances efficiency in the workplace. As individuals are able to send a message at any time, check if the message was received and discern if the message was read. This was expressed within the narrative by participant 2 who stated;

*P2: "I know that person doesn't have to be in front of a computer to get it and I know people use it for work a lot. I know that people cannot run away from me. Whereas with emails, they not on their phones and some people are very strict about that at times so WhatsApp doesn't have boundaries, I will message my boss if I have to".*

Participant 2 was cognizant that she needed feedback on an urgent matter and would use whatever channels necessary to seek the gratification required. She was unable to reach out to a colleague using a traditional form of communication, as a result, she crossed a "boundary" and reached out to them using a different social orientated application. The breaking of boundaries was further exasperated by Ferreira [& Du Plessis \(2009\)](#), who stated the rise of the worldwide web and forms of social applications have broken down geographical, linguistic and domains of knowledge. Additionally, this ability to improve information and communication processes allows countries to modernize their production system and increase their ability to compete in the global market (Castells, 1999).

Forms of online social media connect individuals and aid transparency amongst members to engage in sharing and learning based on their common interests (CoP's) also known as nodes and network (Ferreira [& Du Plessis, 2009](#); Siemans, 2004). As a result, employees are able to access expert knowledge from professionals globally. Leftheriotis and Giannakos (2014) supported this and stated, online social media strengthens weak ties while fostering new connections and promoting professional knowledge sharing, thereby, enhancing the employee work experience as well as performance output.

#### **4.4.1 Summary**

Expedited forms of communication have enhanced the human capability to connect. As a result, individuals are able to connect almost instantaneously. In the workplace, employees are able to connect with other professionals across linguistic and geographical boundaries, thus, increasing their accessibility to rich knowledge bases and forms of expert knowledge. Additionally, employees are in the position to engage in continuous conversations which can improve; their overall competency levels, feelings of support and levels of transparency throughout the organization. In essence then, enhanced communication can improve particular aspects of work which can foster a heightened work experience for employees as well as improving an employer's ability to compete within global markets.

## 4.5 Knowledge Bases, Conversations and Professional Connections

According to the connectivism theory at the core of knowledge bases are communities of interest also known as nodes which often form part of larger networks, allowing for constant interaction, dialogue and conjoined thinking (Kop & Hill, 2008). Many of these ‘conversations’ are presented in the form of words, images, videos and blogs which exist on a multitude of online social media platforms. On such platform’s users traverse a variety of interdisciplinary connections which expands their conceptualization of subject matter (Kop & Hill, 2008). This expanded conceptualization predisposes individuals to a variety of opinions and interpretations while altering the face of traditional learning as individuals no longer have to spend hours attending classes or reading textbooks (Ruggiero, 2002). Rather, their engagement on networks allows users to tap into diversified knowledge bases which can potentially save an individual time, energy and finances.

The uses and gratifications theory defines this capability of new media as: demassification (Ruggiero, 2002). Demassification of new media allows individuals to access wide knowledge bases whilst gathering content from a variety of sources, such as; the television, radio, internet, news channels, documentaries, books, newspapers and magazines (Ruggiero, 2002). Consequently, influencing an individuals’ ability to expand their interests and access a variety of information sources online- irrespective of age, educational background, gender and employment status.

A study conducted by an ICT company in Greece stated that “the decentralization of some competencies has positive effects for productivity” (Ferreira & Du Plessis, 2009, p.3). This implies that organizations can optimize human capital by utilizing forms of online social media and customize business platforms to increase what employees know and how this knowledge is applied within the workplace (Ferreira & Du Plessis, 2009). The shift from a centralized process to a decentralized process of learning, allows forms of knowledge to be obtained in formal and informal ways (Majchrzak et al., 2013). The process of the decentralization of knowledge can be illustrated within the below extracts;

*P4: “I mean looking back when I was at school and how we had to research things, ja we had to go to the library...it opened up a lot of information and accessibility to anybody, I don’t think people pick up a book and read it. Uhm, so that is like the quickest, easiest way to do it, jump on a computer and google something”.*

*P5: “A combination of Stack Overflow and Google polycasts has been immensely helpful to my work, because I could go read a R1000 text book and read 500 pages or I could just go online and watch a ten-minute video that helps me with an issue I have at work”.... “Since they enabled YouTube, I feel like my productivity has gone up, because again, I have that easy access to online resources and learning”.*

*P2: “Twitter, I do a lot of research, I do a lot of exploratory research then using social media with those people, I can go through their tweets, so it will help me there... I look at other people’s white papers, articles and things because there isn’t much research on xxx... so I follow psychologists and xxx sites and podcasts, that is important”.*

The above extracts illustrate a central component of the connectivism theory which states that, “learners” are at the center of the learning experience, as they; direct what they learn and how information is filtered (Kop & Hill, 2008). Participants selected what platforms to engage on as well as their level of contribution to nurture these networks- by actively engaging on them or not. Within this study participants did not actively contribute to their networks and remained uninvolved with the production of knowledge, rather, they engaged in “metavoicing”, which involves reacting to other online profiles, content and activities (Majchrzak et al., 2013).

Despite, their lack of knowledgeable (expert) contributions, a simple comment on a video, image, blog or google discussion can spark new ways of thinking within these nodes or networks. The recipients of these ‘new ways of thinking’ are then able to make practical application to the knowledge base by modifying or refining content (Majchrzak et al., 2013). This constant process of refinement allows users to develop a rich understanding of a particular concept while ensuring the nurturing of accurate knowledge (Goldie, 2016). However, biased and inaccurate information can reduce the efficiency of such conversations (Majchrzak et al., 2013).

The connectivism theory describes this principle as a quintessential component for all learning activities as expired knowledge can impact learning negatively (Goldie, 2016). Despite this possibility, Munene & Nyaribo (2013) posit the ability to engage on networks for learning or knowledge sharing is integral to productivity as it promotes a “culture of sharing henceforth increasing job satisfaction which translates into productivity gain” (Munene & Nyaribo, 2013, p.144).

Additionally, participants alluded to the notion that, the sharing of experiences and informal problem solving unlocks collaborative learning and contributes towards a diverse knowledge base, which can be accessed at any time (Shepard, 2011).

Ferreira & Du Plessis (2009) findings revealed, benefits of knowledge sharing include, “reducing the learning curve of new employees, responding more rapidly to customer needs and inquires, reducing rework and preventing duplication” of work, “all in which aid employee productivity” (Ferreira & Du Plessis, 2009, p.8). In essence then, an employee’s ability to access knowledge can influence feelings of satisfaction and how much or how well employees produce outputs in the workplace.

Notwithstanding this ability participants expressed concern when obtaining knowledge from social orientated applications as; P2: “*they could be fake*” and are often not P4: “*...vetted sources of information*”. The lack of credibility of content on social orientated applications can be considered a contributory factor when employees choose to engage with content on business orientated applications for work purposes. Moreover, it can be considered a deterrent when obtaining information from informal knowledge bases. This was expressed by participant 7, who stated;

*P7: “Besides keeping up to date with news, I suppose or finding interesting articles, no, not really, it points you in a direction to learn something new, but it is not the platform to learn”.*

Notwithstanding these deterrents, networks online have the potential to produce a diversified knowledge base through collaboration and knowledge conversations which can enhance collective intelligence and serve as a source of inspiration while encouraging new ways of being for employees as well as the organization (Bennett et al., 2010).

#### **4.5.1 Innovation**

According to Marquès, Merigó and Soto-Acosta (2015) social networks can add value to any organization by obtaining business intelligence on consumers and competitors. Employees are able to engage on platforms which afford them the opportunity to recognize gaps within the market while employers are able to ‘keep an eye’ on their competitors as well as emerging

markets (Marquès et al., 2015). Additionally, individuals are able to share interesting ideas and concepts within their inner and outer circles. This was expressed within the excerpts below;

*P4: “We might get ideas from things being published on Facebook or any other social media platform” ...” it like gets the innovative juices going, read something about what other companies are doing out there, what went wrong/what was right”.*

*P2: “Like other developers will chat on different chat sites with other developers or those 3D printer Dudes, they will be like hey, check out this, check out that”.*

Participant 4 expresses that their ability to access content during working hours serves as a source of inspiration for them as well as their teams. This was supported by Majchrzak, Faraj, Kane and Azad (2013) findings who stated, an employee’s ability to engage on online networks may help employees approach challenges innovatively.

Furthermore, employees are able to openly expose challenges and collaboratively contribute to solutions and the overall strategic goals of the organization which can enhance feelings of satisfaction in the workplace (Bennet et al., 2010). To illustrate this further, a multinational corporation was in the process of negotiating their vacation policy. The organization engaged employees through a form of knowledge conversation (Majchrzak et al., 2013). This included votes as well as their (employee) input on the idea. Through continuous conversations between the employee and employer an alternative policy was successfully developed and implemented without any direct impact to employee morale and productivity (Majchrzak et al., 2013).

Furthermore, participant 2’s sentiment of roles was further shared by other participants who expressed;

*P3: “Uhm I would imagine that other teams, that do artwork or photography, might get ideas from things being published on Facebook or any other social media platform, even advertising...”*

*P4: “ Facebook, that’s more a social thing but I would definitely say YouTube and Pinterest to get ideas. Uhm, articles on LinkedIn...business articles, trends in the market is definitely important”.*

The above extracts support Hassan, Nevo and Wades’ (2015) findings which suggest online social media has the ability to improve performance within particular job functions; particularly innovative and creative tasks (Hassan et al., 2015). This coincides with findings from a European

study, which found 65% of their employees made use of online social media in the workplace, of the 65% - 46% of employees believed it enhanced their creativity and 38% believed it assisted with information building and creative problem solving (Aguenza et al., 2010).

The significance of roles when engaging on online social media for work purposes can be further exemplified upon examination of the above dialogue, an individual in human resources may actively utilize LinkedIn to source candidates. However, “3D printer dudes” may be less inclined to use this platform and may utilize Reddit to share concepts and collaborate on projects. However, a study conducted by Leftheriotis [&and](#) Giannakos (2014) posited that regardless of age or job role, participants benefit from online social media platforms for both its entertainment value and the collaborative and productivity orientated tools which enhance an individual’s ability to learn, gather information and establish and maintain connections.

#### **4.5.2 Summary**

An employee’s ability to engage forms of online social media during working hours allows individuals the opportunity to access a variety of networks which can aid practical learning on particular tasks within various job roles. Individuals are able to access content independently as knowledge bases are readily available to all who engage on a network or node. This not only influences an employee’s capability to grasp concepts in the workplace, but encourages creative problem solving and collaborative learning. Furthermore, it promulgates a culture of sharing which can reduce workload by finding quicker and easier solutions to challenges as well as areas of a profession which require further learning. Thereby, impacting levels of productivity as employees are able to evolve as knowledge changes, resulting in a more efficient and knowledgeable employee. Perhaps then, it is not the presence of online social media that makes employees unproductive but rather how the platforms are used by individuals (Burkley [&and](#) Van Alstyne, 2004; Leftheriotis [&and](#) Giannakos, 2014).

[This can be further illustrated when examining particular roles within the organization. Employees within particular departments such human resources and advertising reported a higher probability of engagement on online social media to complete tasks or responsibilities when compared to developers, who reported a lower probability of engagement on online social media \(for the fulfillment of tasks and responsibilities\). However, they reported a preference to](#)

[engage on online social media to build knowledge bases for learning and maintain professional connections.](#)

#### 4. 6 Job Engagement and Perceived Productivity

According to Warr and Inceoglu (2012) job engagement can be described as “a positive, fulfilling, affective-motivational state of work-related well-being” (Warr & Inceoglu, 2012, p.2). A fundamental component of this *definition* is an employee’s psychological presence, which includes levels of attention and the absorption of one’s role (Saks, 2006). In essence then, job engagement consists of the following components; level of energy exerted, involvement in work activities and efficiency within their job role (Warr & Inceoglu, 2012; Saks, 2006). Despite this being seemingly similar to job satisfaction it varies due to the amount of energy and enthusiasm exerted when completing duties and responsibilities in the workplace.

Empirical studies that examine online social media in the workplace allude to the notion that the presence of such a technology results in less engaged employees. According to, Aguenza, Al-Kassem and Som (2012) employees who check online social media sites during working hours exhibit a 15% drop in productivity. In addition, a preceding study conducted by North (2010) attempted to explore the appropriateness of online networking sites within the workplace. Findings revealed of the 81% who utilize networking sites, only 13% engage such platforms for work related tasks. Participants were conscious of the “*negative stigma*” P3 attached to online social media usage in the workplace. This “*negative stigma*” can be expounded within the excerpts below;

*P3: “...they would see it as you are loafing now or cruising or whatever”.*

*P6: “ I don’t like to put out that perception of, hey, I’m just dicking around at work”.*

*P2: “... anyone coming up the stairs can see my screen, so I don’t like to keep anything open, it must be work”... “ I am very anxious about people seeing me do anything other than work”.*

The negative stigma of online social media can be attributed to our ideals of a productive employee which are rooted in Taylorist principles (Haynes, 2007). Online social media defies traditional principles by violating these acceptable ways of being and is perceived as a hindrance to levels of absorption and efficiency in the workplace. Employees are able to spend work time

on non-related work activities which include; online shopping, surfing the web, updating or perusing social networking sites, distributing jokes or messages and managing online businesses (Kidwell, 2010).

According to Munene and Nyaribo (2013) this limits one's ability to be exclusively focused on work activities resulting in high levels of presentism which can possibly contribute to a loss of time and consequently reduce productivity, as employees exert less energy on work activities and are not as engaged as they could be (Munene [&and](#) Nyaribo, 2013; Warr [&and](#) Inceoglu, 2012; Saks, 2006).

The misalignment between online social media and work was further exemplified when participant 5 stated; *“most tools are geared towards sucking you in and holding you for a long time, and in work, I think most people can sort of put it down to, that...it shouldn't belong here”*.

According to the uses and gratifications theory this feature allows “interfaces to be responsive” to user's “actions” which customizes feeds and constantly loads in new content (Sundar [&and](#) Limperos, 2013, p.514). This interactive feature of online social media allows users to become absorbed with the utility of such platforms. Additionally, the accessibility of content online (anywhere and at any time) could possibly increase the prevalence of Internet addiction and result in employees who are physically present but *absent* from work activities (Munene [&and](#) Nyaribo, 2013; Dunne, Lawlor [&and](#) Rowley, 2010). Similarly, participants expressed;

*P6: “It is kind of how it is structured, you will always see the next thing. They just always keep loading content in, the very fact that this is a time suck and affects your productivity and your ability to perform when you are split between something cool you saw”*.

*P7: “I think the guy that's not using it can do slightly more, maybe”...*

Findings from Hassan, Nevo and Wade support the aforementioned and state that users who engage on online social media platforms, to pass time or escape briefly may devote less time to their assigned duties and responsibilities. However, Aguenza, Al-Kassem and Som (2012) postulate that, “unproductive employees will find a way to be unproductive even without the internet” (Aguenza et al., 2010, p.25). This was noted within the dialogue as participants expressed;

*P1: "I do feel at times when I am very distracted, I could stay on a bit longer and could be doing other things but if I am doing those other things, I am don't know how well I would be doing them".*

*P5: "So, some days when I am very, what's the word, when I am procrastinating, I am unproductive. I feel it can definitely affect me but if I am unproductive it is not social media that's causing it. It's the cause of being unproductive in the first place".... "then of course there is times when my brain just decides you know, I need a break now, it is time to stop".*

Participants felt online social media affords them the opportunity to "take a break", "reboot the mind" and "de-clutter thoughts". In essence then, allowing them to "re-charge" and refocus at the task at hand. This can be supported with in the extracts below;

*P3: "It is just a way to sort of take a step back, out of the rut, to have a bit of zoning out time and uhm almost use it as a break to recharge and then get back into something work related with more energy".*

*P7: "It provides a quick escape release".*

*P1: "It definitely helps throughout the day...it just takes your mind away from it for that second, you feel a little better".*

Perhaps then a distraction is necessary and essential to employee engagement. This was supported by Augenza, Al-Kassem and Som (2012) who postulated that, short breaks are fundamental to workplace efficiency as no individual can concentrate on a task for prolonged periods. This necessity becomes more plausible when examine the average person's attention span which ranges from five to twelve minutes (Munene [&](#) Nyaribo, 2013). Furthermore, Fahmy (2009) claimed that, 70% of individuals who peruse the internet have sharpened mental capacity (due to these short breaks) which reportedly left them feeling refreshed and renewed.

It can then be said that the destructive nature of such platforms is dependent on the user, as "it is not the presence of technology itself that influences productivity but how it is used" as there are a number of other factors which result in a less engaged employee (Leftheriotis [&](#) Giannakos, 2014, p.139). These factors include but are not limited to; poor vertical and horizontal communication, poor supervisor support as well as a lack of training and development opportunities which influence feelings of organizational engagement and have consequences for both job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Haddud et al., 2016; Saks, 2006).

#### **4.6.1 Summary**

The aforementioned theme highlights how forms of online social media can potentially be perceived as a distraction which hinders workplace productivity. Participants solidify this upon expressing how such platforms are perceived in the context of the working environment. This can partially be attributed to the historical links which have shaped and informed understandings of a productive employee as well as the institutional nature of the workplace which separates the social self and institutional self.

Literature reviewed and findings of the study supported the notion that engagement on such platforms can be utilized to aid rejuvenation and relaxation. In essence then, as a tool to facilitate favorable conditions for improved focus on work related activities. Conversely, central to online social media's ability to be destructive, is the user which controls the manner in which the platform (online social media) is used. Thereby, placing emphasis on the individual and their choice to use online social media during working hours; to initiate higher levels of attention and absorption or to distract them from work related activities for prolonged periods of time.

#### **4.7 Social Connection**

Online social media is known for the ability to bring people together. This includes gaining peer support from others, connecting to known and unknown individuals, having a sense of belonging to a larger community and maintaining interpersonal relationships (Park et al., 2009). According to Nardi, Wittaker and Schwarz (2002) the ability to connect and maintain relationships is important to individuals as people have a natural tendency to nurture relationships. This fundamental human need is known as the social stage in Maslow's hierarchy of needs which involves seeking a sense of belonging, love, friendship and affection (Fraser, 1983). Online social media promotes social interaction and makes these needs attainable for individuals who are introverted or isolated in the workplace. The need to be connected can be illustrated within the excerpts below;

*P7: "I think humans have that innate desire to express themselves"*

*P3: "There is that human interaction of interest, what is actually happening in someone's life".*

*P8: "It gives me something to talk to them about. It gives me a little bit of their personality as well...insight into their lives, so, if I do end up having a*

*conversation with them or becoming friends with them, I have things to talk about with them”.*

*P2: “ We kind of like a close-knit family and we will send like pictures and funny stuff via the WhatsApp group when it’s not really meant for that, it’s more funny banter and whatever”.*

Individuals are able to connect and form bonds with colleagues. This ability to socially connect is common in collectivist cultures and allows employees to balance work-life commitments effectively (Charoensukmongkol, 2014). According to Charoensukmongkol (2014) online social media aids this process (of connecting) and is positively associated with job satisfaction and job performance. However, the principle of forming bonds with colleagues in South Africa is complex as it is a multi-cultural society separated by the inequalities of status and power (Vogt & Laher, 2009). Consequently, informing the formation social circles.

Participants further expressed how online social media has the ability to strengthen ties as they are able to get a glimpse of what is happening in their colleagues’ lives. This includes individuals they may not have been able to connect with due to geographical and logistical reasons which could limit their interaction with colleagues in varying departments as well as middle and higher-level management. This was noted with the narrative below;

*P2: “I follow some people at work and you see they family people as well, I follow my bosses boss’ boss on Instagram, he posts about his hobbies and it’s nice to know it builds relationships, we can chat to him about...you can find common grounds, you can find common threads, you can find topics of conversation or just understand that person holistically. A lot of people hide themselves or uhm you see a different light” ... “ You get an understanding of their kids, you see hey they also cute, they also express themselves with photos and you get to understand the person outside of business too”.*

Online social media affords employees the opportunity to express and reveal a human element of themselves to the world. Thereby, exposing their insights, hobbies, interests and family life to connections on such platforms. The ability to connect on a different level fosters a sense of likeness, kinship and familiarity which nurtures feelings of belonging and group cohesiveness. Moreover, it cultivates feelings of interconnectedness amongst employees. This can be supported by Treem and Leonardi's (2012) findings, who stated that 75% of their sample reported the ability to connect online fostered a sense of community within the organization.

Employees are constantly in a state of influx and migrate between varying roles, forms of online social media assist by providing individuals with a platform to create and maintain presence within the private and public spheres of life (Artherton & Saghafi, 2010). The very fact that individuals are able to negotiate with this in the workplace results in employees who perform at higher levels as well as enhanced feelings of satisfaction (Moqbel et al., 2013).

The ability to be connected does not only impact individuals but also organizations as a whole. Organizations are able to join conversations and engage customers as well as create positive links to partners and contractors (Marquès et al., 2015). This creates positive affiliations to the organization as employees are proud to be associated with a good public brand.

*P7: “ When you look at posts of how great the place is to work in, you feel a level of pride. I think that is good for the self-esteem of the people working here”..... “ If a company or business or people or retailer I am looking at doesn’t have a Facebook or Twitter page, you know, you have that iffy feeling, of what are they hiding?!”*

From the above extracts, one can see how forms of online social media legitimize businesses and are used as an authentic communicative tool for consumers and employees. Additionally, it aids transparency as well as the gathering of collective intelligence which can potentially enhance the overall product or service offered to consumers (Marquès et al., 2015). Furthermore, participants expressed;

*P1: “It’s a way to keep up with news and market trends”.*

*P4: “It’s a nice quick way to connect with professionals” and P8: “... collaborate and talk without having to be in the same physical space”.*

Not only can forms of online social media connect fellow employees and friends but also professionals globally. In doing so, participants expressed they were able to remain relevant by keeping up to date with market trends and interesting information relating to their respective fields. A study conducted by DiMicco, Millen, Geyer, Dugan, Brownholtz and Muller (2008) examined an in-house proprietary system known as Beehive, findings revealed employees would rather expand their network by reaching out to professionals they did not know but shared common interests with. This can be attributed to the notion of learning from those more experienced; experts in the field. Additionally, employees are encouraged to join collaborative ventures beyond the walls of the organization and gather information based on individual hobbies or interests.

### **4.7.1 Summary**

Forms of online social media assist employees in forming bonds within and out of the organization. Individuals are able to observe others presence online which fosters a sense of likeness amongst all employees regardless of rank, age and gender. This sense of likeness cultivates feelings of belonging and cohesiveness, potentially enhancing feelings of satisfaction in the workplace. Furthermore, employees are able to maintain a virtual presence online making it easier to balance their private and public spheres of life. Although an employee's ability to connect with other colleagues does not appear to directly influence productivity, the ability to use online social media in the workplace enhanced feelings of satisfaction as employees were able to balance work-life commitments effectively. However, empirical evidence fails to support that job satisfaction has any direct influence on productivity but rather indirectly impacts feelings of attachment to the organization, levels of commitment and absenteeism which can influence levels of productivity in the workplace (Wight [and](#) Kim, 2004).

## **4. 8 The Virtual Workplace**

Traditionally work took place in stable settings as employees remained with a company for a number of years before becoming experts in their fields (Nardi et al., 2002). However, technological advancements have transformed the nature of work. Organizations are now able to operate globally while experimenting with the outsourcing of job roles and have the capability to be geographically and organizationally separated from company headquarters (Nardi et al., 2002). Thereby, allowing work to be redefined beyond the boundaries of space, time and locations (McGregor, 2000).

Forms of online social media have significantly influenced this arena by creating channels such as; “chat, groupware, computer conferencing systems, blogs, wiki’s and internet telephony” which have created opportunities for spontaneous communication and enhanced work processes as well as the conceptualization of organizational roles (Harden, 2012, p.3888).

In traditional office spaces employees are able to engage each other regularly during lunch breaks or in common areas such as corridors, boardrooms and parking lots (Golden, 2007). These spontaneous encounters encourage a sense of likeness and trust amongst employees which is often absent among removed employees (Golden, 2007).

Online social media potentially affords employees the opportunity to work dynamically and flexibly (Harden, 2012). This ability to do so not only enhances their management of work-life roles but serves a platform to foster group cohesiveness which is often lacking within virtual environments.

The organization in which the study was conducted at comprised of individuals who worked remotely. This can be noted within the excerpts below;

*P2: “There is a lot of people who don’t sit locally, so we have guys in Sweden and all that stuff, and we need to keep in contact with them, obviously they start to feel out of the loop... I will chat to him on WhatsApp, he is very lonely”.*

*P5: “This building is reaching capacity as well. You can’t hire anymore people but if we can work remotely, we get to save a seat”... “ a lot of people work from home on specific days, especially moms you know, with kids and stuff”.*

The above passage highlights how forms of online social media can aid the process of communication for removed employees while allowing them to balance work-life demands. This was further noted below;

*P4: “[online social media is](#)’s an easy tool to get in touch with someone, message them, call them”.*

*P8: “ We need to keep in touch and communicate, in order to check in with them or get some important information”.*

This constant communication affirms feelings of attachment to the organization as employees feel connected to colleagues and in the loop with what is happening in the workplace. Findings from a study within the Golden (2007) paper revealed there is a strong association between limited social integration and peer support which significantly influences an employee’s feelings of satisfaction within the workplace.

Moreover, humans biologically have an innate inclination to form interpersonal relationships with others- including colleagues (Golden, 2007). The importance of this can be explored in the aforementioned theme, social connection (4.7). If not managed correctly, employees within virtual environments are likely to become withdrawn, de-motivated and overly task-orientated, driven by deadlines and goals (Golden, 2007).

Interestingly, the organization in which the study was conducted at is currently running pilot tests to ascertain the impact of virtual workplaces as the building has reached capacity and can no longer accommodate additional employees. The progress and results of these tests remain unknown. However, it is important for researchers to integrate these employees into the current organizational culture as they should be able to participate and share in the values and beliefs of the organization (Bennet et al., 2010).

This can possibly be achieved by integrating forms of online social media as part of the organizational culture which may improve the overall comradery within the organization and in turn feelings of satisfaction in the workplace. The development of an in-house proprietary system may assist in this regard as the organization, local employees and remote employees can constantly communicate and feel connected to a global family and the organization as a whole (Bennet et al., 2010). Failure to integrate such a form of online social media into the organizational culture may result in employees feeling isolated and detached from the organization (Bennet et al., 2010).

#### **4.8. 1 Autonomy**

According to Parker, Axtell and Turner (2001) autonomy includes timing and methods of achieving tasks, in essence then, the degree to which employees have control over important decisions regarding their work as well as the manner in which tasks get executed. This includes whether employees are able to utilize their phones during working hours as well as forms of online social media for work purposes or to support particular work functions.

Many organizations have employed defense technologies and policies to limit employee engagement on such platforms (Ferreira [&and](#) Du Plessis, 2009). This can be attributed to the fear that it reduces employee retention or potentially can result in, the; copyrighting of trade secrets, distribution of offensive material and theft of intellectual property (Chen et al., 2008).

Companies such as (including but not limited to); Apple, Amazon and Microsoft have adopted an integrated approach to online social media in the workplace and have included best code practices which are regulated in the form of policy. Other progressive corporations such as,(but not limited to); Shell and Mac Donald's have integrated social networking into their overall organizational strategy (Fraser [&and](#) Dutta, 2010).

Despite the development of such policies, it is important for organizations to allow their employees the freedom and space to have control over how their work gets done. Not only does this predispose feelings of mutual trust but also feelings of satisfaction. This was highlighted within the narrative below;

*P6: “We don’t like to be managed to the point where these are the actions you can do during your day and this is the time you must do it”... “ “ A blanket ban on Twitter for example during work, I think it does more harm to morale than just leaving it open and letting people engage with it”.*

*P7: “...employees should have the opportunity to do whatever they want on A,B and C”.*

*P8: “ I think it would drop the morale quite a bit, I mean most people in xxx enjoy the culture, that little bit of freedom to do what they need to, post stuff or shop online or whatever”.*

From the above extracts it is clear participants in this particular organization were able to utilize online social media at their leisure. The participants expressed ~~y stated that~~ any changes in this regard would be a violation of trust and would have a negative impact on employees, which could potentially influence levels of self- esteem and their ability to self-actualize in the workplace (Fraser, 1983).

Furthermore, the ability to utilize online social media was perceived as an opportunity to exercise decision making power; as employees decide when to use these platforms and how to use them. Similarly, employers exercise power and control when prohibiting or regulating the use of such platforms within the workplace. This can be illustrated when examining a corporation known as USSA. Initially, the company had strict regulations which prohibited employees from utilizing third party networking sites during working hours. After some time managers adjusted internal policy and integrated forms of online social media within particular aspects of work, as “management recognized, if they wanted to keep the workforce, they need to be given time to take care of personal business from their computers” ... “it helps us balance our lives, it makes us more productive and helps USSA” (Leidner et al., 2010, p.231). This demonstrates how the lines between the personal and private spheres of life are blurring more than ever before.

Forms of online social media can assist by bridging the gap between the private and personal spheres of life as individuals are able to main a healthy work-life balance and enhance feelings of

satisfaction in the workplace. A healthy work-life perception can influence levels of motivation and commitment to the organization.

Moreover, an employee's ability to engage freely on such platforms creates a pleasant and stress free working environment as they are not in constant fear of getting caught and P7; *“respect you have a role to play and you're being compensated for it and that we all sort of dedicating ourselves to it, don't dick around”*.

#### **4.8.2 Summary**

The above-mentioned theme and sub-theme emphasize the manner in which forms of online social media are perceived as a site for decision making. This may not include whether employees use online social media for work purposes but rather if they are able to use online social media at all. Findings revealed an employee's ability to engage online social media platforms during working hours, results in a pleasant work experience as they are not constantly concerned about getting caught (using such sites). Additionally, organizations are able to expand globally within the realm of virtual work. This has implications for the bottom line of the organization and enhances HR capabilities to source the finest candidates worldwide. Online social media can support such recruitment functions as well as provide communication channels amongst virtual and present employees.

Furthermore, forms of effective communication assist removed employees in feeling a part of a global family and in the know how with what is happening within the organization. This avoids isolation, enhances feelings of comradery and gives employees the tools to manage their personal and private spheres of life which can improve employee morale and feelings of satisfaction within the workplace.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

Employees experience of utilizing online social media in the workplace was explored, meaning was derived from their understanding of the construct as well as their perceived applicability of such platforms in the workplace. In an attempt to unearth these experiences, employees highlighted the negative stigma surrounding forms of online social media and how their interactions were shaped and influenced by these perceptions and feelings. Moreover, an

understanding of online social media's enhancing attributes were uncovered and discussed through the extraction of insights from employees as they experience it. This was condensed into the aforementioned themes and sub-themes.

# Chapter Five

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## 5.1 Introduction

The following chapter attempts to provide a synopsis of the findings within the study. Additionally, recommendations will be noted to inform future studies as well as provide insight on the subject matter in relation to organizational policy. Limitations will also be noted to assist other researchers interested in understanding online social media in the context of the workplace.

## 5.2 Summary of Main Findings

The main objective of the research study was to explore employees' experiences and perceptions of utilizing online social media within a working environment, in particular, the implications, if any, for productivity and perceived levels of job satisfaction.

The study was framed within the interpretive phenomenological paradigm and was guided by four main research questions, which include; what forms of online social media do employees engage in while at work, what impact has online social media had on their perceived levels of satisfaction at work, has online social media fostered or hindered their perceived levels of productivity and do employees feel their working experience would be more pleasant if they made use of online social media.

In order to unearth such experiences, eight one-on-one, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with employees within an IT company. Thereafter, each interview was transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. This assisted in providing rich, detailed data and was utilized as a basis to understand employees' experiences and attitudes towards online social media in the workplace.

### 5.2.1 Summary of Key Themes and Sub-themes

#### 5.2.1.1 *The Multiple Facets of Online Social Media*

The study highlighted the conflicting nature of online social media in the workplace. Participants expressed this upon questioning the relevance of such platforms for work purposes and emphasized acceptable ways of being within organizations. The distinction between suitable

business applications vs. social applications further drew attention to these acceptable ways of being as well as normative roles which distinctively indicate the applicability of online social media based on job roles and functions. This can be illustrated upon examining an employee's preference of online social media use within a human resource role, such individuals are likely to make use of LinkedIn or Facebook to source candidates. However, an employee within a developer role is unlikely to engage on such platforms for the same purpose and may be motivated to engage such networks to recharge, refocus or stimulate comradery within the organization.

#### ***5.2.1.1.1 Preferences and Personal Interests***

Participants narrated how preferences and interests inform their value perception and significance of online social media platforms. This differs from individual to individual, emphasizing how users make intentional, goal directed choices (Ko et al., 2005). As illustrated above, for some individuals online social media enhances job functions and serves as a tool to foster job engagement as well as enhancing social and professional connections, accessibility to diverse knowledge bases and ability to communicate and operate locally and globally.

#### ***5.2.1.2 Communication and Connectivity***

Forms of online social media permit employers the opportunity to cross boundaries, access talent and collaborative ventures throughout the globe. This not only enhances expansion ability but affords employees the opportunity to engage in continuous conversations which improves the interconnectedness of employees throughout the organization. Furthermore, this allows for an efficient method of conversing and sharing information within the micro, meso and macro environments. Employees no longer have to await the reply of an email as forms of online social media adopt a high level of interactivity which allow individuals to ascertain if a message was read and received (Majchrzak et al., 2013; Ruggiero, 2000).

All individuals form part of a global family which is interconnected and at the center of rich knowledge bases which allow for improved problem-solving ability, innovativeness and an overall enhanced working experience. This interconnectedness may directly promote higher

levels of productivity within the workplace as employees are able to work efficiently by expediting crucial information through easier and quicker communication channels. This constant flow of communication enhances feelings of support and in turn positive affiliations to the organization.

### ***5.2.1.3 Knowledge Bases, Conversations and Professional Connections***

In the workplace employees are occasionally required to gather information on an unknown subject or when they experience difficulty grasping a particular concept/s in which they possess little understanding. Upon attempting to do so individuals traditionally engaged expert knowledge sources such as, encyclopedias, books, journals and newspapers. However, as technology advanced and the demassification of media occurred, individuals are now able to tap into communities of interest and knowledge conversations at their fingertips.

This decentralization of knowledge encourages creative problem solving and collaborative learning through professional connections thus exposing individuals to diversified opinions and knowledge outside the realm of their experience. Ferreira and Du Plessis (2009) highlight how forms of informal and formal knowledge can positively influence productivity as key competencies are decentralized and increase what employees know as well as how it is applied in relation to an individual's tasks or skills. Additionally, these networks, nodes and communities of interest promote a culture of sharing amongst all individuals regardless of age, gender, status or nationality.

It is noteworthy to mention that the extent to which these knowledge bases remain relevant and diversified are dependent on active contributions on such networks or nodes. This is concerning in light of the number of participants who openly engage in “metavoicing” on such platforms. Nonetheless, a mere comment can spark new ways of thinking and new conversations on a particular subject matter (Majchrzak et al., 2013).

#### ***5.2.1.3.1 Innovation***

Participants highlighted the collaborative vantage forms of online social media afford employees, as they are able to share interesting ideas and concepts within their team or outer circle as well as

monitor competition and market related trends. Additionally, the exposure to rich and varied sources of information opens individuals to a world of possibility which can transform how employees approach particular aspects of work, if utilized advantageously. In essence then online social media's destructive or constructive nature is contingent on the control users have when engaging with content online as well as whether they utilize the tools on such platforms in a meaningful manner within which ever context the user desires.

#### ***5.2.1.4 Job Engagement and Perceived Productivity***

The opposing stance of online social media surfaced within this theme as participants differentiated between the perceived ideals of productivity and the necessary tools to aid output in the workplace. In doing so, forms of online social media were perceived as a *taboo* activity which is isolated from a productive employee as it distracts individuals and impacts levels of absorption and efficiency. These less engaged employees exhibit high levels of presentism and lower output as they exert less energy and time on work related duties. On the contrary, participants argued distractions do not only exist online but are everywhere and necessary for employee retention. The ability to escape and re-charge energized employees and enhanced their perceived capacity to get work done optimally.

#### ***5.2.1.5 Social Connection***

Forms of online social media break through traditional walls making the lives of anyone visible to all. Employees expressed the ability to see a human element of colleagues, supervisors and managers fosters a sense of likeness amongst all individuals making them more relatable to employees across various divisions, departments, levels and countries. These attributes promote a sense of likeness and strengthen weak ties by proving a platform to connect and maintain a presence in the public and private spheres of life. Moreover, employees exhibited increased levels of attachment to an organization upon observing online connections with the brand, its partners, customers and contractors. This positive affiliation to the organization cultivates further feelings of interconnectedness amongst internal employees as well as external contributors and consumers. In essence, the ability to connect, nurtures feelings of belonging and group cohesiveness which enhances feelings of satisfaction in the workplace.

### ***5.2.1.6 The Virtual Workplace***

Online social media has transformed the nature of work as employers are able to operate globally within the virtual realm of work. Moreover, employees are able to balance work life commitments while communicating with remote employees. Thus, avoiding isolation and maintaining a sense of comradery within a global family. Additionally, forms of spontaneous communication enhance work processes and impact the overall bottom line as well as feelings of fulfillment within the organization.

#### ***5.2.1.6.1 Autonomy***

Participants highlighted the importance of being able to execute tasks using tools they deem suitable, this may or may not include online social media platforms but rather if they are able to engage on such platforms in the workplace freely. The ability to do so was seen as a site to demonstrate mutual trust within the working relationship. Any restrictions or termination of usage on such platforms would have a negative impact on the working relationship, as this would display a violation of trust between the employee and employer as well as reduce feelings of satisfaction in the workplace.

On the other hand, employers are able to demonstrate power and control when prohibiting or regulating the use of online social media platforms within the workplace. Within the organization (the study was conducted at) limited restrictions were enforced upon employees giving them the freedom to work with a variety of tools including forms of online social media. Participants expressed the ability to conduct their work autonomously evoked feelings of commitment to their tasks as well as feelings of accountability to the organization.

### **5.2.2 Integrated Findings**

Employees within the IT company were able to utilize online social media platforms at their leisure. In previous organizations participants narrated their experience was different as they could not engage with content as freely. ~~They expressed is resulted~~ this resulted in feelings of anxiousness as ~~they felt they~~ individuals constantly had to be on “guard”. Despite the company’s open policy participants were still conscious of how they engage with content within the

workplace. This illustrates the notion of normative roles as well as the negative stigma that networks have within the context of work.

Furthermore, findings revealed participants utilized a variety of online social media platforms while at work, this included both social and work orientated applications. All participants reported using WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube. In addition to the above, participants used at least one of the following on a daily basis; Discord, Confluence, Microsoft Teams, Linda.com, Google Podcasts and Stack Overflow to solve challenges or problems in the workplace. Employees made motivated choices by selecting what medium to utilize based on their specific needs, tasks or moods. Additionally, employees discerned the appropriateness of varying online social media platforms and displayed goal directed behavior by actively and/or passively engaging with content.

Participants expressed various performance enhancing attributes (of online social media) which impacts levels of productivity in the workplace. These include robust communication channels amongst local and virtual employees; non-traditional platforms of learning through knowledge bases and professional conversations; innovative problem solving and collaboration and enhanced employee engagement.

Moreover, forms of online social media foster a culture of sharing and transparency amongst employees; cultivate interconnectedness; group cohesiveness; comradery and a sense of kinship amongst all contributing partners (within the micro, meso and macro environments) thus enhancing feelings of contentment and employee attachment to the organization.

It can be argued the mere use of online social media does not directly influence employee's perceived levels of job satisfaction. Rather, the idea of having accessibility to these platforms fosters feelings of autonomy and mutual trust within the working relationship thereby, enhancing perceived levels of job satisfaction in the workplace. In addition, online social media can assist in avoiding burnout as employees are able to achieve a healthy work-life balance by extending "one's virtual presence into other realms" of life including varying roles and interests (Moqbel et al., 2013, p.245).

The aforementioned contributes to the overall working experience of employees as well as the overall goals and objective of the organization. In conclusion, emphasis and accountability must be given to users as they control how the platform is utilized in the content of work which

demonstrates the user's focus and their choice to use an online social media platform to enhance or detract from work.

### **5.3 Recommendations and Interventions**

According to Nardi, Whittaker and Schwarz (2002), as worldwide communication capabilities become more dynamic and fluid individuals as well as organizations can no longer isolate themselves from online social media. It is then vital employers actively engage employees and business partners in conversations to successfully navigate online social media's influence in the workplace.

This active engagement can assist in establishing an understanding of such a phenomena and help realize the potential of such networks. Developing a code of good practice can assist by providing acceptable limits and boundaries for employees as well as serving as a mechanism of protection for employers. Furthermore, forms of technology and internet usage should be included in labor laws to ensure there are consequences for unethical internet usage as well as providing a base line for what is acceptable, grounds of misconduct and dismissal in the workplace.

Employers can administer forms of psychometric testing to identify individuals who are likely to adopt addictive tendencies such as internet addiction. This could further motivate the need for training on online social media etiquette as well as ratify the importance of a code of good practice in the workplace. However, this may serve as a form of biasness and marginalize specific employees, particularly during recruitment processes. It should be noted this recommendation is made with extreme caution and further research is required to explore the ethical and legal implications of this particular recommendation within the workplace.

### **5.4 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

It is generally believed that one cannot generalize the results from a case study as it cannot provide reliable information applicable to the wider population (Flybjerg, 2006). However, over decades, case study research is becoming increasingly popular amongst researchers as it is a valuable method which can contribute to the development of theories and interventions as well as assisting with the evaluation of interventions (Baxter & Jack, 2008). [Moreover, the rationale for utilizing such a technique- studying one case \(organization\) was inaccurate as case study](#)

methodology is utilized to gather a holistic understanding of a case. This includes examining subunits or embedded elements of a phenomena (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In this case, embedded elements could have included, examining existing company policies on online social media usage in the workplace and/ or interviewing managers, or supervisors to understand their experiences and perceptions of online social media and its impact within the workplace. This can be considered a major flaw within the study as only employees within the organization were interviewed and asked to participate in the study.

The research study was additionally framed in the connectivism theory which is a relatively new and contentious learning theory. This particular theory was included by the researcher due to its relevance to technology and online learning. However, it was only applied to the theme: knowledge bases, conversations and professional connections as it explains learning in terms of interactions on networks or nodes. This could not be expanded to other themes as it was not applicable to those findings.

The research study was conducted within an IT company, this limits the applicability of the results within other sectors as employees within other industries (including but not limited to finance, clothing or health) may have different experiences of utilizing online social media within the workplace. Similarly, findings in studies within other populations and settings improve the credibility, validity and generalizability of the results within this paper.

In saying this, it is noteworthy to mention the limited sample size and setting of the study as a larger sample could result in key additional findings and supplement an understanding of online social media in the context of work. Furthermore, an analysis of online social media within various sectors can provide a holistic perspective of online social media in organizational settings. A mixed methods approach may also assist in this regard as researchers are able reach a geographically dispersed sample from a variety of settings which further advocates the generalizability of the study within the wider population.

Moreover, an independent study could cultivate an in-depth understanding of online social media in the workplace as despite assurances of confidentiality participants could have tailored particular responses, in fear this could hinder their employer's current perception of online social media usage within their working environments.

An independent examination of the study revealed that outdated literature and studies reviewed (older than five years) could reduce the relevance of the findings. However, despite the fast-

growing nature of online social media there is limited literature on the research topic within organizational settings. Particularly, studies which explored online social media, productivity, and job satisfaction. This could further ratify the need for future studies within organizational settings or within the same -or similar subject matter. simila

## **5.5 Conclusion**

The study revealed forms of online social media can potentially have performance enhancing attributes which can positively impact levels of productivity as well as feelings of satisfaction in the workplace. These associations were made throughout the study and can be reviewed in the above-mentioned chapters. Such findings emanated from literature reviewed, interview data and the amalgamation of these, to both the uses and gratifications theory and the connectivism theory. Additionally, limitations and recommendations were noted to support and improve the development of future research.

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# APPENDICIES

## Appendix 1 Gatekeepers Letter

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[REDACTED]

Clarissa Pillay

Faculty of Psychology

University of Kwa Zulu Natal

Dear Ms. Clarissa Pillay

**Dissertation 2017: A qualitative study exploring employee's attitudes and experiences of online social media in the workplace. A case study of a Software Development Company in KZN**

The above research protocol has been reviewed by [REDACTED] HR Department and I am pleased to inform you that your request has been approved. Access is hereby granted to the data required as stipulated on your protocol.

Should your methodology change or any concerns arise during the data collection period, it is your responsibility to inform [REDACTED] due course. You are also required to forward the completed project to [REDACTED] before submission.

I look forward to viewing the results of your study.

Kind regards,



[REDACTED]  
HR Manager

---

## Appendix 2 Letter Requesting Participation to the Study

---

Student:

Clarissa

0844005294

[clarissap18@gmail.com](mailto:clarissap18@gmail.com)

Project Supervisor:

Dean Isaacs

[Isaacsd1@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Isaacsd1@ukzn.ac.za)

Human Social Science Ethics Committee:

Mr Prem Mohun

+27 31 260 4557

[mohunp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunp@ukzn.ac.za)

**Name of principal investigator:**

Clarissa Pillay

**Project supervisor:** Dean Isaacs

[isaacsd1@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:isaacsd1@ukzn.ac.za)

**Part I: Information Sheet**



This informed consent form is for a qualitative research project which aims to explore the implications of online social media in the workplace. We are inviting you to participate in the study. More information is provided below:

My name is Clarissa Pillay; I am currently registered for the Masters program in Industrial Psychology at the University of KwaZulu- Natal. As part of my course I am conducting a qualitative research project which aims to explore the implications of online social media in workplace. Online social media is relevant as it is changing the way in which employees work as well as assisting organizations in reaching organizational goals in an innovative manner.

We are interested in exploring the way in which online social media may impact job satisfaction and productivity. Many scholars argue that online social media has many benefits such as; participation via information sharing, encouraging the creation of internal social networks to enhance communication, problem-solving and innovation amongst co-workers which can

potentially enhance productivity and job satisfaction amongst employees (Turban, Bolloju & Liang, 2011). However, research also indicates there are many negative effects when using online social media in the workplace. The study aims to dwell deeper into the motives when using online social media as well as the possible implications for productivity and job satisfaction.

In order to achieve this, you are invited to participate in a once off, one on one, thirty-minute interview which will be conducted at a time and venue convenient to you. This interview will be recorded, transcribed and analyzed during the research process. Nine other individuals have also been approached to participate in this study. This includes both males and females within the organisation. Your participation in the research process is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from it at any stage. The choice you make will have no bearing on your job or any work-related evaluations or reports. All information provided will be kept confidential; no names of participants or organizations will be included in the research outcome. However, if the need becomes necessary anonymity and confidentiality of the participants will still be protected by using fictitious names.

During the interview, I will ask you a few questions, no preparation is required in advance. No one else but the interviewer (I) will be present during the interview (unless you would like someone else to be present). Additionally, it should be noted only the project supervisor and I will have access to the interview transcripts and recordings. The transcripts will be kept in a file along with the tapes from the interview. After a five-year period, all data collected will be incinerated.

There are no risks associated with participating in the study as all information gathered will be kept confidential. Additionally, there will be no direct benefit to you. However, your participation is likely to help us find meaningful information regarding the impact of online social media in the workplace. Once inferences have been made from the interview data, a focus group will be arranged for all participants to discuss the findings of the research. This will ensure all participants that their confidentiality has been upheld during the research process as well as demonstrating their input to the research outcome.

Once again, I wish to highlight that you are free to withdrawal from any stage of the research process. As mentioned, your participation will be kept confidential and will not affect your job or job-related evaluations in anyway. In addition to this, I will provide you with an opportunity to review your remarks and modify or remove statements if I did not understand you correctly.

If you have any further questions please feel free to contact me using the following details; email: [clarissap18@gmail.com](mailto:clarissap18@gmail.com), telephone number: 0844005294. A proposal has been reviewed by the Ethics committee of University of Kwa-Zulu Natal which attempts to ensure that no participants are harmed during the research process.

Thanking you in advance for your consideration.

Regards, Clarissa

## **Appendix 3 Informed Consent Form**

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### **Certificate of consent**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (Full name) have been invited to participate in a research study which aims to explore employee's lived experiences of online social media in the workplace. I have read the foregoing information and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. Any questions I may have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to participate in this study.

I hereby consent / do not consent to have this interview recorded.

Print name (of participant):

Signature (of participant):

Date (Day/Month/Year):

## Appendix 4 Interview Schedule

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1. What forms of online social media do you make use of?
2. Which forms do you utilize most often?  
Probe: Why have you selected these forms?
3. Do you utilize forms of online social media at work?  
Probe: If not why, If so; why
4. In a normal working day, how often do you find yourself on online social media?
5. Do you find yourself engaging in online social media at a particular time or activity?  
Probe: If so, why?
6. Are there benefits of using online social media in the workplace?  
Probe: How so?
7. Do you think online social media at work make a difference to your everyday functioning?
8. What are the ways online social media may impact or influence your satisfaction at work?
9. What are the ways online social media may impact or influence your productivity at work?
10. What is your understanding of productivity?
11. What is your understanding of Job satisfaction?
12. Are you aware of your company's formal policy regarding the use of online social media in the workplace?  
Probe: If so, can you explain your understanding of it?  
  
Probe: Was this something you came across while signing your employment contract with the company?
13. If you could engage in forms of social media more often at work, how would that make you feel?

## Appendix 5 Ethical Clearance form from the Human & Social Science Research Ethics Committee



20 June 2018

Ms Clarissa Pillay (210517471)  
School of Applied Human Sciences – Psychology  
Howard College Campus

Dear Ms Pillay,

Protocol reference number: HSS/0406/018M

**Project Title:** A qualitative study exploring the perceived implications of online social media for employee productivity and satisfaction in the workplace: A case study of an IT company in KZN

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 03 May 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....  
Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Mr Dean Isaacs  
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr Maud Mthembu  
Cc School Administrator: Ms Ayanda Ntuli

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Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)






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