

University of KwaZulu-Natal

**Influencers of University Choice:
Who Influences First-year Computer Science Students to Study at
UKZN?**

by

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ABSTRACT

Influencer marketing is a form of marketing which focuses on influential people rather than the target market as a whole. This study looks at who are the influencers of university choice, as prospective students consult with many different people when making their university choice. The research objectives and questions centred around identifying influencers, determining their strength, ranking their influence and recommending how they could be incorporated into university marketing strategies. By focusing on first-year BSc Computer Science and Information Technology students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. This study aimed to identify the main influencers of students' choice of university. A census method was applied to collect data that was directed to an entire population of first-year students (as above). A response rate of 72% was obtained, with 110 respondents from a population of 152 students. The Social Influence Theory, as proposed by Herbert Kelman, was used as the theoretical framework for this study. Findings revealed that influencers who had the most interaction with students had the strongest influence. Parents were found to be the strongest and only significant influencer of university choice. In order of most to least influential, influencers were ranked as follows: interpersonal/ intrapersonal influencers, school influencers, UKZN influencers and inspirational influencers. It was recommended that UKZN use parents in marketing strategies, use stronger influencers to aid UKZN staff, develop potential influencers and engage with industry. The scope, time-period and size of study were identified as limitations. As a direction for future research, a study examining individual influencers can be done to attain better understanding of the strength/weakness of the influencer.

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ACRONYMS and ABBREVIATIONS

BSc	Bachelor of Science
CAES	College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science
CSIT	Computer Science & Information Technology
eWOM	Electronic Word-Of-Mouth
ICT	Information Communications and Technology
IT	Information Technology
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
PR	Public Relations
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
WOM	Word-Of-Mouth

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Influencer marketing makes use of influential parties to deliver brand messaging to the target market. Higher Education marketing strategies need to evolve towards marketing that is more influential in order to capture the student market better than competitors. Relating to this, prospective students will consult with different people and entities when deciding on which university to attend. By focusing on first-year Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Computer Science and Information Technology students, this study set out to discover who persuaded these students to study at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). In this chapter, the researcher introduces the focus, problem statement and background of the study. The research objectives, research questions and motivation for the study are then discussed. The research methodology and theoretical framework are introduced before the ethical considerations and analysis are explained. Finally, a chapter outline is provided, which forms the structure of the study.

1.2 Focus of the Study

This study focuses on the concept of influencer marketing, within the context of higher education institutions, namely universities. Therefore, key aspects include: influencers of university choice, influencer strength and student satisfaction of university choice - among the first-year Computer Science and Information Technology (CSIT) students at UKZN.

1.3 Problem Statement

UKZN is one of the country's top five universities, with about 45 000 enrolled students (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2017). This institution competes in a highly competitive

sector, with many other public and private higher education providers. Therefore, in order to remain competitive, UKZN has to differentiate and market itself as a university of choice. Kalimullina and Dobrotvorskayaa (2016) have identified factors that influence the university decision-making process for potential students. These factors include: contact audience, personal characteristics, area of residence, financial position, media presence, professional experience, university facilities and form of education. This study focused on the contact audience factor, by looking at influencers of university choice. Babin, Grant and Sawal (2010) describe influencers as key figures in the students' immediate environment that have a significant influence on their career development. A few examples of influencers include: parents, teachers, guidance counsellors and friends. The data collected about these influencers can be used to generate recommendations for the institution to advance its strategy of being a university of choice.

1.4 Background to the Problem

A background to higher education in South African is given, detailing the changes that have occurred in the sector. UKZN is then profiled and its strategy is discussed, as it is relevant to this study.

1.4.1 Higher Education in South Africa

The South African higher education landscape has changed significantly to give rise to the over 126 public/ private higher education institutions in the sector (Council on Higher Education, 2016). South African universities are considered among the best in the world, with four of its universities (University of Cape Town, University of the Witwatersrand, Stellenbosch University and University of KwaZulu-Natal) being listed in the top 500 universities in the world (Times Higher Education, 2018). With fewer but stronger players in the sector, attracting the best students has become more competitive (Johnston, 2010). A major task for higher education marketers is to market the institution's unique selling points to prospective students.

Social media and the role of influential people are changing the way that marketers communicate with prospective students. Communication has changed from a sender-receiver system, to a more influential peer-to-peer and receiver-to-sender system (Johnston, 2010). This has given marketers a new way to reach students by targeting the people who influence their choice of university. van Heerden et al (2009) conducted a study that looked at the sources of information that South African students use to inform their university choice. The study revealed that the majority of information sources were directly or indirectly related to influencers, such as: word-of-mouth, open days, teachers, alumni, parents and school visits. This trend was also observed in a more recent study by Lubbe and Petzer (2013), which found that parents/ guardians, other relatives and friends are more influential on university choice than advertisements. Influencer marketing is rooted in word-of-mouth communication, which notes that strong ties (between families) were perceived as more influential sources of information, by students (Johnston, 2010).

1.4.2 University of KwaZulu-Natal

Figure 1.1 provides an overview of UKZN's strategic plan 2017 to 2021. The university's purpose is to shape a better future by "inspiring greatness", which is captured in the centre of the diagram in orange (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2017). The purpose is surrounded by the issues pertaining to the institutional climate and culture, that being Excellence, Transformation, Service culture and Innovation/ Entrepreneurship (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2017). Inspiring greatness underscores the centrality of the REACHT values of Respect, Excellence, Accountability, Client-orientation, Honesty and Trust and outlines the pillars required to achieve the institutional culture objectives (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2017). The climate and culture ring (in yellow) is surrounded by four strategic goals and four enablers that inform the substance of the strategy (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2017). The entire strategy wheel is surrounded by the university's vision, which is to be "the Premier University of African Scholarship" (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2017, p.18). Goal 1 and Enabler 1 are of particular

importance to this study. Goal 1 aims to attract highly talented students and to develop them to their full potential to become globally aware professionals, leaders and citizens (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2017). Enabler 1 aims to develop a brand that enhances stakeholder experiences by articulating unique value propositions and promoting UKZN as a great African university (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2017). The College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science (CAES) is the college within UKZN that offers life and earth science-related programmes at the university. It's the role of the CAES Public Relations (PR) unit to market the university and attract the best students to the science fields.

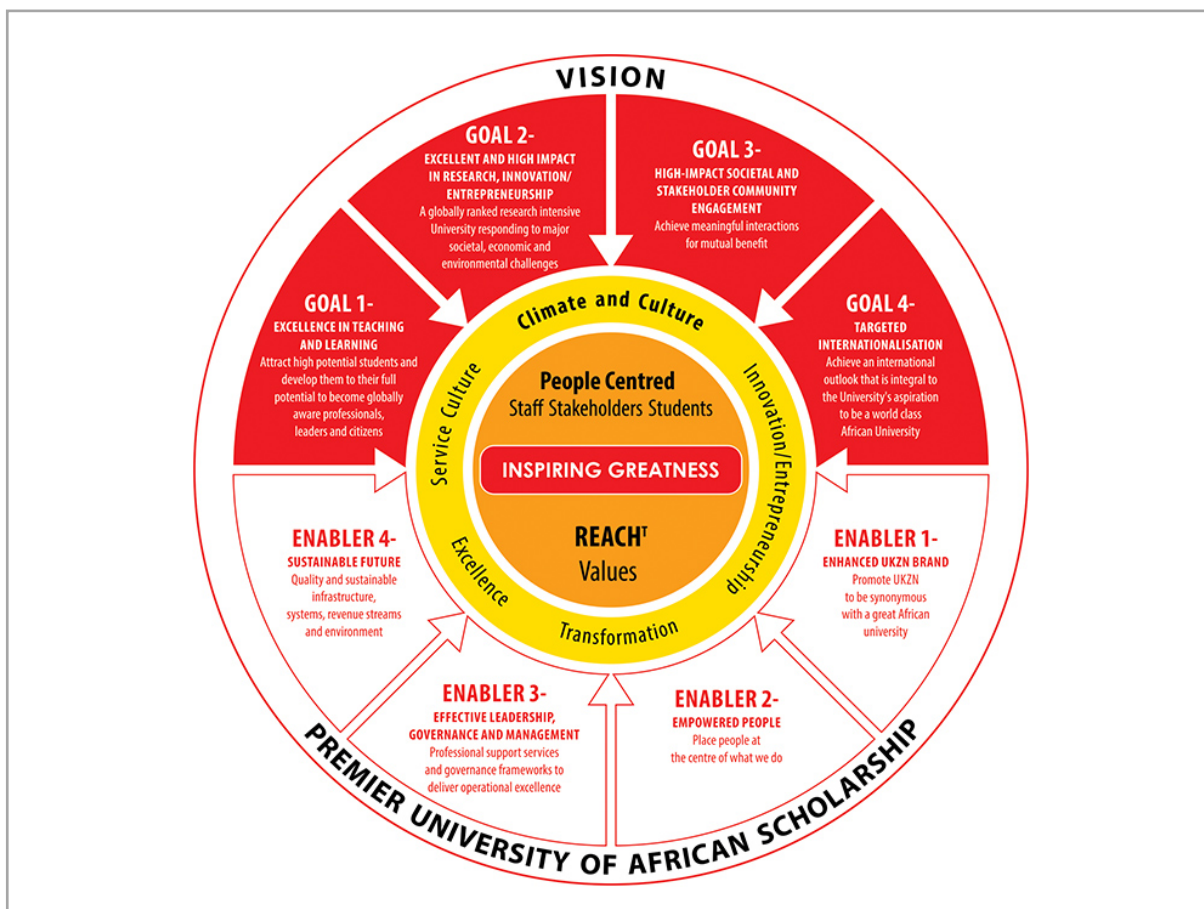


Figure 1.1: Strategy from a glance

Adapted from University of KwaZulu-Natal. (2017). Strategic plan 2017 - 2021. p18.

In light of the strategies and goals of UKZN, this study examines the ways in which universities are marketed. Traditional university marketing strategies focus on students, however, this study aims to look at the viability of marketing to influencers of university choice.

1.5 Research Questions

Reflective to the research problem and background, the study attempted to answer the following research questions:

- Who influences students' choice to study at UKZN?
- What is the strength of this influence?
- Who are the strongest and weakest influencers?
- What can be done to incorporate influencers into marketing strategies?

1.6 Research Objectives

The following research objectives were set, based on the research questions:

- To identify the influencers that affect students' choice to study at UKZN.
- To measure the strength of the influence on students.
- To rank influencers, in terms of the strength of their influence over students.
- To present recommendations on how to include influencers into marketing strategies

1.7 Motivation for the Study

This study identifies the influencers of university choice for CSIT students at UKZN. By identifying these influencers, the university can take steps to work with these supporters to capture the student target market. This study gathers data that can guide recruitment/ marketing practices and add to the emerging field of influencer marketing.

Stakeholders who can benefit from this research include:

- UKZN Public Relations team – to aid recruitment practices and strategies.
- Marketing professionals – to help guide the development of university marketing strategies.
- Finance department – this research can guide the marketing budget allocations, that may result in a higher return on investment.
- Funders and corporates - can provide insight on how to attract the best students to provide funding and work opportunities.
- Academics, students and researchers - research on influencer marketing is limited, so this study will shed light on the subject and add to the theory of influencer marketing.
- Government – study findings be used by Department of Higher Education to devise influencer strategies to encourage youth to pursue tertiary education.

1.8 Methodology

The study was conducted at UKZN's Westville and Pietermaritzburg campuses, where the BSc CSIT programme is offered.

A census method was used whereby an entire population of first-year students were targeted as respondents. The total population of first-year CSIT students for 2017 was 152. There were 110 respondents, which gave a strong 72% response rate (out of an entire population). The study adopted a quantitative approach and a questionnaire was used to collect primarily quantitative data from the respondents.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

The study was underpinned by the Social Influence Theory which postulates that referent others influence an individual's attitudes, beliefs and actions through processes of compliance, identification and internalisation (Kelman, 1958). Compliance reflects that an individual acts to comply with the opinions of others, identification reflects individual identification with a community and internalisation reflects that an individual accepts the influence due to the congruence of his/ her values with those of group members (Zhou, 2011). The theory was applied in the study through the data analysis from an outcome perspective.

1.10 Ethical Considerations

Key ethical considerations that were considered by the researcher include:

- Ethical Clearance was obtained (Protocol Ref No: HSS/1983/017M).
- Permission to conduct this study was granted by a gatekeeper's letter issued by the University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- The front of each questionnaire contained a letter of informed consent, stating the purpose of the study and declaring that participation was voluntary. Each respondent signed and submitted the letter along with their completed questionnaire.

- In formulating the questionnaire and this paper, the use discriminatory and offensive language was avoided.
- Privacy and anonymity of respondents were guaranteed. No confidential or identifying information was released or seen by anyone other than the researcher.
- Acknowledgement of works of other authors was made in text and in the reference list, using the Harvard referencing system.

1.11 Analysis

All data collected in this study was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. A reliability analysis was performed to determine the accuracy and precision of the measurement procedure, followed by a biographical analysis to develop a profile of the respondents. Descriptive statistics were used to present the data collected, through the use of graphs, frequencies, percentages and means. Inferential statistics were presented via a principal component analysis using Eigenvalues. Finally, the results were analysed within the context of the Social Influence Theory.

1.12 Chapter Outline

This study is made up of five chapters, detailed below.

- Chapter one gives a brief background and introduction to the research. It outlines the problem statement, research questions, research objectives and research methodology.
- Chapter two reviews the relevant literature on influencer marketing and students' decision-making process for university choice. Key influencers of university choice are explored and the theoretical framework is introduced.

- Chapter three outlines how the research was carried out inclusive of design, instruments, data collection and ethical considerations.
- Chapter four presents the collected data in the form of descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. This chapter also provides a discussion on the research findings and is interpreted in conjunction with Social Influence Theory.
- Chapter five ties up the objectives with the findings and brings the study to a close. Recommendations are made on how to incorporate influencer marketing into current marketing strategies.

1.13 Summary

The aim of this chapter was to introduce the study and all the elements that encompass its structure. The topic was introduced by discussing the study's focus, problem statement and background. This gave rise to the research objectives, research questions and motivation for the study. The research methods and theoretical framework were referred to and the ethical considerations and analysis techniques were detailed. Finally, an outline of the chapters in this study was given, explaining the structure of this paper. The next chapter explores the decision-making process for university choice and reviews the literature on influencer marketing.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by reviewing the literature on influencer marketing, discussing its origins and the source of influencers' power. An overview of higher education in South Africa will be provided, as it is the context of the study. This is followed by an investigation into the university-choice decision-making process and the factors that affect students' university choice. The literature on the various influencers of university choice will then be reviewed. The millennial generation and the information sources they use to choose a university will also be discussed. Finally, the Social Influence Theory will be introduced as the theoretical framework for the study.

2.2 Influencer Marketing

Every day, consumers are overwhelmed with thousands of marketing messages. This has led to a decline in return on investments from traditional advertising, as consumers have become less engaged with marketing messages (Magnini, 2011). Marketers have had to evaluate other ways of capturing the attention of their target market.

Influencer marketing utilises key leaders to deliver brand messaging to the target market (McAvoy, Malone and Lang, 2017). Instead of marketing directly to consumers, influencers are used to spread the marketing message. While influencer marketing is a relatively new term, it is simply an evolution of word-of-mouth (WOM) advertising (Johnston, 2010).

For some time, marketers have realised that consumers share their product experiences with each other. Listeners found their peers' opinions to be more credible than information received from organisations. Berry and Keller (2003) referred to these peers as 'the influentials.' They postulated that because influentials were the first to try

new products and share their opinions openly, via WOM, they possessed an influence over customers (Berry and Keller, 2003). Gillin (2007) introduced the concept of new influencers that use social media tools (blogs, vlogs, podcasts and social media) to reach consumers. These influentials are now the drivers of influencer marketing today (Gillin 2007).

Post-millennium, the internet has transformed the way we search for information, communicate and even shop. The internet has also caused traditional WOM to evolve into electronic WOM (eWOM). King, Racherla and Bush (2014) define eWOM as any statement made by customers about a product or company, which is viewed by the online community.

Due to the omnipresence of social media, influencer marketing is becoming a new buzzword circulating the digital marketing scene. Everyday influencers vlog, blog and share their opinions with their followers via social media. They are perceived to be more authentic and relatable because they share their real-life experiences (Solis, 2017). For this reason, influencers are trusted by consumers (more so than brands) and therefore possess an influence over consumers.

2.2.1 What is Influence?

Influence is the ability to cause effect or change behaviour and is not the act of trying to influence and therefore should not be confused with popularity (Solis, 2017). An influencer can have many followers (and therefore be popular) but have a weak influence over a target group (Solis, 2017). According to Sudha and Sheena (2017), a powerful influencer has reach, relevance and resonance. Reach refers to the size of the audience, relevance measures the degree to which the influence fits the context of the purchasing decision, and resonance refers to the amount of activity an influencer generates by publishing content (Sudha and Sheena, 2017).

Studies have been done on the relative influence of strong and weak social ties between people. Strong ties (within families) are more likely to be used for influencer marketing and are more influential than weak ties (Johnston, 2010). Weak ties transfer information from one party to another, but may not influence behaviour (Johnston, 2010).

2.2.2 Macro-influencers vs Micro-influencers

Ordinary people who communicate with their friends or social circle can be identified as influencers, but so can journalists, experts and public figures. Brown and Fiorella (2013) categorise influencers into two groups, namely micro-influencers and macro-influencers.

Macro-influencers are people with a large audience made up of communities with whom they have a relationship (Brown and Fiorella, 2013). This can be a public figure with a large social media following (Brown and Fiorella, 2013). A strong relationship exists between the influencer and the follower, but it won't necessarily elicit an impulsive reaction from the follower (Haapasalmi, 2017).

Micro-influencers directly impact the behaviour of consumers and exert true influence over the customer's decision-making process (Brown and Fiorella, 2013). They exist within the individual's social circle, such as: family, friends and colleagues (Brown and Fiorella, 2013). This is the strongest type of influence, as recommendations by close people are often considered more influential on an individual's buying decisions (Lisichkova and Othman, 2017).

2.3 Overview of Higher Education in South Africa

The South African higher education landscape has seen a major restructuring, through the creation/ merging of new institutions and the dissolution of old ones. There are now over 126 public/ private higher education institutions in South Africa (Council on Higher

Education, 2016). The sector is very different from the fragmented 336 public/ private institutions under the pre-1994 regime (Council on Higher Education, 2016). The sector is now more unified in terms of governance, quality assurance, types of qualifications, funding opportunities and enrolment strategies (Council on Higher Education, 2016).

South African universities are considered among the best in the world, with four of its universities being listed in the top 500 universities in the world. Table 2.1 shows the top five universities in the Africa as well as their world ranking for 2019.

SA Rank	World Rank	University
1	156	University of Cape Town
2	201 -250	University of the Witwatersrand
3	301–350	Stellenbosch University
4	401–500	University of KwaZulu-Natal
5	501-600	Makerere University

Table 2.1: World university rankings 2019

Adapted from Times Higher Education. (2018). Best universities in Africa 2019

In terms of size, there are now almost a million students in the tertiary education which represents exponential growth from the half million in 1994 (Council on Higher Education, 2016). In addition, there are approximately 90 000 students in private higher education (Council on Higher Education, 2016). The predominance of African student's at most higher education institutions represents South Africa's transformation since Apartheid (Council on Higher Education, 2016).

The unprecedented growth in higher education has led to external regulation and quality assurance to become the industry norm. As the number of institutions, institutional types, educational offerings and knowledge areas covered has grown, so too has the need for evaluating if higher education is achieving its purpose.

Based on the performance of students who entered university in 2006, Council on Higher Education (2016) observed the following trends:

- About one in four contact students failed or dropped out before their second year of study. Only twenty-seven percent (27%) of contact students graduated in the time intended.
- Fifty-two percent of contact students graduated with three- and four-year degrees within five years.
- Racial disparities in performance still exist, with completion rates 50% higher for white contact students than that of African contact students.

2.4 Decision-making Process for University Choice

University offerings can be packaged into three products – the core, tangible, and augmented product (Alhakimi and Qasem, 2014). Firstly, the core refers to students buying the benefits that a degree can offer in terms of career, prestige and lifestyle. Secondly, tangible attributes might include the campus layout, laboratories and sporting facilities. Finally, intangible attributes (library membership for graduates, student loans, financing and job placement) make up the augmented level.

John Dewey first introduced a five-stage buying process model that consumers goes through when making a purchase decision, as shown in figure 2.1. Starting with problem recognition, the consumer passes through the stages of information search and evaluation of alternatives (Kotler, 2000). This followed by making the purchase decision and exhibiting post-purchase behaviour (Kotler, 2000). In the problem

recognition stage, the buyer recognises a problem or need (Kotler, 2000). For most students, this occurs at the end of high school, when they start to consider career options and applying to universities (Lubbe and Petzer, 2013).

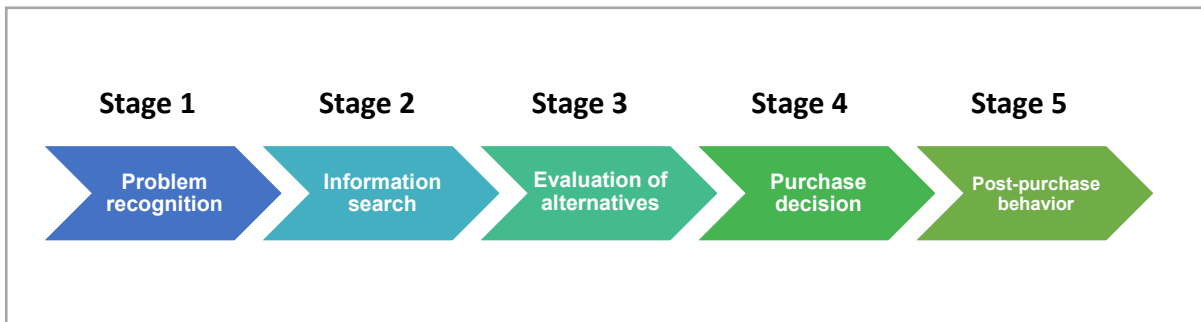


Figure 2.1: Consumer buying process

Adapted from Kotler (2000, p98.)

In the information search stage, the consumer is inclined to search for more information about the product (Kotler, 2000). Students engage in their own information search by consulting personal sources (family/ friends), commercial sources (websites, university marketing material), public sources (newspapers) and experiential sources (university open days) for information (Lubbe and Petzer, 2013). In Stage 3, the consumer processes competitive brand information and makes a final judgment (Kotler, 2000). Students will compare universities, identify which one best meets their needs and will then apply to those institutions (Lubbe and Petzer, 2013). The purchase is made in stage 4, if: (1) there is no intervention between the purchase decision and intention, and (2) the perceived risk is low (Kotler, 2000). This involves the student being accepted to study at the university and consequently registering (and paying fees) at the institution (Lubbe and Petzer, 2013). The final stage is the post-purchase behaviour where the consumer will experience satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the process (Kotler, 2000). Satisfied students may decide to return for postgraduate qualifications, whereas dissatisfied students may decide to transfer to another university (Lubbe and Petzer, 2013).

2.5 Factors that Influence University Choice

Potential students will pass through three phases throughout their university career, that being, applicant, student and alumni (Kalimullina and Dobrotvorskayaa, 2016). Kalimullina and Dobrotvorskayaa (2016) postulate that in the applicant phase, a student will consider a number of factors when selecting a university. These factors give an insight into the decision-making process of prospective students when looking to join a university. Kalimullina and Dobrotvorskayaa (2016) go on to identify several decision-making factors that affect students' university choice, which is discussed below.

2.5.1 Contact Audience

This refers to people who influence students' choice of university and a future specialty (Kalimullina and Dobrotvorskayaa, 2016). Potential students listen to the opinions shared by friends, parents, guidance counsellors and teachers among others. Băcilă (2008), WOM communication was voted as the primary source of information used by students to choose a university. This study focuses on this factor, by looking at influencers of university choice.

2.5.2 Personal Characteristics

Students choose courses that relate to their interests and future careers. A student's preferences, needs, aptitude and self-confidence all play a role in university choice (Kalimullina and Dobrotvorskayaa, 2016). Dawes and Brown (2002) have shown that personal factors show the greatest positive influences on a student's choice of university.

2.5.3 Area of Residence

This factor often plays an important role in influencing the university choice of a school graduate. This includes: the region's infrastructure, local customs and traditions, and

the quality of education offered (Tikhomirova and Isaev, 2010). In terms of closeness, Raposo and Alves (2007) claim that proximity to home is one of the strongest influences on the choice of university for students.

2.5.4 Financial Position

Many students are not able to afford university tuition and therefore look at institutions that provide financial support and incentives (Kalimullina and Dobrotvorskayaa, 2016). The #feesmustfall movement that occurred in 2016 (in South Africa), proves that this factor is very pertinent to South African students. University students across South Africa brought universities in the country to a standstill by protesting for free education. The average first-year tuition for a Bachelor of Science degree ranges from R12 800 to R 50 000 (Grant, 2015). In terms of funding opportunities, South African students rely on the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). In 2017, NSFAS was allocated a funding budget of R15 billion which they used to support over 400 000 students (Pijoo, 2017).

2.5.5 Media Presence

If students are aware of higher education offerings such as best academic programmes, demand for particular professions and university rankings, then their choice of university is more informed (Kirillina, 2000). A university's presence on mass media increases their exposure and chance of being considered in a student's choice set. This can be done through radio and television participation, publication of research, advertising in student-centred publications and social media engagement.

2.5.6 Professional Experience and Flexible Learning

If a student has a certain amount of professional experience, then this factor impacts their choice of an academic programme and a form of education (Kalimullina and

Dobrotvorskayaa, 2016). This factor is relevant to students who want to get a second degree, are from secondary special education institutions or those looking to improve their professional skills (Kirillina, 2000).

2.5.7 University Facilities

Students' university choice is also influenced by what a university can offer in terms of its infrastructure (Kalimullina and Dobrotvorskayaa, 2016). Some considerations include: availability of student accommodation, modern equipment (LANs and laboratories), pedagogical support (tutorials, textbooks, library funds) and student recreation (sports fields, cafeterias and social areas) to name a few (Tavares et al, 2008).

2.5.8 Forms of Education

This factor defines the way in which teaching is delivered at universities (Kalimullina and Dobrotvorskayaa, 2016). This factor goes beyond just teaching in a classroom but also includes practical and on-site training, academic workload, industry relevance, and integrating study and work opportunities (Tavares et al, 2008).

2.6 Influencers of University Choice

This study will investigate the contact audience factor by looking at the people, that students come into contact with, who have influenced their university choice. The literature on each of these influencers is presented in the following discussion.

2.6.1 International Studies

Pimpa (2002) examined the influence of family, peers, and agents on students' choices of international education in Thailand. The study found that students perceived family members as the most trustworthy sources of information for university choice (Pimpa, 2002). Parents influence was considered strong, mostly due to the financial support they provide to students. In addition, information from peers was observed to work in harmony with familial influences to support the decision-making process. Information from education agents assisted the student in choosing an academic course and university (Pimpa, 2002).

Johnston (2010) looked at how the influence of friends and family members compared to the influence of non-personal media, within the context of university choice. University staff were ranked as having the highest influence, followed by personal sources of information received from family/ friends (Johnston, 2010). The information sources were ranked from most to least influential, in the following order: university staff, mother, open days, father, friend, teacher, university sports event, paper mail, social media, student ambassador, university website and email (Johnston, 2010).

A study done by Babin et al (2010) examined the role of influencers on Information and Communications Technology (ICT) career choices, among Canadian high school students. The results showed that ICT students make their career decisions based on their own perceptions/ interests. In decreasing levels of influence, students ranked the following people as influencers: 1) Parents, 2) Friends, 3) Teachers and 4) Counsellors (Babin et al, 2010). Parents were considered the strongest influencers and guidance counsellors were the weakest (Babin et al, 2010). Friends were rated as having some influence, but not to the extent that students in other subject areas noted (Babin et al, 2010).

Constantinides and Stagno (2012) compared the role of social media on students' university choice in comparison to traditional university marketing channels. The study found that social media channels (forums, blogs and social networks) rated lower than

the traditional media channels. The results were unexpected, as 95.1% of students stated they maintain a social media profile and 77.5% access their profile daily. Constantinides and Stagno (2012) go onto state that the lack of relevant content could explain social media's low ranking, as few universities use social media as a direct marketing tool.

James et al (2018) assessed Pharmacy students' motivation to study Pharmacy in Sierra Leone. The study noted that in order to attract individuals to the profession, factors influencing Pharmacy as career choice needs to be understood (James et al, 2018). Findings showed that teachers and family/ friends were the most significant contributors to Pharmacy being chosen as a career (James et al, 2018). Furthermore, TV adverts, influence from a pharmacist (industry professional), respect for the profession, social usefulness and part-time work were all considered weak influencers of students' choice of Pharmacy (James et al, 2018).

A study by Schipull (2009) looked at why students chose to attend selected Midwestern Christian liberal arts institutions for their education. Subjects ranked the following reasons for their college choice: Christian/ spiritual, academic quality, institutional demography, family and peer/ mentor influences. Only 15% of respondents stated that their pastor or spiritual mentor had a profound effect on their choice of college, despite this study taking place at a spiritual college (Schipull, 2009). This is in contravention with a study by Dial (2014), which found African American churches to influence the education plans of their parishioners, by establishing college preparatory programmes and conducting college workshops in their communities.

2.6.2 South African Studies

Moving to a South African setting, van Heerdan et al (2009) investigated the choice factors and information sources that prospective students used at a higher education institution in South Africa. The usefulness of the different information sources were measured. Influencers were ranked as the most influential information source after

university publications, with parents being considered the least influential (van Heerdan et al, 2009). The influencers that were ranked in order of most to least influential were: WOM (from friends), campus open days (university staff), teachers, alumni and parents (van Heerdan et al, 2009).

Similarly, and in a more recent study, Abrahams, Jano and van Lill (2015) looked at factors influencing the career choice of undergraduate students at a historically disadvantaged South African university. Results from the study showed that family and teacher support were not viewed as significant influencers of career choice (Abrahams et al, 2015). Abrahams et al (2015) posit that this might be because a large proportion of respondents were first-generation university students. Guidance counsellors were rated as the weakest influencer, while brochures and lecturer visits were the strongest (Abrahams et al, 2015).

The aim of the Lubbe and Petzer (2013) study was to understand what and who influences potential students' university choice in South Africa. Siblings, other family and school friends were found to be significantly less influential information sources (Lubbe and Petzer, 2013). The study found that first-generation students refer to brochures, speaking to others and teachers more than second-generation students (Lubbe and Petzer, 2013). Second-generation students rely much more on their parents' advice, drawing on their parents' university experiences. This finding indicates how important brand perceptions are to the market, as prospective students are influenced by positive word-of-mouth (Lubbe and Petzer, 2013).

Shumba and Naong (2012) examined factors influencing students' career choice and aspirations in South Africa. The study found that family, personal choices and teachers' influence were all determinants of career choice. The majority of respondents attributed their career choice to the subject choices (self-influencer) they made in school. Teachers were viewed as key influencers of career paths because they shape the perceptions of learners' abilities, ultimately guiding their career direction (Shumba and Naong, 2012).

A study by Tracey (2016) looked at the youth's perceptions of political leaders in South Africa. The study noted that youth in South Africa had a very negative view of political leaders, saying that they 'use people to get to the top', 'only think of themselves' and 'fail to keep the promises' (Tracey, 2016). These sentiments were echoed by Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (2012), which noted that 49.8% of youth felt that political leaders were not concerned with them and 49.3% believed that their voices/ views were unheard by public officials. With no trust in political leaders, it seems the youth of this country will not be easily influenced by politicians.

Arising from the above studies the following influencers have been identified. These include parents, siblings, other relatives, friends, teachers, guidance/ career counsellors, UKZN staff, alumni, UKZN students, industry professionals, social media personalities, bloggers/ vloggers, spiritual leaders and political leaders. The influence of these influencers will be examined in this study.

2.7 Millennial Behaviour

The millennial generation were born between 1982 and 2003, and are characterised as being highly educated, career-driven, and politically progressive and possess strong brand loyalty when presented with quality products (Schawbel, 2015). However, students from this generation can have a difficult time reaching a decision and sometimes rely on their parents to decide for them (Keeling, 2003). Reasons for this could be that they're poor decision makers, they're overwhelmed by the choices available or they're unmotivated to achieve an objective (Keeling, 2003).

Surveys confirm that millennials favour a structured curriculum, with order and focuses on the basics (Keeling, 2003). Keeling (2003) explains that millennials prefer subjects where they can measure their progress (mathematics and science) over subjects that lack clear-cut answers (humanities and arts). Millennials consider the opinions of their peers or fellow consumers to be more credible than traditional media (Smith, 2012). WOM is seen as more credible than advertising, as it is perceived as having passed

through the evaluation of “people like me” (Smith, 2012).

The internet gives millennials the power to control the free market by expressing their opinions on numerous platforms that reach a large number of consumers. Social media, websites and interactive technologies invite millennials to actively promote and advance products and brands. This online generation are keen to write reviews, share feedback and highlight their brand experiences (Smith, 2012).

Schawbel (2015) identified new findings about the millennial consumer that provides keen insight on how they should be marketed to.

- Millennials are not influenced by advertising because they see it as inauthentic. Only 1% of millennials said that a compelling advertisement would improve their trust in a brand.
- They review blogs before making a purchase. Thirty-three percent of millennials utilise blogs before they make a purchase versus less than 3% that rely on traditional media sources. Older generations rely more on traditional media, whereas millennials look to the digital space to learn about the world (Schawbel, 2015).
- Forty-three percent said that they value authenticity more than content when consuming news. They first have to trust a news source before they read the content, therefore they find blogs to be authentic as they are usually run by a single person (Schawbel, 2015).
- Their future inheritance won't change their buying behaviour (Schawbel, 2015).
- Sixty-two percent of millennials say that if a brand engages with them on social networks, they are more likely to become a loyal customer (Schawbel, 2015).

- Forty-two percent said they are interested in helping companies develop future products and services, as they want to be more involved with how their products are made (Schawbel, 2015).
- In order for brands to be relevant with millennials, they need engage with them on multiple platforms. Eighty-seven percent of millennials use between two and three technological devices daily, 39% are likely to purchase a tablet computer in the next five years, while 30% are in favour of wearable devices (Schawbel, 2015).
- Sixty percent said that they are often or always loyal to brands. So it is better to build a relationship with them sooner rather than later, to earn their long-term loyalty (Schawbel, 2015).
- Seventy-five percent said that they love brands that support their local communities and would rather purchase from competitors who are socially conscious (Schawbel, 2015).

Considering these findings, it can relate to universities as well whereby millennials require universities to build a deeper and authentic relationship with them.

2.8 Information Sources

This section focuses on the sources of information that students consult when choosing a university. There are two major types of information sources that a student can use. Internal sources are obtained from past searches or personal experiences and are used to inform routine or low-involvement purchase decisions (de Jager and du Plooy, 2010). External sources refers to information acquired from environmental sources outside of the consumers' experience (de Jager and du Plooy, 2010).

Students will consult various sources of information when making career decisions. These can include: friends, family, career counsellors, teachers, reference groups and opinion leaders. Higher education institutions will use adverts in traditional and digital media, as well as promotional material and events to market their brand.

van Heerdan et al (2009) conducted a study that looked at information sources used by South African students to choose a university. The sources are displayed in order of most to least important (left to right) in Figure 2.2 and reflected the following.

- The most useful source of information was found to be university publications followed by WOM.
- Thirty percent of respondents rated campus visits and open days as excellent information sources.
- Students were found to be active online users, with close to 60% of respondents rating university websites as a good or excellent information source.
- School visits, radio ads and television advertising were rated as poor sources of information.
- Sixty percent of respondents rated friends' word-of-mouth as a good to excellent source of information.

Word-of-mouth, high school teachers, parents and alumni information sources listed in the study can all be considered as influencers. It seems that South African students rely on influencers as an information source, to a large extent. This indicates that influencers play an important role in supplying information that guides university choice.

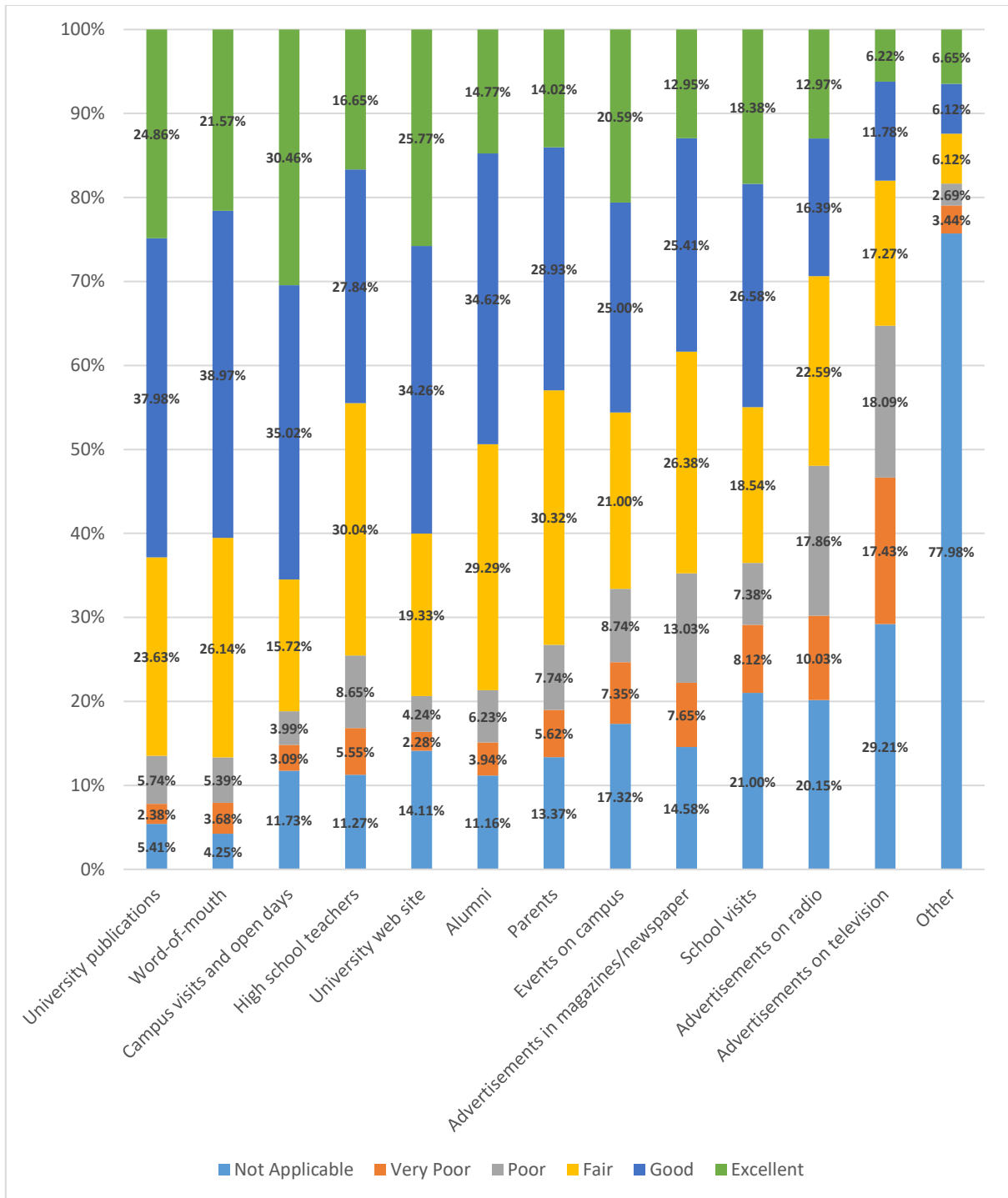


Figure 2.2: Information sources used by South African students

Adapted from van Heerden et al (2009, pg. 98.)

2.9 Theoretical Framework

The Social Influence Theory, as proposed by Herbert Kelman, is used as a theoretical framework for this study. Social influence refers to the influence of referent others on an individual's attitudes, beliefs and actions through processes of compliance, identification and internalisation (Krezel and Krezel, 2017). The Social Influence Theory proposes that an individual's attitudes and behaviour may change because of social influences (Kelman, 1958). The drive for association with social groups is at the core of the theory, which posits that individuals seek approval of their own opinions and their likes and dislikes from outside reference groups (Krezel and Krezel, 2017).

The Social Influence Theory (as shown in figure 2.3) goes on to explain that individual behaviour is affected by three social processes: compliance, identification and internalisation (Kelman, 1958).

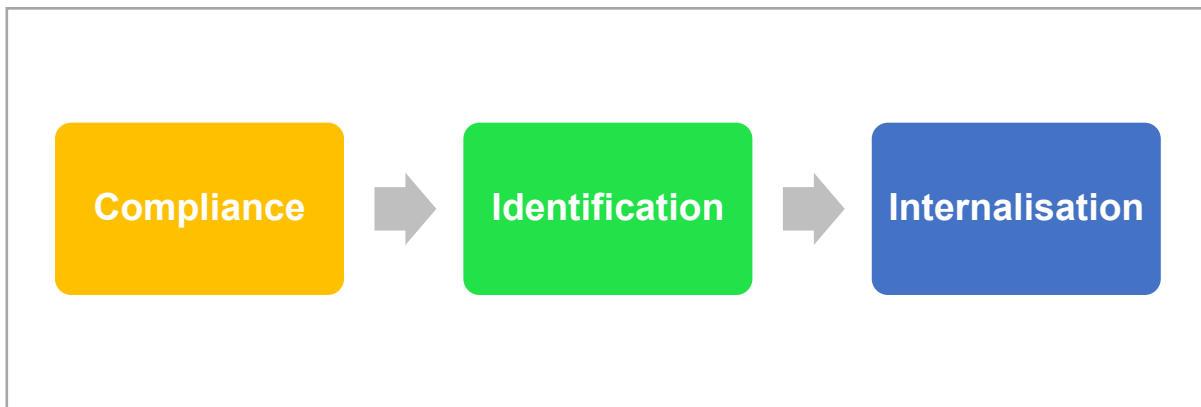


Figure 2.3: The social influence theory

- Compliance occurs “when an individual accepts influence because they hope to achieve a favourable reaction from another person or group” (Kelman, 1958, p.53).

- Identification occurs “when an individual accepts influence because he wants to establish a satisfying self-defining relationship to another person or a group” (Kelman, 1958, p.58).
- Internalisation occurs “when an individual accepts influence because the content of the induced behaviour (the ideas and actions of which it is composed) is intrinsically rewarding” (Kelman, 1958, p.53).

Drawing on the Social Influence Theory, many studies have examined the effects of the three social processes of compliance, identification and internalisation.

Qu, Zhang and Cheung (2012) explored five styles of handling conflict (compromising, integrating, dominating, avoiding and obliging) within the context of the three social influence processes, in a corporate setting. The study found that internalisation contributes to the compromising and integrating conflict management styles, while identification supports a dominating style and compliance nurtures an avoiding and obliging management style (Qu et al, 2012).

Zhou (2011) conducted a study that examined the social influence of user participation in online communities. The findings showed that identification and internalisation significantly affects user participation and that internalisation affects identity. The insignificant effect of compliance indicated that the opinions of significant others did not affect the behaviour of users in the online community. The study went on to explain that online community managers should facilitate user participation through the use of the identification and internalisation processes (Zhou, 2011).

Cheung, Chiu and Lee (2011) looked at the social influence that drive students to use online social networks (Facebook). The findings indicated that group norms (internalisation) had a significant influence on the use of Facebook because users had a high tendency to use Facebook when they had similar values to their groups (Cheung

et al, 2011). Social identity (identification) did not have any significant relationships with the use of social media because users lose their sense of belonging as they join more communities (Cheung et al, 2011). The result showed that social factors are more important in determining intentional social action (Cheung et al, 2011).

In a study by Hanh et al (2019), the aim was to explore how social influence affects students' university choice. Hanh et al (2019) posit that social influences impact individuals because they look to external reference groups, for approval of their opinions. The study found that there is a positive significance between herding (following others and imitating group behaviours) and the decision to choose a university. Informational social influence (accepting information from others as evidence of reality) affects university selection positively. In contrast, normative social influence (compliance) has a negative effect on university selection (Hanh et al, 2019).

2.10 Summary

This chapter began by reviewing the literature on influencer marketing, determining that it was an evolution of WOM advertising. An overview of South Africa higher education sector was given. This was succeeded by an in-depth look at students' decision-making process (for university choice) to gain an understanding of their purchasing behaviour. The decision-making factors that students consider when choosing a university was then explored. The literature on influencers was reviewed, which identified the influencers that this study will explore. Since the target population of this study are millennials, their generational characteristics were analysed and the information sources that they use to select a university was discussed. Finally, the Social Influence Theory was introduced as the theoretical framework for the study. In Chapter 3, the methodologies used to conduct the research for this study will be unpacked.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the methods used to fulfil the research in accordance with its aims and objectives. Theories on research methodologies are examined and applicable ones are adopted for the study. This generates a discussion on the research design and paradigm. The study's research setting is explored, along with definition of the population and sampling approach. The research instrument is described and data collection and analysis practices are outlined. Explanations of reliability, validity and biases are given, ending with a discussion around ethical considerations.

3.2. Aim of the Study

For recap purposes, the aim of this research was to identify the influencers of university choice, for the first-year CSIT students at UKZN. The strength of their influence needs to be determined as well. This information can be used to make recommendations on how best to utilise the strongest influencers and develop the weakest influencers. The aim of this study lead to the development of the research objectives and questions (as outlined in Chapter 1).

3.3 Research Design and Methods

The research design is the plan to be followed to realise the research objectives and questions (Tustin et al, 2010). It represents the master plan that specifies the methods and procedures for collecting and analysing the data. Salkind (2014) outlines three types of research designs, namely exploratory, descriptive and causal. Descriptive research describes the characteristics of an existing phenomenon (Salkind, 2014). This study followed a descriptive research design, as it looked at the existing concept of

influencer marketing within the context of universities. According to Tustin et al. (2010), the research methods used in descriptive research are structured and quantitative in nature. They go on to describe quantitative research as the collection of primary data from a large sample to project results to a wider population. This study followed primarily a descriptive quantitative approach, as data collected from the population was subjected to statistical manipulation to describe the current situation, whilst also making basic inferences about all CSIT students at UKZN. In light of this, a quantitative survey method was used to collect data, whereby respondents answered questions administered through questionnaires.

3.4 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is a set of common philosophies shared between scientists about how problems should be understood (Dudovskiy, 2016). There are four main philosophies, namely pragmatism, positivism, realism and interpretivism (Dudovskiy, 2016). In positivism studies, objective data collection and interpretation are the main roles of the researcher, with observable and quantifiable research findings (Dudovskiy, 2016). This study followed a positivist approach, as it relied on the data collected via a questionnaire that was analysed. The results were quantifiable, as seen in chapter four. In a positivist approach, the researcher is independent of the research and maintains minimal interaction with research respondents. The study is based purely on facts and is considered objective (Dudovskiy, 2016). The researcher only encountered the respondents when administering the questionnaire. The findings of this study are based entirely on the data collected, and therefore are factual and objective.

3.5 Study Setting

UKZN is one of the country's top five universities, with about 45 000 enrolled students (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2017). This institution competes in a highly competitive sector with public and private competitors. The institution was chosen because it is one

of the top universities in the country, and therefore would be a university choice contender for school leavers.

The university is made up of four colleges:

- College of Humanities (CH)
- College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science (CAES)
- College of Health Sciences (CHS)
- College of Law and Management Studies (CLMS)

The College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science is the setting of this study, as it contains the Computer Science programme in the School of Mathematics, Statistics and Computer Science. The study was located on UKZN's Westville and Pietermaritzburg campuses, as the population was spread across both campuses. These students were chosen because they were most accessible to the researcher to conduct this study. The researcher is employed at the Public Relations (PR) unit for the CAES, whose purpose is to market all programmes in the college.

3.6 Population and Census Approach to Study

This study adopted a census approach rather than targeting a sample. Sampling is a technique used to select some of the elements in a population in order to draw conclusions about that population (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). A population is made up of elements about which we wish to make some inferences (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). A census is a count of all the elements in a population (Cooper and Schindler, 2003). Cooper and Schindler (2003) postulate that two conditions must exist for a census study to be feasible, namely: (1) when the population is small and (2) when the elements are quite different from each other. The entire first-year class of Computer Science students is the population and each individual student are the elements for this

study. The population was both small (152) and had different elements (see biographical data in section 4.3), which confirmed the feasibility of the census approach used. Therefore, the survey was distributed to the entire population and those that responded to the survey then became the census sample.

3.7 Construction of the Instrument

A questionnaire was used to gather information from selected respondents in hard copies. The instrument contained two sections. The first section collected biographical data that was used to profile respondents. The second section contained a list of possible influencers. Respondents were required to indicate how much each influencer affected their university choice, by using a 5-point Likert-style scale. The remaining questions required a yes/ no response, with the option to leave a comment. There were 16 questions in total, which took about 10 minutes to answer.

3.8 Data Collection

At first, data collection was done via an online questionnaire. A list of first-year computer science students with email addresses was to be obtained from the school's office. An online questionnaire was created, using the online survey site known as Kwik Surveys. This survey was then to be emailed to the students on the above-mentioned list. After consulting with the school's administration office, it was determined that this was not an effective data collection method. The school's office had a very poor response to course satisfaction surveys that they issued via email. The researcher was advised to take a more direct approach.

All 152 first-year computer science students have to enrol for the Computer Science 102 module, in order to complete their degree. This class ran four times a week on both campuses. Attendance was generally low, except for the exam revision classes at the end of the semester. These lectures provided the perfect opportunity to reach students on both campuses, by conducting a paper-based survey. The researcher spoke with

lecturers on both campuses and arranged to get the last 15 minutes of a lecture to administer the survey.

Data collection was done in two lecture sessions that being, one on each campus on different days. In both sessions, the researcher introduced himself, explained the research, administered the questionnaire and captured the results. Participation was completely voluntary, with those students not wanting to participate being allowed to leave the session. There were 110 respondents from a population of 152 students, which yielded a 72% response rate (out of an entire population).

3.9 Data Analysis

All data was captured in an excel document, by coding the questions and recording the responses. This data set was then handed over to a statistician, who utilised the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software for analysis of the data. Data was then presented in several formats (tables, graphs etc.) and returned to the researcher for interpretation. A descriptive analysis was done to provide a summary of the influencers identified by the census. Frequency tables identified the strongest influencers and were discussed in conjunction with the biographical data collected.

3.10 Reliability and Validity of the Study

Reliability is the degree to which research methods produce stable and consistent results (Dudovskiy, 2016). Here are the four most common ways of measuring reliability.

- Test-retest reliability - reliability is obtained by conducting the same test twice (Dudovskiy, 2016). The scores are then compared in order to evaluate the test for stability over time.

- Parallel forms reliability - reliability is achieved by distributing alternate versions of an assessment tool to the same group of individuals (Dudovskiy, 2016). The consistency of results can be evaluated by correlating the scores across alternate versions.
- Inter-rater reliability – this is a measure that assesses the degree to which respondent’s assessment decisions are in agreement, as answers are interpreted in different ways (Dudovskiy, 2016).
- Internal consistency reliability - is used to evaluate the degree to which different test items (that probe the same construct) produce similar results (Dudovskiy, 2016).

In order for a test to be reliable, it also needs to be valid. Research validity refers to how well an instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Dudovskiy, 2016). Here are the four most common ways of measuring validity.

- Face validity - this measure assesses the intended construct under study (Dudovskiy, 2016). If respondents do not believe the measure is accurate, they may become disengaged with the task.
- Construct validity - ensures that the measure is actually measuring the construct and no other variables (Dudovskiy, 2016). A panel of experts or students can be used to decide what a specific item measures.
- Criterion-related validity – Validity is achieved by correlating test results with another criterion of interest, which is used to predict future or current performance (Dudovskiy, 2016).
- Formative validity - is used to assess how well a measure is able to provide information to help improve the topic of study (Dudovskiy, 2016).

A pilot test was done on 10 volunteers, who were not part of the sample. Test-retest and parallel forms measures were used to test for reliability, by issuing the survey twice via online and paper-based methods. Results were more or less the same. A face validity measure was used to determine validity. Respondents deemed the survey valid as it asked questions relating to influencer marketing, and did not stray off topic.

3.11 Bias

Research bias occurs when researchers influence the results, in order to portray a certain outcome (Tustin et al, 2010). This study encountered a bias known as surrogate information error. This form of researcher bias is created by a variation in the information needed to address the marketing problem (Dudovskiy, 2016).

3.12 Ethical Considerations

This study embodied the following ten principles of ethical considerations (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

- Research respondents should not be put in harm's way or danger.
- The dignity of research respondents should be respected and prioritised.
- Prior to the study, full consent must be obtained from the respondents.
- The privacy of research respondents has to be protected.
- Research data confidentiality should be ensured.
- Respondent anonymity must be guaranteed in the research.

- Avoid deception or exaggeration when formulating the research aims and objectives.
- Affiliations, funding sources and possible conflicts of interest must be declared.
- Communication must be honest and transparent in relation to the research.
- Misleading information or the bias representation of primary data, must be avoided.

The following ethical considerations were made:

- Due to this research involving human subjects, ethical clearance was obtained from UKZN in accordance with the General Guidelines for the Ethics Review Process. A gatekeepers letter was obtained that allowed the researcher to administer the study at the UKZN.
- A letter of informed consent was attached to the front of each questionnaire, stating the purpose of the study and declaring that participation was voluntary. Each respondent signed and submitted the letter along with their completed questionnaire. Participation by respondents was done on a voluntary basis.
- In formulating the questionnaire, offensive and discriminatory language was avoided.
- Privacy and anonymity of respondents were guaranteed. No confidential or identifying information was released or seen by anyone other than the researcher.
- Acknowledgement of works of other authors was made in text and in the reference list, using the Harvard referencing system.

3.13 Summary

In this chapter, the research methods used to gather the data was discussed. The aim of the research was to add the theory of influencer marketing and provide recommendations to improve UKZN recruitment practices. The study conducted descriptive research, by collecting quantitative data and following a positivist research paradigm. The University of KwaZulu-Natal was chosen as the setting for this study. A census approach was adopted targeting an entire population of the first-year BSc CSIT students. A survey approach was adopted to collect data, which was analysed using SPSS statistical software. The study had a response rate of 72%, since there were 110 respondents from a population of 152 students. The study was tested for reliability and validity, and biases were addressed. Finally, a discussion around ethical considerations was made. The data that was collected and analysed will be presented and analysed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results from the data collected and links the findings to the literature reviewed. The questionnaire consisted of questions that were structured using a Likert-scale format combined with yes/ no questions. The administration of the questionnaire took the form of a traditional self-completed questionnaire. The responses were analysed quantitatively and discussed descriptively through a narrative discussion and a graphical presentation of the data.

4.2 Reliability Analysis

Cooper and Schindler (2003) define reliability as the accuracy and precision of a measurement procedure. To determine if the data is reliable, a Cronbach's alpha was calculated along with the proportion of respondents. The results of these calculations are shown in Table 4.1 below. All statistical analysis was performed using SPSS software.

Statistical test	Test Value	N
Response rate	72%	110/ 152
Cronbach's Alpha	0.961	19

Table 4.1: Reliability statistics

The measure of reliability is the precision of a research instrument. For quantitative instruments, reliability is assessed through testing and re-testing methods (Muijs, 2010). The reliability statistics show that this survey has a high response rate of 72%.

A high response rate shows that many of the respondents approached and answered the study. The high Cronbach's alpha value of 0.961 (any value > 0.7 is considered acceptable), shows that the data is reliable.

4.3 Biographical Analysis

The respondents were asked to provide information in order to establish a biographical profile of the respondents who represent the CSIT first-year students. The data is presented graphically and discussed descriptively.

4.3.1 Gender

The gender demographics of the respondents are shown in Figure 4.1. It can be seen that three-quarters of the respondents identify as male (at 75%), while 25% identify as female. These findings show that the computer science programme is largely male-dominated.

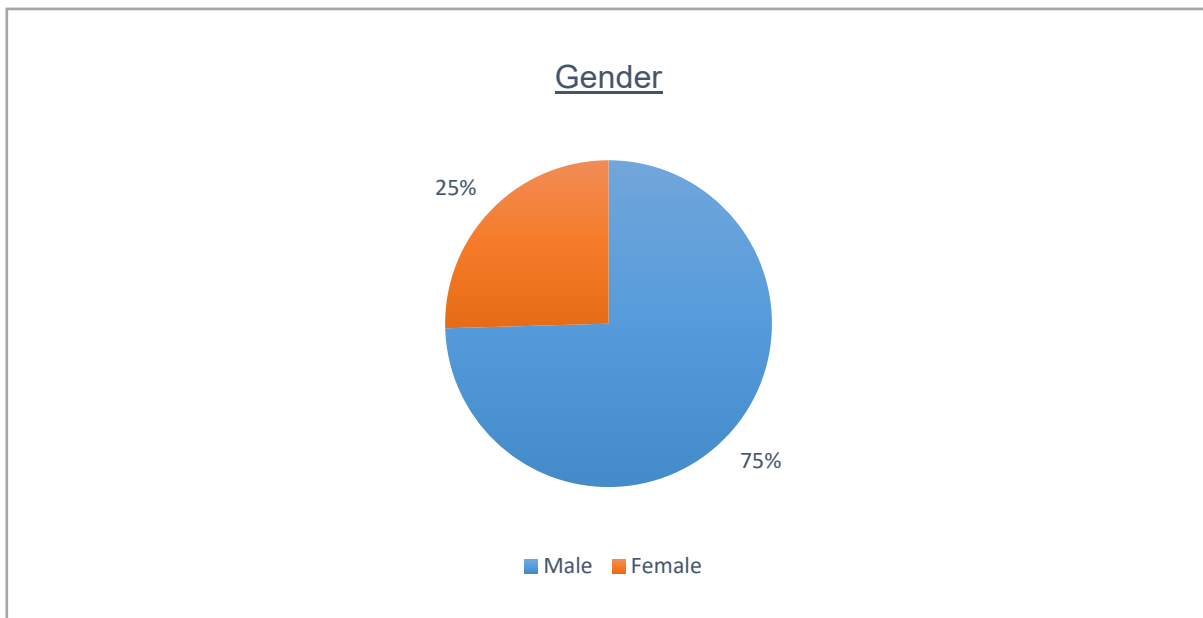


Figure 4.1: Gender of respondents

4.3.2 Age

The age groups of respondents presented in Figure 4.2, shows that 46% of respondents are teenagers and 54% are young adults. The minority of respondents (1%) are between the ages of 16 and 17 years old. At 45%, the majority of the respondents are between the ages of 18 and 19 years old. The next biggest age group are the 20 to 21 year-olds, who account for 40% of respondents. Fourteen percent of respondents are older than 22 years of age. This age distribution shows that the respondents are part of the millennial generation born between 1982 and 2003 (Schawbel, 2015). This study looked at millennial behaviour in terms of university choice, as detailed in chapter two. The respondents are about to enter adulthood, where they will begin to make decisions on their own. Keeling, (2003) noted that this generation have difficulty in making decisions because they lack decision-making skills, have too many options to consider, or are not motivated to act.

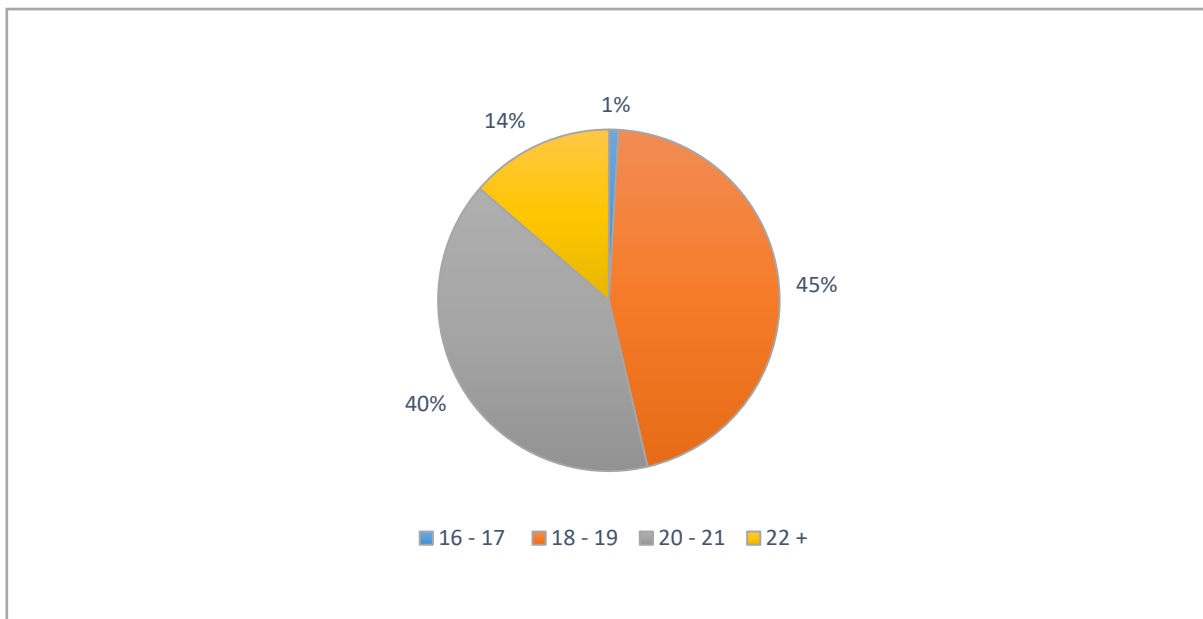


Figure 4.2: Age of respondents

4.3.3 Race

Figure 4.3 shows the race demographics of respondents and indicates the diversity of first-year computer science students. The majority of respondents identify as African (at 62%), which indicates that the university is achieving transformation in its student population. Thirty-two percent of respondents identify as Asian, which is considered to be from the South African Indian population. White people (Caucasians) account for 3% of respondents, while 3% identify as an “other” race group. The Coloured race are the least represented race group at 1%. All of South Africa’s race groups are represented in this study and the race demographics are representative of the KwaZulu-Natal region.

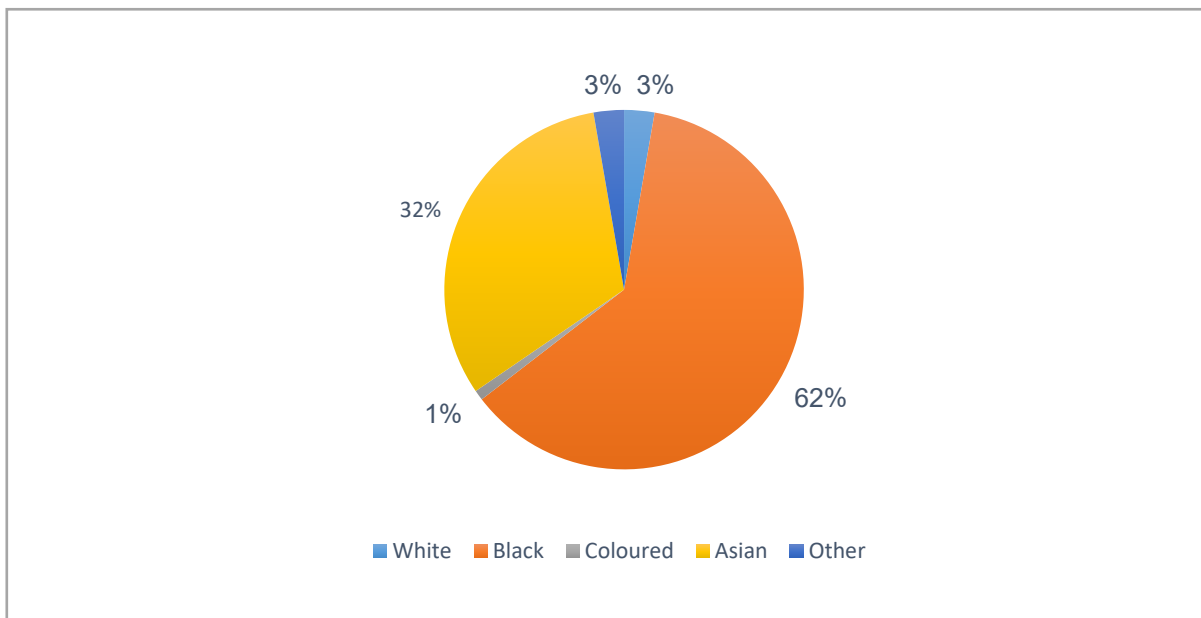


Figure 4.3: Race of respondents

4.3.4 Language

The different home languages of respondents are presented in Figure 4.4. The majority of respondents (46%) are Zulu speakers, which is indicative of the prevalence of Zulu tribes in KwaZulu-Natal. There are an equal number of respondents that speak Xhosa

and other international languages at 5% each. A few respondents speak Pedi (2%) and Venda (2%), while only 1% of respondents speak Sotho. The majority (55%) of respondents speak African languages native to South Africa, which is reflective of the majority of students being of African descent (as indicated in Figure 4.3). English is chosen as the home language by 40% of respondents. Since English is the language of instruction at UKZN, it is expected that all respondents are fluent in English.

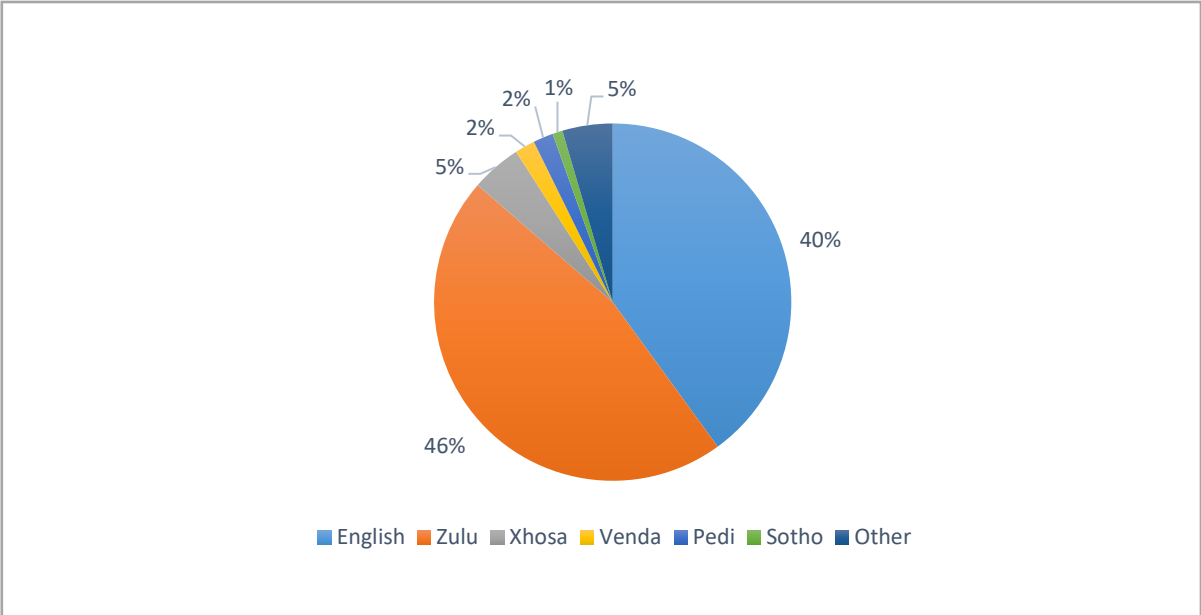


Figure 4.4: Language of respondents

4.3.5 Campus Location

In Figure 4.5, the campus location of respondents is shown. The majority of respondents are based on UKZN’s Westville campus at 65% and 35% are based on the Pietermaritzburg campus. This is a true reflection of the distribution of computer science students across the two campuses. Westville campus has more students than Pietermaritzburg campus, because it is located in Durban which is more urbanised and populated than Pietermaritzburg.

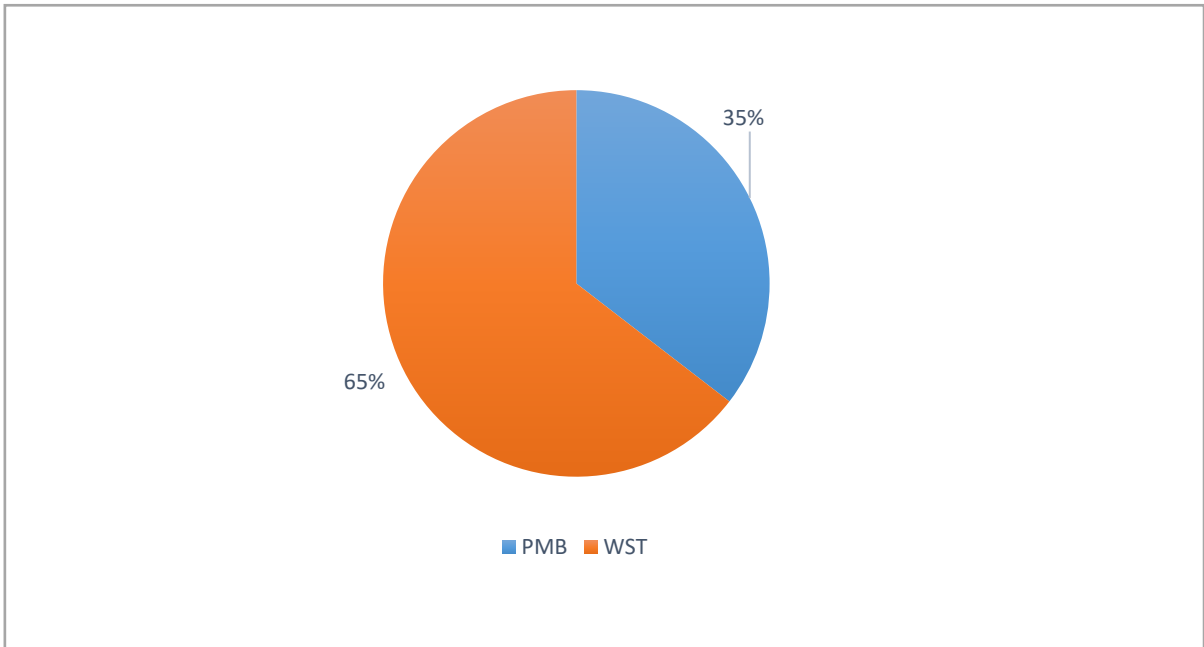


Figure 4.5: Campus location of respondents

4.3.6 Source of Financing

The source of financing that students use to fund their studies is displayed in Figure 4.6. Ninety one percent of respondents need assistance in funding their studies, through either family, loans or bursaries. This is to be expected as they are school leavers who are not yet employment. The majority (36%) of respondents are funding their studies with the help of a parent/ family/ guardian. Thirty six percent of respondents are paying for their studies by obtaining a loan, which also needs a parent/ family/ guardian to stand as surety. Eighteen percent of respondents have received a bursary, which would have been issued by NSFA's, a company or the university itself. Nine percent of respondents claimed to be using their own finances to fund their studies. These funds would be raised by working part-time, saving money, or receiving an inheritance. These findings highlight how inaccessible higher education is to youth without financial support or means.

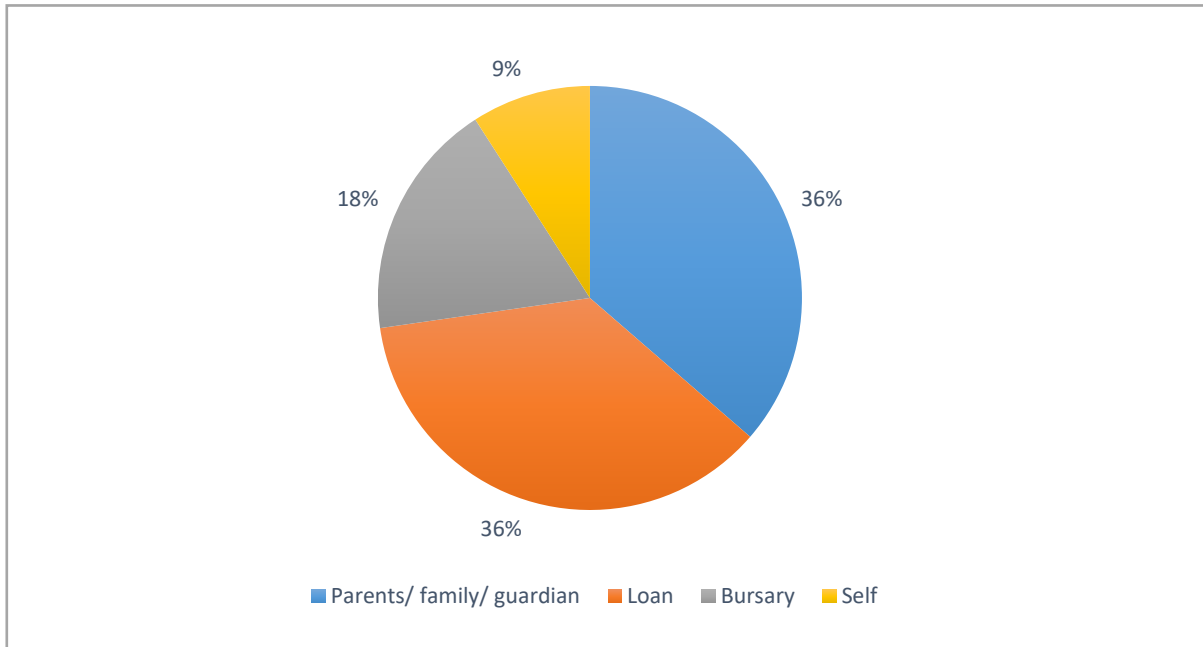


Figure 4.6: Source of financing used by respondents

4.4 Descriptive Statistics

For this discussion, influencers are grouped into four categories: Interpersonal/ Intrapersonal influencers, School influencers, UKZN influencers and Inspirational influencers. Data collected on how students feel about influencers is also presented. The data will be presented and then discussed descriptively.

4.4.1 Interpersonal/ Intrapersonal Influencers

Interpersonal influencers refer to people whom respondents have a personal relationship with and have influenced their university choice. These include: parents, siblings, other relatives and friends. Intrapersonal influencers refer to the respondents themselves (myself) and their introspection regarding university choice. These influencers' results are shown in Figure 4.7.

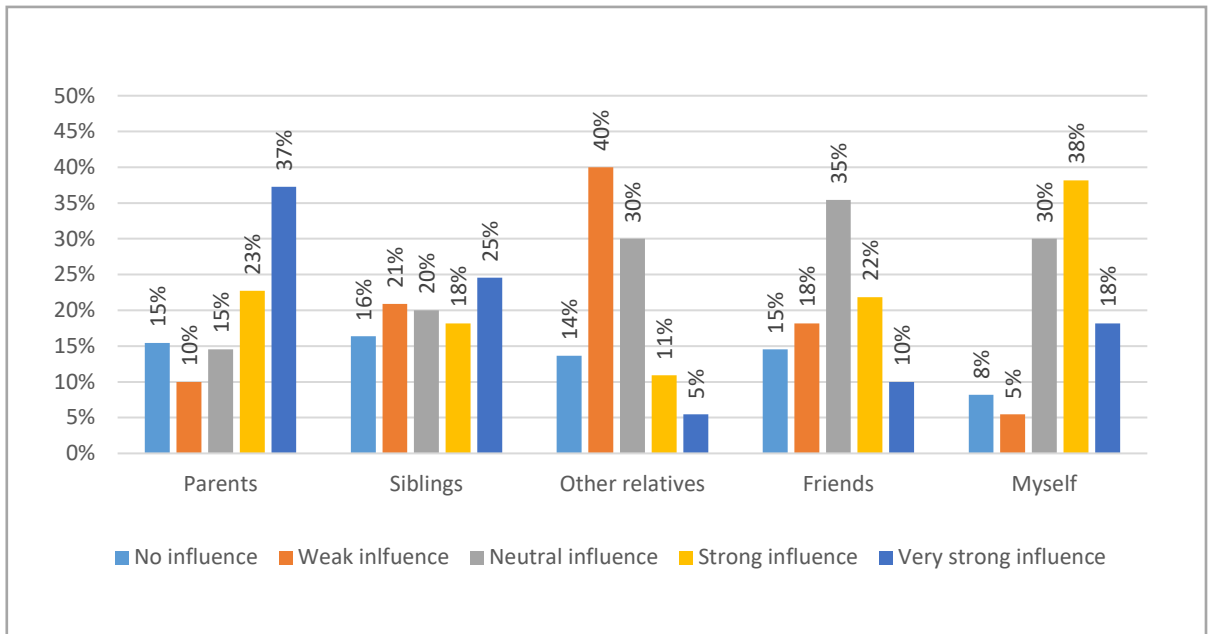


Figure 4.7: Interpersonal/ Intrapersonal influencers

When looking at the parental influencers, the majority (60%) of respondents said that their parents had a strong to very strong influence on their choice of university. Twenty-five percent of respondents claimed their parents had a little or no influence on their university choice. Fifteen percent of respondents felt that their parents had a neutral influence on their university decision. Overall, respondents felt that parents were strong influencers of university choice. These findings are supported by the Pimpa (2002) and Babin et al (2010) studies, which both identified parents as the strongest influencers of university choice. The strength of this influencer could be attributed to the fact that they assist students in decision-making, as suggested by (Keeling, 2003). Another reason could be because the majority of students need parental assistance to fund their studies, as indicated in section 4.3.6 and figure 4.6.

Forty-three percent of respondents (the majority) said that siblings had a strong to very strong influence on their university choice. Thirty seven percent of respondents said that their siblings had little to no influence on their choice of university. Twenty percent of respondents felt that their siblings had a neutral influence on their university decision.

These findings indicate that respondents feel that siblings are strong influencers of university choice, but not to the extent of parents. This is in contravention to the Lubbe and Petzer (2013) study, which found siblings to be among the least influential information sources that affect university choice.

Respondents don't seem to consider other relatives as strong influencers of university choice. Only sixteen percent of respondents said that other relatives were strong to very strong influencers of university choice. The majority of respondents (54%) felt that other relatives had little to no influence on their choice of university. Thirty percent of respondents found other relatives to have a neutral influence on their university decision. This is in line with Lubbe and Petzer (2013) and Abrahams et al (2015), which found that family influences (other than parents) did not significantly influence university choice.

Results show that 35% of respondents see friends as having a neutral influence on their choice of university. Thirty-two percent of respondents feel their friends have a strong to very strong influence on their university choice. Thirty-three percent of respondents said that friends had little to no influence on their university decision. Although the majority of students regard friends as neutral influencers, there was almost an even distribution of responses. This is in contravention with the findings of the Johnston (2010) and Babin et al (2010) studies, which ranked friends as strong influencers of university choice.

The majority of respondents (56%) see themselves as strong to very strong influencers in the university choice decision. Thirteen percent of respondents felt that they had little to no influence on their choice of university. Thirty percent of respondents believed they had a neutral influence of their choice of university. The general consensus is that the students see themselves as strong influencers. This in line with the Babin et al (2010) and Shumba and Naong (2012) studies, which both acknowledged the influence of personal interest and preference on students' university choice. Students factor their own thoughts and opinions into their university decision, as this is one of the first life

decisions they will make on their own.

Overall, the results show that parents, siblings and the respondents themselves are considered to be strong influencers. Friends are seen to be neutral influencers and other relatives are weak influencers of university choice.

4.4.2 School Influencers

These influencers refer to people that respondents have encountered in high school that have influenced their university choice, such as: teachers and guidance/ career counsellors. The results pertaining to these influencers are shown in Figure 4.8 below.

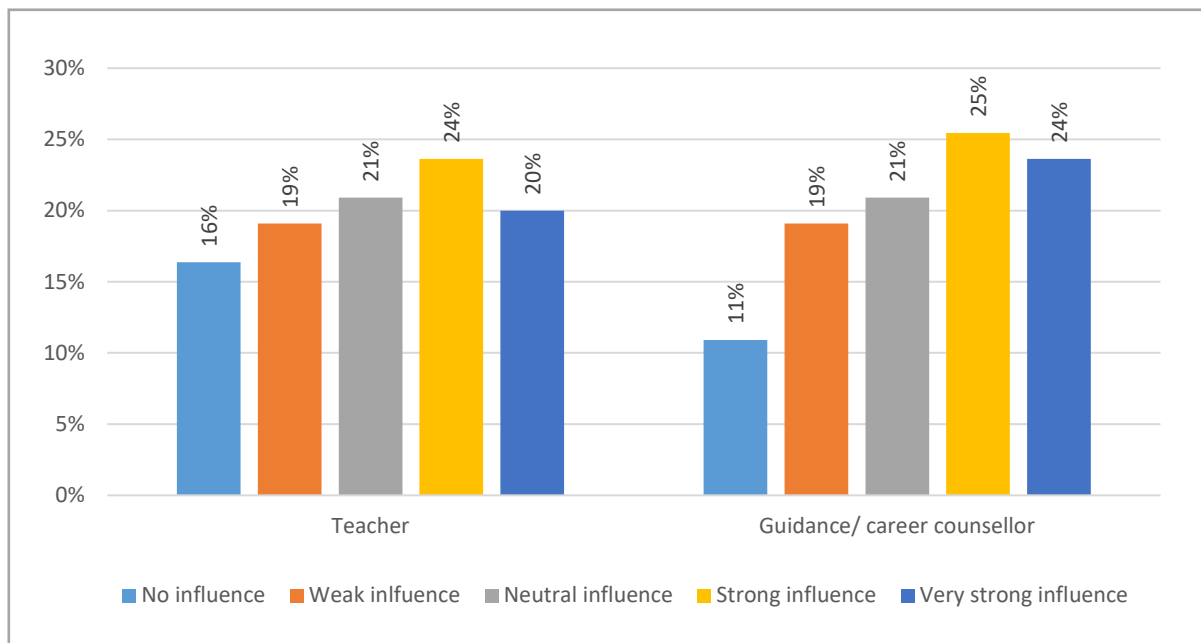


Figure 4.8: School influencers

Looking at the influence of teachers, 44% of respondents said that teachers are strong to very strong influencers of university choice. Thirty-five percent of respondents felt that teachers had little to no influence on their choice of university. Twenty-one percent

of respondent's see teachers as having a neutral influence on their university decision. The majority of students considered teachers to be a strong influencer. Shumba and Naong (2012) and Babin et al (2010) both support this finding, having recognised teachers as being among the top influencers of university choice. (Lubbe and Petzer, 2013) found that first-generation university students rely more on brochures, talking to others and teachers than second-generation students.

Forty-nine percent of respondents (the majority) claimed that guidance/ career counsellors had a strong to very strong influence on their university choice. Thirty percent of respondents said that guidance/ career counsellors had little to no influence on their choice of university. Twenty-one percent of respondents felt that guidance/ career counsellors had a neutral influence on their university decision. Overall students found guidance/ career counsellors to be strong influencers of university choice. This differs in findings from the Abrahams et al (2015) and Babin et al (2010) studies, which found guidance counsellors to be among the weakest influencers of university choice.

Based on the aforementioned results, school influencers (teachers and guidance/ career counsellors) are considered to be strong influencers of university choice.

4.4.3 UKZN Influencers

These influencers refer to people (affiliated with UKZN) that have influenced respondents' university choice. These influencers include: UKZN staff (schools liaison officers, public relations officers or academics), UKZN alumni or current UKZN students. The findings of these influencers are shown in Figure 4.9.

UKZN staff are seen as a strong to very strong influencers of university choice, according to 37% of respondents. Thirty seven percent of respondents also said that UKZN staff had little to no influence on their choice of university. Twenty-six percent of respondents felt that UKZN staff had a neutral influence on their university decision.

Overall it seems that UKZN staff have a neutral influence on university choice, since they were rated as strong and weak by the same number of respondents.

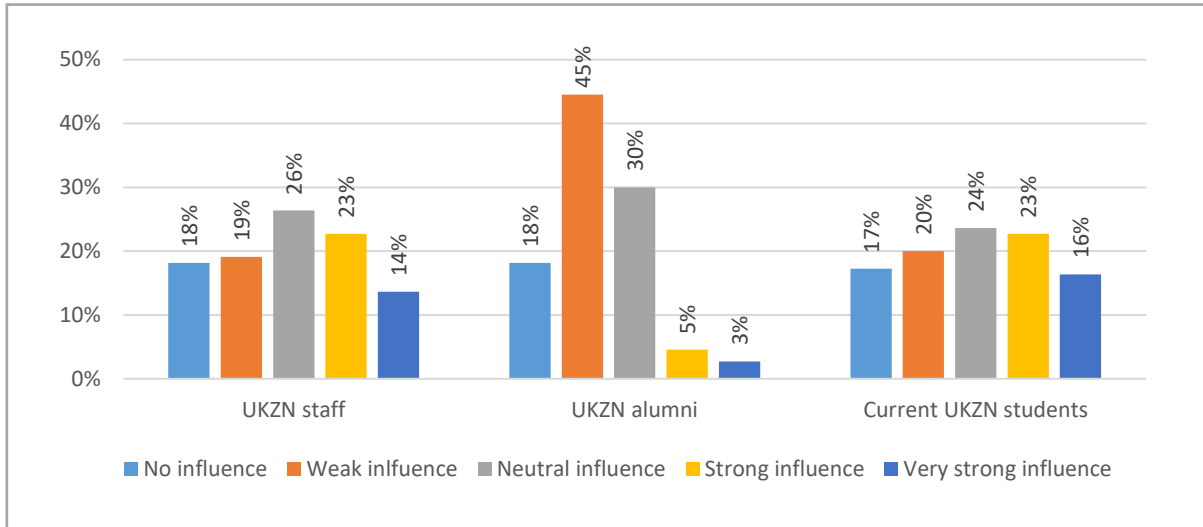


Figure 4.9: UKZN influencers

This is an interesting finding, as the students would have encountered these staff (schools liaison officers, public relations officers and academics at open days) during recruitment drives. These influencers would be assumed to be strong influencers, since they are actively involved in influencing students to attend UKZN. These findings are in contravention with the van Heerdan et al (2009) and Johnston (2010) studies, which noted university staff to be strong influencers of university choice.

Looking at UKZN alumni, 63% of respondents (the majority) considered alumni to have little to no influence on university choice. Thirty percent of respondents saw UKZN alumni as neutral influencers of university choice. Only 8% of respondents felt that UKZN alumni had a strong to very strong influence on their university decision. It seems that students see UKZN alumni as weak influencers of university choice. This is supported by the findings of van Heerdan et al (2009), which also ranked alumni as a weak influencer of university choice. A possible reason for this is that potential students do not get the opportunity to interact with alumni.

Thirty-nine percent of respondents, said that current UKZN students have a strong to very strong influence on their choice of university. Forty-seven percent of respondents felt that current UKZN students had little to no influence on their university choice. Twenty-four percent of respondents considered current UKZN students to have a neutral influence on their university decision. It seems that majority of respondents, see current UKZN students as weak influencers of university choice. This is supported by the findings of the van Heerdan et al (2009) study, which found student ambassadors to be among the weakest influencers.

It seems that this category of influencers are not strong influencers of university choice, with the majority of respondents finding UKZN staff as neutral influencers; and UKZN alumni and students as weak influencers. This is surprising as these influencers are often featured in university marketing material.

4.4.4 Inspirational Influencers

Inspirational influencers refer to people that respondents have looked up to and may have inspired their university choice. These influencers include industry professionals, social media personalities, bloggers/ vloggers, spiritual leaders and political leaders. The findings relating to these influencers are presented in Figure 4.10.

Industry professionals are seen as having little to no influence on university choice, according to the 75% of respondents. Twenty percent of respondents believe that industry professionals have a strong to very strong influence on their choice of university. Only 15% of respondents said that industry professionals had a neutral influence of their university decision. It seems that the majority of students consider industry professional to be weak influencers of university choice. This is supported by the findings of James et al (2018), which also found industry professionals to be weak influencers. A possible reason for this weak influence is that students have not come in contact with industry professionals, as they are still in school.

A similar trend regarding the influence of social media personalities and blogger/vloggers, can be seen. Regarding social media personalities: 67% percent of respondents said that they had little to no influence, 9% said they were strong to very strong influencers and 25% said they were neutral influencers. Regarding blogger/vloggers: 57% percent of respondents said that they had little to no influence, 15% said they were strong to very strong influencers and 28% said they were neutral influencers of university choice. Overall, respondents considered both social media personalities and blogger/ vloggers to be weak influencers. These findings are supported by the Constantinides and Stagno (2012) and Johnston (2010) studies, which both found social media to be a weak influencer of university choice. Constantinides and Stagno (2012) go onto state that the lack of relevant content could explain why social media has a relatively weak influence.

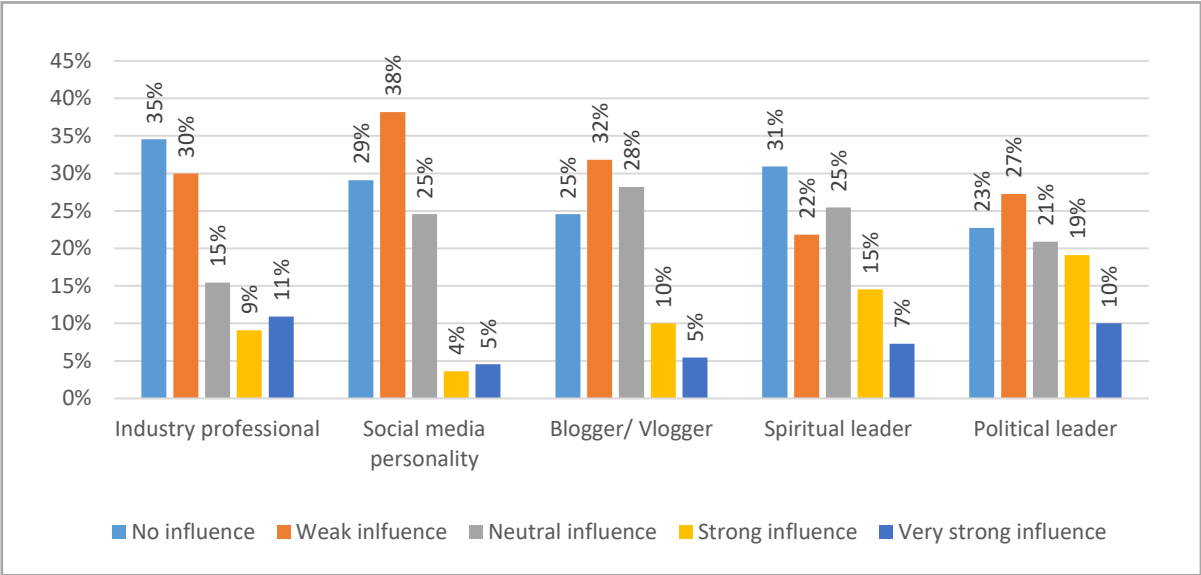


Figure 4.10: Inspirational influencers

Fifty-three percent of respondents consider spiritual leaders as having little to no influence on their choice of university. Twenty-two percent of respondents saw spiritual leaders as strong to very strong influencers of university choice. Twenty-five percent of respondents said that spiritual leaders have a neutral influence on their university

decision. The majority of respondents see spiritual leaders as weak influencers of university choice. These findings are supported by Schipull (2009) and is in contravention with Dial (2014).

Political leaders were considered to have little to no influence on university choice by 50% of respondents. Twenty-nine percent of respondents said that political leaders had a strong to very strong influence on their choice of university. Twenty-one percent of respondents feel that political leaders have a neutral influence on their university decision. It appears that the majority of respondents see political leaders as weak influencers of university choice. The reason for this weak influence could be related to respondents having negative perceptions of political leaders, as found in the Tracey (2016) and Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (2012) studies.

According to the majority of respondents, inspirational influencers are weak influencers of university choice. Looking at all influencer data, the following can be noted: parents, siblings, the respondents themselves (myself), teachers and guidance/ career counsellors were all considered to be strong influencers. Friends and UKZN staff were seen as neutral influencers. Other relatives, UKZN alumni, current UKZN students, industry professionals, social media personalities, blogger/vloggers, spiritual leaders and political leaders were all said to be weak influencers.

4.4.5 Students Feelings about Influencers

Respondents were asked a series of questions about influencers, which is presented in the following discussion. The data is examined in order to determine how respondents feel about influencers and their influence.

4.4.5.1 Need for influencer in decision-making process

Respondents were asked if they were able to make the university choice decision without an influencer. The majority answered no (55%), as seen in Figure 4.11. This is proof that influencers play an important role in the university choice decision.

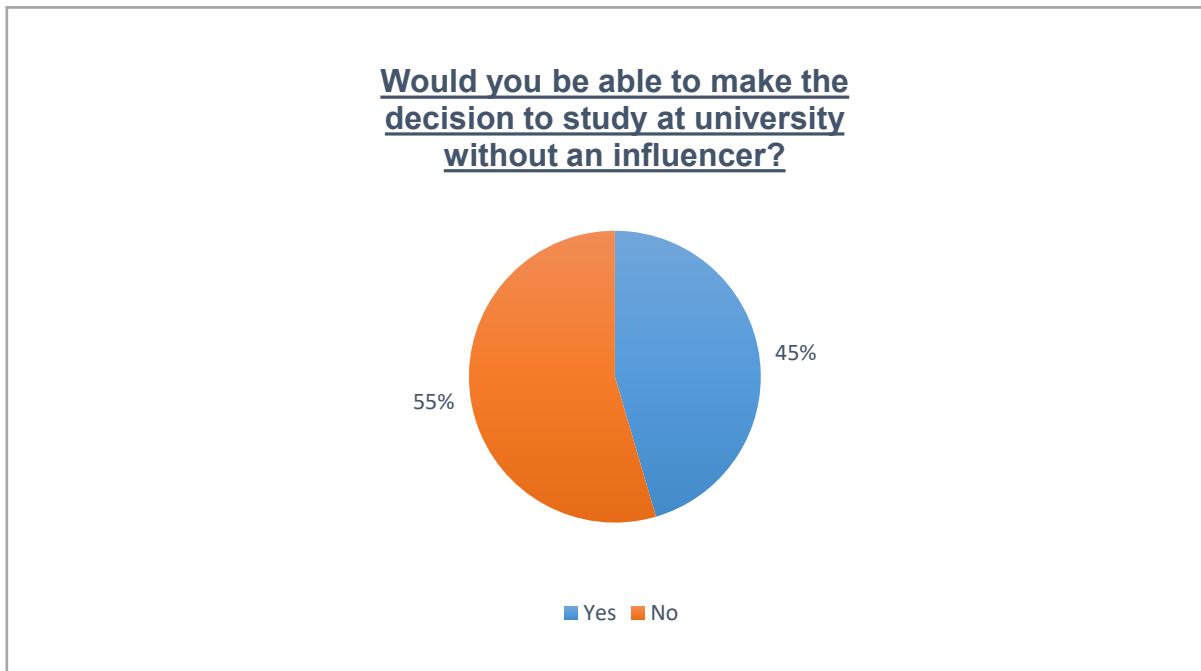


Figure 4.11: Need for influencer in decision-making process

This is in line with the studies done by van Heerdan et al (2009) and Johnston (2010), which listed influencers as the most influential information source used to by potential students to inform their university choice. Influencers will be engaged during the first three stages of the decision-making process (problem recognition, information search and evaluation of alternatives), as detailed in section 2.4 and figure 2.1. Without the influencers, the respondents claim they will not be able to make the purchase decision (as seen in figure 4.11).

4.4.5.2 Influencer vs university trust

Figure 4.12 shows results about whether respondents trust information from influencers more than information from the university. Responses were almost evenly split, with 52% saying no and 48% saying yes. This means that information from influencers is valued almost as much as information from the university, among respondents.

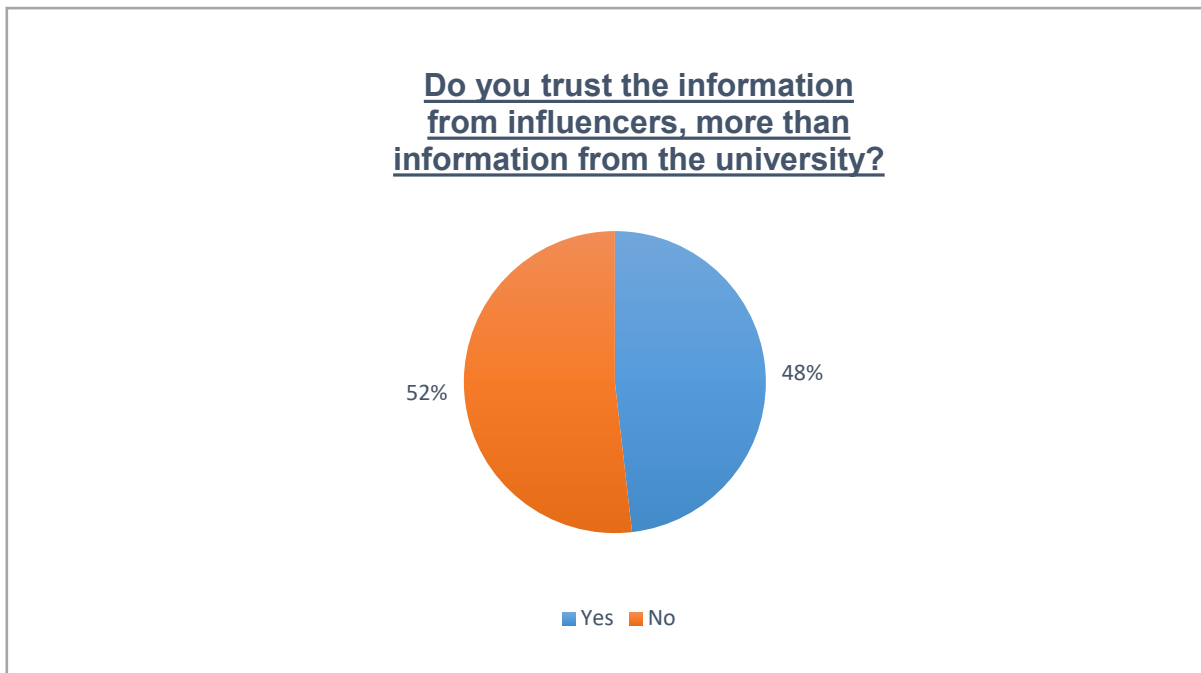


Figure 4.12: Influencer versus university trust

This finding implies that students trust information from influencers almost as much as information from the university. This is supported by Johnston (2010), which found that university staff were ranked as having the highest influence, followed by personal sources of information received from family/ friends. It's interesting to note that although information from UKZN is trusted slightly more than influencers, UKZN influencers were found to have a neutral to weak influence - as shown in section 4.4.3.

4.4.5.3 Incorporating influencers into marketing

Respondents were asked if they wanted influencers to be incorporated into university marketing strategies. Figure 4.13 shows that 69% of respondents said that they would like influencers to be incorporated into marketing strategies, while 31% said they would not. Figure 4.11 showed that respondents need to consult with influencers to make their university choice and figure 4.12 showed that university information sources are trusted more.

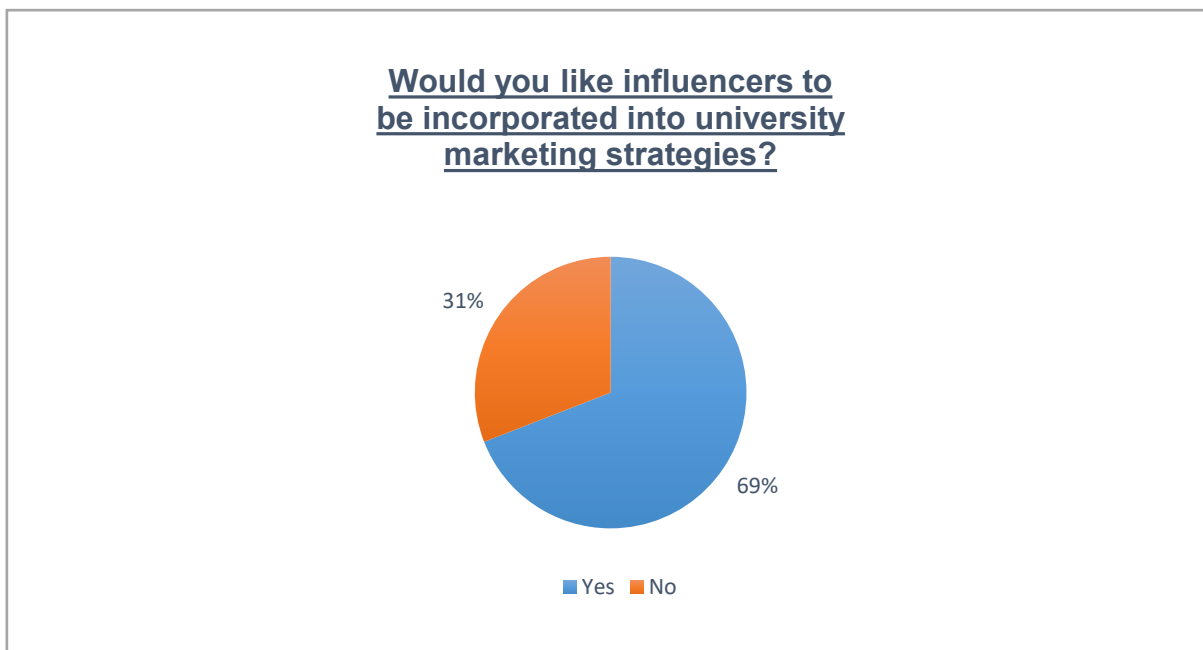


Figure 4.13: Incorporating influencers into marketing

It makes sense to incorporate influencers into university marketing strategies. Doing this will aid students in moving to the fourth stage of the decision-making process and make the purchase (as shown in figure 2.1).

4.4.5.4 Contentment with university choice

Ninety percent of respondents said that they were happy with their choice to study at UKZN and 10% said they were not, as shown in Figure 4.14. Because students felt they needed influencers to choose a university (figure 4.11) and they trust the information from these influencers as much as university sources (figure 4.12), they wanted influencers incorporated into marketing strategies (figure 4.13). They used this information from influencers to make their university choice.

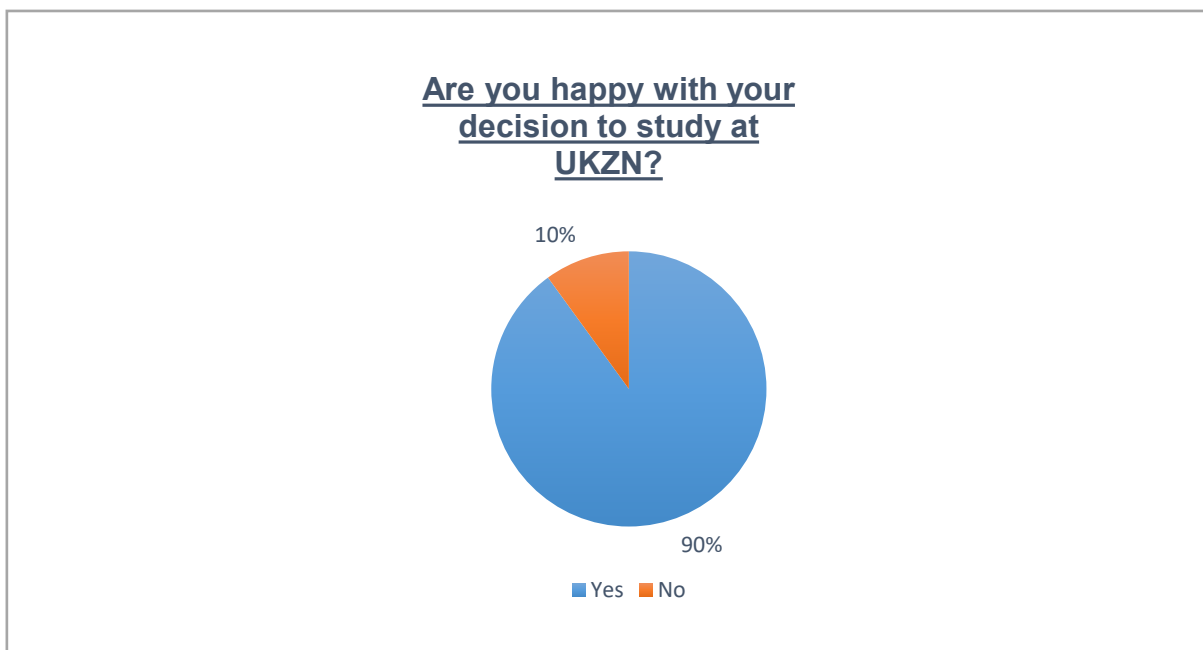


Figure 4.14: Contentment with university choice

Figure 4.14 shows that the majority of students are content with their university choice decision. This contentment indicates that students have experienced some level of satisfaction and have moved to the final stage of the decision-making process (post-purchase behaviour), as detailed in section 2.4 and figure 2.1. The respondent's contentment with their university choice, also indicates that influencers have had a positive effect on university choice. This influence can be attributed to the strong influencers: parents, siblings, the respondents themselves (myself), teachers and

guidance/ career counsellors were all considered to be strong influencers (as identified in section 4.4).

Overall, the majority of respondents felt that they needed influencers to choose a university and they trust information from influencers as much as information from the university. Respondents want influencers to be incorporated into marketing strategies and they are happy with their choice of university after consulting with influencers.

4.5 Inferential Statistics

This section delves deeper into this investigation of influencers by determining the strength of influence, which was one of the aims of the study. A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was done as it measures the minimum number of factors that explain the largest variance in the dataset. The results show the calculated Eigenvalues (actual contribution of the variance of each factor) and are presented in Table 4.2. The influencers are ranked from strongest to weakest.

The commonly used Eigenvalue-greater-than one principle was applied to the factors. Influencers with an Eigenvalue greater than one are considered as significant and those with Eigenvalue less than one are insignificant.

Rank	Initial Eigenvalues				
	Type of influencer	Influencer	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	Interpersonal/ Intrapersonal influencers	Parents	13.733	91.556	91.556
2		Siblings	.421	2.804	94.360
3		Other relatives	.180	1.200	95.560
4		Friends	.174	1.157	96.717

5		Myself	.117	.783	97.500
6	School influencers	Teacher	.102	.679	98.178
7		Guidance/ career counsellor	.059	.391	98.570
8	UKZN influencers	UKZN staff	.056	.372	98.941
9		UKZN alumni	.041	.272	99.213
10		Current UKZN students	.029	.193	99.406
11	Inspirational influencers	Industry professional	.027	.180	99.586
12		Social media personality	.021	.138	99.724
13		Blogger/ Vlogger	.018	.119	99.843
14		Spiritual leader	.012	.083	99.926
15		Political leader	.011	.074	100.000

Table 4.2: Principal component analysis

The results show that parents were ranked as the strongest influencer (Eigenvalue = 13.73, 91.56% of variance). Parents were significantly stronger than any other influencer, as they were the only factor with an Eigenvalue greater than 1. This is supported by the findings in Figure 4.7, which show that respondents saw parents had a strong to very strong influence. Studies by Pimpa (2002) and Babin et al (2010) also found parent to be the strongest influencers. The rest of the interpersonal/ intrapersonal influencers made up the top 5, such as: siblings (Eigenvalue = 0.42, 2.8%), other relatives (Eigenvalue = 0.18, 1.2%), friends (Eigenvalue = 0.17, 1.16%) and myself (Eigenvalue = 0.12, 0.78%).

Teachers (Eigenvalue = 0.10, 0.68%) were the strongest influencer among school influencers. This is surprising as the role of a guidance/ career counsellor is to influence university and career choice, yet they are less influential than teachers and interpersonal/ intrapersonal influencers. This is supported by the findings in figure 4.8, which shows that respondents considered teachers and career/ guidance counsellors to be strong influencers.

The UKZN staff (Eigenvalue = 0.56, 0.37%) were ranked as the strongest of the UKZN influencers, which is expected as staff (such as those working in School Liaison, Marketing and Public Relations) are actively responsible for influencing university and career choice when it comes to prospective students. It's surprising to note their relatively low ranking (regarding influence on university choice) when compared to the interpersonal, intrapersonal and school influencers. The mid-ranking of these influencers corresponds with the findings of figure 4.9, which showed UKZN influencers to have a neutral to weak influence on university choice.

Political leaders were ranked as the weakest influencer (Eigenvalue = 0.01, 0.07% of variance), while the rest of the inspirational influencers made up the bottom five. They were ranked as follows: industry professional (Eigenvalue = 0.27, 0.18%), social media personality (Eigenvalue = 0.21, 0.14%), blogger/vlogger (Eigenvalue = 0.18, 0.12%), spiritual leader (Eigenvalue = 0.12, 0.08%). The low ranking of these influencers corresponds with the findings of figure 4.10, which showed UKZN influencers to have little to no influence on university choice.

It's interesting to note that Interpersonal/ Intrapersonal influencers were the strongest influencers (figure 4.7), followed by school influencers (figure 4.8), then UKZN influencers (figure 4.9) before ranking inspirational influencers as the weakest influencers (figure 4.10). It seems that the strongest influencers are the ones that students interact with the most. Students are likely to have daily interactions with interpersonal/ intrapersonal influencers and would see school influencers often but to a lesser degree. UKZN influencers would only be encountered a few times during open

days and school visits. Inspirational influencers would only be encountered as part of the students' information search process.

Since parents are the strongest influencers, efforts should be made to incorporate them into university marketing strategies because of their influence on university choice. Efforts should also be made to improve the influence of the weaker influencers, especially in the case of university staff whose role is to recruit students. These and other recommendations will be made in chapter five.

4.6 Application of Theoretical Framework

The Social Influence Theory as proposed by Kelman (1958) was used as the theoretical framework of this study. Kelman (1958) delineated three primary processes of influence: compliance, identification, internalisation, which were explored in chapter two. The influence of parent will be applied to the model to demonstrate the Social Influence Theory, thereafter a revised model will be proposed that incorporates other influencers with potential.

4.6.1 Application of Model

Social influence occurs when a person's awareness and actions are affected by others (Zhou, 2011). In the current study, parents were found to be the strongest influencers of university choice (table 4.2), and their influence is applied to the Social Influence Theory in Figure 4.15.

The study results show that parents were the strongest influence (table 4.2), hence compliance occurs when an individual accepts influence in order to adopt the induced behaviour to gain approval or avoid disapproval (Kelman, 1958). Students can be said to have complied with their parents influence to attend UKZN. This is evidenced in the fact that the students are attending UKZN and that they could not have made that the choice without influencers (figure 4.11), the strongest of which was parents (table 4.2).

Students would get approval from parents because they complied with their parents' university choice.

Identification is said to occur when individuals adopt the induced behaviour in order to create or maintain a desired and beneficial relationship to another person or a group (Kelman, 1958). Students maintain their relationship with their parents by accepting their influence and consequently choosing to attend UKZN, therefore adopting the induced behaviour.

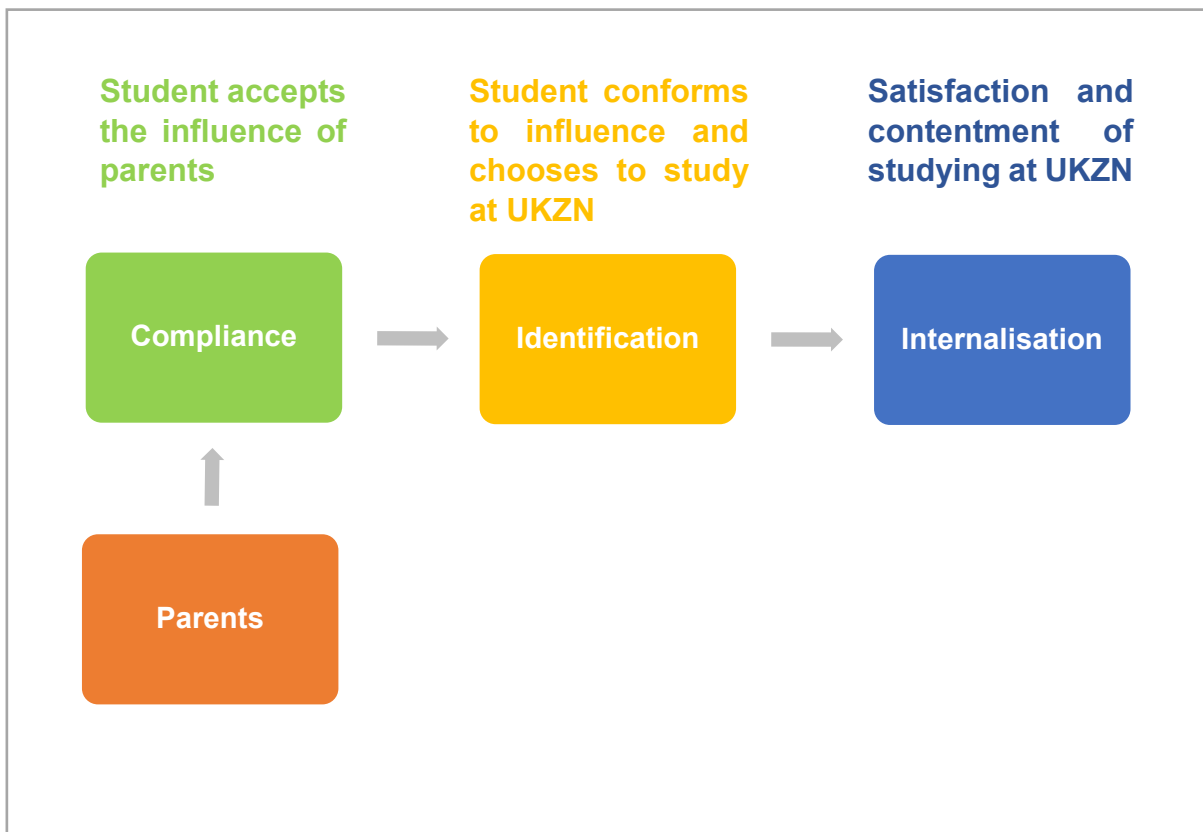


Figure 4.15: Current application of model of social influence on university choice

Internalisation is assumed to occur when individuals accept influence after perceiving the content of the induced behaviour is rewarding and after realising that it is congruent

with their value system (Kelman, 1958). Students chose to attend UKZN after perceiving that they would get their parents' approval and realising that it's what they (the students) wanted as well. This is evidenced on the fact 90% of students are happy with their decision to attend UKZN (figure 4.14) and 56% of students saw themselves as strong influencers (figure 4.7). Hence, satisfaction occurs due to the content of the new behaviour (attending UKZN).

4.6.2 Proposed Model

The findings of this study showed that parents were the strongest influencers of university choice. However, this study does not intend to neglect nor ignore the potential of other influencers. There is a high probability that students did not rank the other influencers as strong (as parents) primarily because they have not been properly exposed to such influencers in the past. These influencers can reach their potential if they are developed and if student are exposed to them. Figure 4.16 expands the model of social influence on university choice, to include influencers that have potential to be strong influencers of university choice.

The following influencers showed potential to be developed, based on findings from this study or the literature presented in chapter 2.

- Siblings - 43% of respondents (the majority) said that siblings had a strong influence on their university choice (figure 4.7).
- Friends - 35% of respondents found friends to be neutral influencers (figure 4.7), but Johnston (2010) and Babin et al (2010) ranked friends as strong influencers of university choice.
- Teachers - 21% of respondent's saw teachers as having a neutral influence on their university decision (figure 4.8), but Shumba and Naong (2012) and Babin

et al (2010), recognised teachers as being among the top influencers of university choice.

- Guidance/ career counsellors - 49% of respondents (the majority) claimed that guidance/ career counsellors had a strong influence, as did Babin et al (2010).
- UKZN staff - Respondents found that UKZN staff have a neutral influence on university choice (figure 4.9), while van Heerdan et al (2009) and Johnston (2010) found university staff to be strong influencers of university choice.
- Social media personalities - Although 67% of respondents said that these influencers were weak (figure 4.10), Constantinides and Stagno (2012) noted that 95.1% of students maintain a social media profile. Social media has potential if it is developed as a resource for the university.

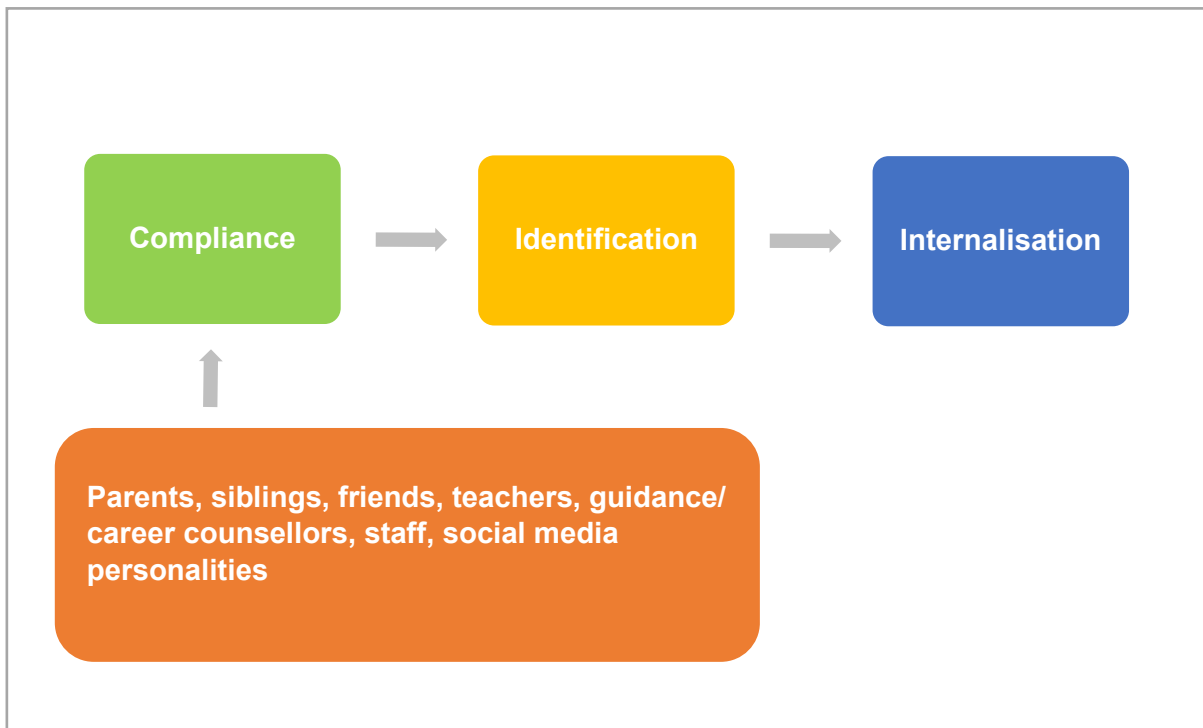


Figure 4.16: Proposed model of social influence on university choice

Strategies to develop these influencers should be put in place and incorporated into university marketing strategies, along with strategies to leveraging parental influence. The model shows that all these influencers have the potential to influence university choice through the Social Influence Theory.

4.7 Summary

In this chapter, the data from the study was presented and analysed. The results from the reliability analysis were presented to confirm the validity of the study. The biographical data was then shown to build a demographic profile for the respondents. This was followed by a descriptive analysis of the findings, using the questionnaire data and literature review. Inferential statistics were presented by conducting a principal component analysis, which identified parents as the strongest influencer of university choice. The findings were then applied to the Social Influence Theory and a revised model was proposed. In the next chapter, the research findings are used to draw conclusions and make recommendations for this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will highlight the main features of this research paper and conclude the study. A background to the research problem will be given and the research questions and objectives will be restated. The findings of the study will then be discussed by stating how the findings answered the research questions, realised the research objectives and supported the theoretical framework. Recommendations for the study will be given and then limitations of the study will be addressed. Directions for future studies will be identified before the study is concluded through a summary of the most salient points.

5.2 Problem Statement, Research Questions and Objectives of the Study

This study focused on the concept of influencer marketing, within the context of university choice. First-year Computer Science and Information Technology students were surveyed to find out who influenced their university choice.

5.2.1 Problem Statement

The study took place at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which is one of the country's top five universities. This institution competes in a highly competitive sector that works to attract the best students. To remain competitive, UKZN has to market itself as a university of choice among potential students. This study focused on examining influencers and the strength of their influence on university choice, for prospective students.

5.2.2 Research Questions

The study attempted to answer the following research questions:

- Who influences students' choice to study at UKZN?
- What is the strength of this influence?
- Who are the strongest and weakest influencers?
- What can be done to incorporate influencers into marketing strategies?

5.2.3 Research Objectives

The following research objectives were set, based on the research questions:

- To identify the influencers that affect students' choice to study at UKZN.
- To measure the strength of the influence on students.
- To rank influencers, in terms of the strength of their influence over students.
- To present recommendations on how to include influencers in marketing strategies.

5.3 Have the Research Questions Been Answered?

The study had four research questions that dealt with identifying influencers and their influence on students' university choice. This is how the research questions were addressed.

5.3.1 Research Question 1 - Who Influences Students' Choice to Study at UKZN?

Influencers that were identified by respondents were then presented in the data found in figures 4.7 – 4.10 (Chapter 4). It was shown that parents remained the strongest influencers of university choice for this study.

5.3.2 Research Question 2 - What is the Strength of This Influence?

The data presented in figures 4.7 – 4.10 showed how respondents viewed the strength of influence of each influencer. Parents, siblings, myself, teachers, guidance/ career counsellors were all considered strong influencers. Friends and UKZN staff were seen as neutral influencers. Other relatives, UKZN alumni, current UKZN students, industry professionals, social media personalities, blogger/vloggers, spiritual leaders and political leaders were all said to be weak influencers.

5.3.3 Research Question 3 - Who are the Strongest and Weakest Influencers?

A principal component analysis was done in section 4.5 to determine the strongest and weakest influencers. The results were presented in table 4.2 and showed that parents were the only significant influencer. In order of most to least influential, the influencers were ranked as follows: Interpersonal/ intrapersonal influencers, school influencers, UKZN influencers and aspirational influences.

5.3.4 Research Question 4 - To Present Recommendations on how to Include Influencers in Marketing Strategies

Recommendations are given in section 5.6 to determine what can be done to incorporate influencers into marketing strategies. Strong influencers need to be capitalised on and weak influences need to be developed.

5.4 Findings in Relation to Models/ Frameworks

The Social Influence Theory, as proposed by Kelman (1958), was used as the theoretical framework of this study. The results of this study were applied to the model in section 4.6.1 and Figure 4.15. Current results imply that parents are the primary influencers that lead to university choice and contentment with that choice for students. However, a revised model of the social influence on university choice is proposed which incorporates influencers with potential that can underpin the model for future strategies (based on results in section 4.6.2 and figure 4.16).

5.5 Did the Study Fulfil the Intended Objectives?

Based on the research questions, the objectives of this study centred around finding the most influential influencers of university choice. This is how the research objectives were met and realised.

5.5.1 Objective 1 - To Identify the Influencers That Affect Students' Choice to Study at UKZN

This objective was fulfilled through the influencers of university choice that were identified in the study.

5.5.2 Objective 2 - To Measure the Strength of the Influence on Students

This objective was fulfilled as the data presented showed how respondents viewed the strength of influence for each influencer.

5.5.3 Objective 3 - To Rank Influencers, in Terms of the Strength of Their Influence over students

This objective was fulfilled as the strength of each influencer was determined and ranked.

5.5.4 Objective 4 - To Present Recommendations on how to Include Influencers in Marketing Strategies

Recommendations are given in section 5.6 will show how influencers can be incorporated into university marketing strategies.

5.6 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to incorporate influencers into university marketing strategies.

5.6.1 Parent Target Strategy

Since parents were found to be the strongest and most significant influencer on university choice, they should be included in future recruitment strategies by UKZN. The university already holds an Open Day once a year for students to visit and learn about the university. The university may benefit from having a parents' day that will target parents of potential students. A database of these parents should be also be obtained from feeder schools so that the university can inform parents of application procedures, important dates and news.

5.6.2 Leveraging Influence of Stronger Influencers

It was interesting to note that the UKZN staff were ranked somewhere in the middle of the list of influencers. UKZN staff were found to be relatively weak influencers, yet they are directly responsible for influencing potential students to attend UKZN. It is recommended that university staff capitalise on the influence of interpersonal/ intrapersonal and school influencers, in order to be more influential themselves. It will be a good idea to market directly to the strongest influencers (parents and teachers), who will then pass on the marketing messaging to the students. For example, recruitment staff can hold information evenings for parents or visit schools to talk to teachers about university programmes. This approach ensures that staff have a more direct influence on university choice, via strong influencers.

5.6.3 Developing Potential Influencers

Siblings, friends, guidance/ career counsellors, UKZN staff and social media personalities were all identified as influencers with the potential to influence university choice. It is recommended that these influencers be developed to be used in the university's marketing strategy. This can be done by conducting further market research to determine how effective they will be as influencers.

5.6.4 Developing Industry Partnerships

As part of its Internationalisation goal, UKZN wants to strengthen partnerships with industry. To do this, it is recommended that industry professionals be developed as influencers, even though they were found to be weak influencers. This can be done by getting members of industry to speak at open days and school visits. This informs students about their careers after university and gives industry the opportunity to identify and develop future talent.

5.7 Limitations

The following limitations were identified for this study.

5.7.1 Limitation 1

This study only examined first-year students as they recently made their university choice. However, all the other university students have made the same choice at some point. Therefore, a larger study should include them as well.

5.7.2 Limitation 2

The research was done over a short period of time and the results may not be as comprehensive as expected.

5.7.3 Limitation 3

The study will be based on students at the UKZN, which may not be a big enough population to make inferences about the entire tertiary education sector.

5.8. Directions for Future Researchers

This study provided a quantitative look at who influences university choice and the strength of their influence.

- A future study can examine each influencer to a deep level and gain a better understanding of influencers, as it will reveal why they are strong/ weak.
- This study was limited in scope as it focuses on CSIT students, as they were most accessible. A future study should be done across the university.

- A study between South African universities should be done in order to gauge influencer preferences nationwide.
- This study focused on first-year students who have already made their university choice. A future study should investigate university choice with grade 11 and 12 students, who are currently going through the university-choice decision-making process.

5.9 Conclusion

This study examined influencers of university choice by focusing on the first-year CSIT students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). The research questions and objectives centred around identifying influencers, determining their strength, ranking their influence and recommending how they could be incorporated into university marketing strategies. The literature on influencer marketing, university-decision-making process, and influencers of university choice were presented. The Social Influence Theory was introduced as the theoretical framework for this study. The study adopted a census approach and achieved a 72% response rate out of a population of 150. The findings of the study were presented and revealed that parents were the strongest and most significant influencer. Interpersonal/ intrapersonal influencers and school influencers were found to be strong influencers, while UKZN influencers and aspirational influences were found to have a weak influence on university choice. The findings were applied to the Social Influence Theory and the model was adapted to include influencers with potential. It was recommended that UKZN use parents in marketing strategies, use stronger influencers to aid UKZN staff, develop potential influencers and engage with industry. The scope, time-period and size of study were identified as limitations for this study. Broadening the scope and conducting a university-wide study, were some of the suggestions for future studies. This study can be used by universities to become more marketing-oriented and to adapt their marketing mix to correspond with the findings of the study and to recruit and retain quality first-year students.

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APPENDIX 1: GATEKEEPERS LETTER



29 September 2017

Mr Sashlin Girraj (SN 206505741)
Graduate School of Business and Leadership
College of Law and Management Studies
Westville Campus
UKZN
Email: sashlingirraj@gmail.com girraj@ukzn.ac.za Ndlovum2@ukzn.ac.za

Dear Mr Girraj

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

"Influences of university choice: Who influences first-year computer science students to study at UKZN?"

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by handing out questionnaires to first year students enrolled for the BSc Computer Science & IT programmes on the Westville and Pietermaritzburg campuses.

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

- Ethical clearance number;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using 'Microsoft Outlook' address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the Protection of Public Information Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted Signature]

MR S S MOKOENA
REGISTRAR

Office of the Registrar

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Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 8005/2206 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 7824/2204 Email: registrar@ukzn.ac.za

Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

APPENDIX 2: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER 3C

Informed Consent Letter 3C

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP**

Dear Respondent,

MBA Research Project

Researcher: Mr Sashlin Girraj (031 260 2914)

Supervisor: Dr Matshediso Ndlovu (031 260 7825)

Research Office: Ms P Ximba 031-2603587

I, Sashlin Girraj am an MBA student, at the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, of the University of KwaZulu Natal. You are invited to participate in a research project entitled *Influencers of university choice: Who influences first-year computer science students to study at UKZN?* The aim of this study is to find out who influences students choice of university.

Through your participation, I hope to understand who persuaded you to study computer science at UKZN. The results of the focus group are intended to contribute to the understanding of decision-making influencers and how they can be used in influencer marketing strategies.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time with no negative consequence. There will be no monetary gain from participating in this survey/focus group. Confidentiality and anonymity of records identifying you as a participant will be maintained by the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, UKZN.

If you have any questions or concerns about completing the questionnaire or about participating in this study, you may contact me or my supervisor at the numbers listed above.

The survey should take you about 10 minutes to complete. I hope you will take the time to complete this survey.

Sincerely

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

This page is to be retained by participant

APPENDIX 3: CONSENT LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP

MBA Research Project
Researcher: Mr Sashlin Girraj (031 260 2914)
Supervisor: Dr Matshediso Ndlovu (031 260 7825)
Research Office: Ms P Ximba 031-2603587

CONSENT

I.....(full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

This page is to be retained by researcher

APPENDIX 4: QUESTIONNAIRE

Influencers of university choice: Who influences first-year computer science students to study at UKZN?

Influencer marketing is a form of marketing which focuses on influential people rather than the target market as a whole. This assessment tool will be used to determine who persuaded students to study at UKZN.

The results of this assessment tool can be used to:

- identify the influencers that affect students' choice to study computer science at UKZN.
- measure the strength of the influence on students.
- rank influencers, in terms of the strength of their influence over students.
- present recommendations on how to include influencers into marketing strategies.

This questionnaire has two sections:

- Section 1: Biographical information
- Section 2: Influencer evaluation

You must be 18 or older in order to participate in this survey

- **Instructions:**
- To answer the questions in both sections, fill in your answer in the space or mark with an x (where applicable).
- Please take the time to read each question carefully before you answer, to inform me how you truly feel.
- Your honest responses are essential for this analysis to be of value.
- Your answers and identity will be kept confidential.
- Thank you for your time and effort in participating in the interview

Section 1: Biographical information

1. Student number: _____
2. Gender: _____
 - Male
 - Female
3. Race: _____
 - White
 - Black
 - Coloured
 - Asian
 - Other (please specify)
4. How old are you? _____
 - 18 – 19
 - 20 – 21
 - Older than 22
5. Which campus are you based at? _____
6. What is your home language? _____

2

- Afrikaans
- English
- Zulu
- Xhosa
- Tswana
- Venda
- Tsonga
- Swazi
- Pedi
- Ndebele
- Sotho
- Other (please specify)

7. Which high school did you go to? _____
8. Which area or town do you live in? _____
9. Has any one of your family or friends ever attended UKZN? _____
 - Yes
 - No
10. How will you be financing your studies? _____

3

- Parents/family/ guardian
- Loan
- Bursary
- Self (your own funds)
- Other (please specify)

End of Section 1.
Please proceed to Section 2.

4

Section 2: Influencer evaluation

- Please indicate which of the influencers listed below, influenced your decision to study at UKZN.
- By placing an “x” in the relevant field, please indicate how strong of an influence the person had on your decision.
- In the last column (called Specify), please provide information on who the influencer is.
- The last five influencers are called “other”. Use these fields to mention influencers that are not listed below and mention who they are in the “Specify” column.
- Q21 – Q25, are yes or no questions

Q	Influencer	Strength of influence					Specify
		No influence	Little influence	Medium influence	Strong influence	Very strong influence	
1	Parents						
2	Siblings						
3	Other relatives						
4	Friends						
5	Myself						
6	Teacher						
7	Guidance/ career counsellor						
8	UKZN staff						

5

9	UKZN alumni						
10	Current UKZN students						
11	Industry professional						
12	Social media personality						
13	Blogger/ Vlogger						
14	Spiritual leader						
15	Political leader						
16	Other						
17	Other						
18	Other						
19	Other						
20	Other						

6

Please answer these questions with a Yes or No, and feel free to elaborate on your answers.	
21	Would you be able to make the decision to study at university without an influencer?
22	Do you trust the information from influencers, more than information from the university?
23	Would you like influencers to be incorporated into university marketing strategies?
24	Are you happy with your decision to study at KZN?
25	Do you have any final comments regarding the use of influencer marketing at universities?

End of Section 2.
Thank you very much for participating in this study.

7

APPENDIX 5: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



27 June 2019

Mr Sashlin Girraj (206505741)
Graduate School of Business & Leadership
Westville Campus

Dear Mr Girraj,

Protocol reference number: HSS/1983/017M

Project title: Influencers of university choice: Who influences first-year Computer Science students to study at UKZN

Approval Notification – Amendment Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application and request for an amendment received on 11 June 2019 has now been approved as follows:

- Change in Supervisor (Dr Matshediso Ndlovu -> Dr Sachin Suknunan)


Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form; Title of the Project, Location of the Study must be reviewed and approved through an 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 period of 3 years from the date of original issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully


.....
Professor Deresh Ramjugernath
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Dr Sachin Suknunan
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr Emmanuel Mutambara
Cc School Administrator: Ms Zarina Bullyraj

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)



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Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4609 Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za / snymanm@ukzn.ac.za / mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

APPENDIX 6: TURNITIN REPORT

6/24/2019
Turnitin

Turnitin Originality Report

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