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A study on how university students in Durban, KZN, use the Internet during their spare time

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A study on how university students in Durban, KZN, use the Internet during their spare time.

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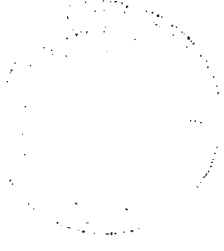

ABSTRACT

Various studies have been conducted around the world on students and Internet usage. These studies have been conducted on students of different age groups, from entry level, up to and including students at colleges and universities. In view of studies conducted elsewhere, the researcher was keen to investigate how local students, from Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, used the Internet during their spare time.

The study was a qualitative study based on the experiences of a few students who were chosen as participants using snowball sampling. The data was produced using interviews and a mini survey. Data was analysed by generating themes which emerged.

The research findings indicated that students do use the Internet occasionally for educational purposes, such as research or communication with their lecturers. However, the responses revealed that they used the Internet mainly as a leisure activity. Common activities included social networking, e-mail, network games and downloading music.

A disturbing find was that students had little or no knowledge regarding the legal and ethical use of the Internet. Similarly, students had minimal knowledge of netiquette.

Due to the above findings, a sample *Internet usage policy*, a *sample agreement*, as well as *guidelines for Internet usage* (*including netiquette*) has been compiled as part of the recommendations for education managers to adopt in order to promote a healthy and safe culture of Internet use at their respective institutions.

DEDICATION

To my late parents

Anne and David Polayya

who always encouraged me to read from a very young age.

Your excellent example as educators and your inspiration has enabled me to come this far.

To my family

Ash, **Zaid**, **Raez** and **Reza**

Thank you for your love, patience and support during the long hours I spent working on this dissertation.

DECLARATION

I, Cheryl Brenda Kader, declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted previously for any degree at any university.

Signature

04-04-2008

Date

Supervisor

07/04/08

Date

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The Internet cuts across all forms of segregation such as age, gender, religion and race in its ability to connect people. Students at tertiary institutions use the Internet much more than the general public; it has become part of their daily practice and its usage is as common as the use of telephones (Jones, 2002). The rapid increase in Internet usage has transformed the flood of information in schools, colleges and universities (McQueen & Fleck, 2004). The Internet offers an extremely large source of information as well as a convenient medium for communication (Jordan, 2007). Due to the growing popularity of the Internet, studies on Internet usage have been conducted by many people in various countries around the world. Jones (2002) suggests that in studying the Internet habits of students at university, one can gain insights into future online trends.

With the Internet being relatively new and readily available at most educational institutions, particularly tertiary institutions in South Africa, the researcher chose to conduct this study in order to gain some insight into how the students in Durban, KZN use the Internet.

1.2 Focus of Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the ways in which young university students (aged 18 to 25) in Durban, KZN use the Internet during their spare time, with special reference to netiquette.

1.3 Rationale

Since the inception of the Internet in 1993, Internet usage has grown considerably. In South Africa, the number of Internet users in 2007 is 5.1 million with the population being 49.66 million. The growth rate of Internet users since 2000 is 112.5 percent (www.Internetworldstats.com). With growing numbers of users globally, Internet usage has also recently become one of the major topics of discussion amongst researchers (Wilborn, 1999).

As a Computer Science / IT educator, one of my tasks is to educate learners on how to access information on the Internet; this invariably involves making learners aware of the ethical and moral issues related to the use of the Internet; hence my reference to netiquette.

Various concerns regarding netiquette are also raised internationally (Douglas-Brown, 2001) and laws on Internet usage (cyberlaw) in South Africa have been put in place (Buys, 2004). In the light of technological advancement and widespread Internet usage, the researcher chose to undertake this study. The purpose of the study was, therefore, to explore:

- Which genres of sites are accessed?
- What content on these Internet sites do students find useful?
- What ethical issues associated with Internet usage (including netiquette) are students aware of?

The results from this study could be used to guide the researcher, policy makers and other interested individuals or groups to:

- compile a policy for Internet usage by students and
- formulate a set of guidelines (including netiquette), for facilitators and students, which promote a legal and ethical culture of Internet usage.

1.4 Review of related literature

Internet World Stats (www.Internetworldstats.com, 2007) indicates the growing number of Internet users both locally and internationally.

The researcher believes that the Internet is a novelty to most users in this country; many people access the Internet, having no prior knowledge to what it offers. Once a user is exposed to the vast array of information on the web, he/she becomes overwhelmed; the novice is therefore eager to explore as much as possible. This holds true for both young children and adults.

The novice, according to Jordan (2007) through experimentation, trial and error or through information gained from other users, finds a niche for himself/herself on the Internet and becomes a regular user of one or more genres of sites. Data available on the Internet is not regulated; there exists therefore the possibility that children could access information that is not appropriate for their age and needs (Jordan, 2007). Whether the user is accessing sites responsibly, is a matter of concern for parents, educators and the community at large.

The World-Wide Web provides a vast amount of information on e.g. people, journals, databases, pornography, etcetera, which most users access using the available search engines. Clark (2000) describes a few asynchronous and synchronous technologies which can be used in online research itself to gather data; e.g. e-mail lists and Internet Relay Chat (IRC) which can be used for interviews, focus-groups and on-line observation.

Internet Relay Chat (IRC) is used extremely widely by people in general these days. It allows people from various parts of the world to participate in electronic, text-based communication. Participants communicate using text messages in real-time (meaning that all users are online simultaneously) with one or multiple users; files may also be sent between users (Niemand & Ransleigh, 2003).

The media sometimes reveal the positive and negative experiences that some users have had on IRC and dating sites due to the anonymity it offers. A negative aspect is that users on these sites could be frauds; on a positive note this sense of anonymity also allows users of these sites, in a way, to get to know each other, without fear of face-to-face rejection (Brown, Maycock & Burns, 2005). Bearing in mind that some users spend many hours on such sites (which could pose some danger to those who are not enlightened thereof), this study also encompassed the ethical issues associated with the use of the Internet.

1.5 Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

Concepts

In the context of this study, broad meanings that have been attached to the core concepts are as follows:

- *Internet*: A system of linked computer networks (Pfaffenberger, 2002).
- *Netiquette*: A set of behaviour guidelines for various Internet services that are available (Pfaffenberger, 2002).
- *Chat Rooms*: A facility that enables two or more people to "converse" over the Internet (Stair & Reynolds, 1999).

Paradigm / ontology / epistemology

The interpretive framework has been chosen, as it is positioned in the world of lived experiences. Interpretive research sets out to understand (verstehen)

human behaviour and empathise with it; it is steered by a set of views, beliefs and opinions on the world and how it should be interpreted and studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). An individual has his or her own interpretation of everything that goes on around him/her. The ontology associated with this approach, is a subjective reality; subsequently, the epistemology is one where the values of the participant as well as the observer / researcher become interlaced. Hence the methodologies that lend themselves to subjectivity and interpretation, such as interviews (one-to-one and focus group), are employed (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

Frames of enquiry / Theories

The research attempts to explore certain phenomena (as stated in the focus) related to Internet usage: Carl Rogers' *Phenomenological Theory of Personality* as well as Jürgen Habermas' *Theory of Communicative Action* therefore form the theoretical framework to this study.

Carl Rogers' phenomenological theory asserts that an individual's perceptions and experiences are not only part of his or her own reality, but that it also results in his or her actions (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1983). The researcher therefore regards this theory as a definite basis to the research; it is considered as being a link to, or being parallel with, the possible actions young students may take as a result of knowledge gained from the Internet and / or their subjective experiences on the Internet.

According to Outhwaite (1994), Habermas' *Theory of Communicative Action* implies in part, a reconstructive theory, i.e. to recover, elicit and contribute to the practical development of human ability for communicative action. Habermas (Outhwaite, 1994) suggests that instead of just acting in a way that is beneficial to ourselves, people should act in a manner that contributes to the interests of society in general. Using the Internet as a means of communication can therefore be built on this theory. Perzynski (2004) cites a course (Sociology of the Internet) by Randy Stoeker of the University of Toledo, which exemplifies what Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action means, as it illustrates how the Internet can promote communication – by revealing that, learning Internet skills, as well as social aspects related to the Internet are equally important.

1.6 Critical questions

- Which genres of sites are accessed?
- What are the reasons for students accessing these sites?
- What ethical issues associated with Internet usage (including netiquette), are students aware of?

1.7 Research design and methodology

Qualitative research is subjective; it is in-depth, exploratory, interpretive and open-ended in nature; studies are conducted on entities in their natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) as opposed to quantitative studies, which are

conducted in controlled settings. Since this study required that the researcher gain an in-depth knowledge and greater understanding of how young students use the Internet, the study was conducted within the qualitative framework (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The use of qualitative data such as interviews, in qualitative research enables one to understand as well as explain social phenomena (Myers, 1997).

1.7.1 Context and Sampling

The context in which this study was conducted was specifically university students (aged 18 – 25), in Durban, KZN, who have access to Internet facilities. The rationale behind the choice of this age group, was that most young adults within this age group, would, at some stage, have had access to the Internet in the past few years either at school, libraries, Internet cafes or in their homes and most definitely at university. Therefore, the sampling technique which I used was purposive sampling.

Purposive sampling is a method used when one chooses participants who are information-rich, based on the purpose of the study; in this instance the criteria being 'university students who use the Internet' (for whatever reason or application) – case of *criterion* purposive sampling (Patton, 1990). Furthermore, the researcher aimed, to include students belonging to various socio-economic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds participate in the study – case of *maximum variation* purposive sampling (Patton, 1990).

In order to obtain participants for the study, the case of *snowball* purposive sampling was applied (Patton, 1990); this required the researcher to identify one member from the population of interest, who then referred another person and so on. This method of sampling was used as it was difficult to identify members of this particular group, in this instance, 'university students who use the Internet'. A point of concern here however, was that this method could create a questionable sample, since friends can refer friends and not people they do not like (Patton, 1990).

1.7.2 Methods of data collection / production

This research entailed a multi-method study. The specific techniques for data collection / production that were used will now be discussed.

Focus-group interviews: 1 group with 6 participants

A focus-group interview involves a group session of participants who share common characteristics or activities; the content is also focused; hence the term 'focus group' (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delport, 2002). The main purpose in utilizing a focus group was to initially gain multiple as well as common or collective viewpoints regarding the use of the Internet by university students. Comparisons and verification of data produced would then be possible (Krefting, 1991).

Semi-structured one-to-one interviews: 4 participants

Semi-structured interviews are used to gain a detailed picture of the participants' views on a particular topic (De Vos et al., 2002). Since this method of data collection / production enables flexibility for both researcher and participant, this method was utilised. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with a fairly open framework; the researcher designs an interview schedule where inductive and deductive questions may be used (Rice & Ezzy, 2000), but the research is only guided by the schedule, rather than dictated by it. Probing and asking qualifying questions when the need arises is therefore possible (De Vos et al., 2002).

1.7.3 Data Analysis

Units of meaning were selected (De Vos et al., 2002). Concepts were then grouped, related and categorised (Rice & Ezzy, 2000). Themes that emerged were then identified and re-contextualised by referring to the literature (De Vos et al., 2002). Findings relating to identified themes were reported.

1.7.4 Validity / Reliability / Trustworthiness

The application of a multi-method approach allowed for a comparison of data produced – referred to as triangulation (Krefting, 1991); it is a means of ensuring concurrent validity and prevents personal bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Observation on certain Internet sites did involve lurking. According to Berkman and Shumway (2003), lurking is when one does not participate in a virtual

community, but reads the discussions. The ethical dilemma faced by researchers lurking on the net is that users on these sites are expecting privacy. It is suggested that journalists and academic researchers who intend using this technique, make participants on these sites aware of their presence as well as their purpose for being there (Berkman & Shumway, 2003); they should only continue with the consent of members on the site at any given time. However, given that the researcher only used this technique for verification of what the *MySpace* and *FaceBook* sites were all about, rather than data production, the actions of the researcher may not be regarded as unethical.

1 .7.5 Ethical Issues

Throughout the research process, it was ensured that the rights and privacy issues relating to the students being studied were not compromised in any way. Prospective participants were given a letter of *informed consent* (Appendix 7) to sign, containing details of the study with the option of participating and / or withdrawing at any given stage of the research. Anonymity and confidentiality was also guaranteed.

1.7.6 Limitations

A limitation, to this study is that participants may not have been totally honest with the researcher, for various reasons such as shyness or privacy. Participants may have given responses which they considered appropriate but may not have been true or valid (De Vos, et al., 2002).

1.8 Conclusion

The Internet has arrived, its usage is growing daily and there is no doubt that responsible usage needs to be promoted. The following chapter briefly highlights the history of the Internet and common applications.

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CHAPTER TWO:

LITERATURE REVIEW

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief history of the Internet, followed by the Internet as it exists today and a short discussion on Internet usage by university students; commonly accessed genres of sites are highlighted. Legal, social and ethical issues related to Internet usage are then addressed.

2.2 History of the Internet

According to Leiner, Cerf, Clark, Kleinrock, Lynch and Perzynski (2004), the Internet has transformed the computer and communications world like nothing has ever done before. Planning for the Internet, by the Advanced Research Projects Agency in the U.S. Department of Defense (ARPANET) began in the 1950s. In August 1962, J.C.R. Licklider of MIT discussed his Galactic Network concept where he envisioned a globally interconnected set of computers through which everyone could access data and programs quickly, from any site (Leiner, et al., 2004). In essence, this concept is really what the Internet is like today.

The Internet was developed in the United States in the 1970s as a network for use by the Defense Department; it was called the ARPANET. It was developed initially as an experiment and was used to support communication within the

Defence Department. The usefulness of computer networking – especially electronic mail, as exhibited by the Department of Defense on ARPANET, piqued the interests of other communities and disciplines. Hence, by the mid-1970s computer networks, according to Boswell (2005), had begun to develop wherever funding became available.

A brief timeline

1957: The United States Department of Defense formed a small agency called ARPA (Advanced Research Projects Agency) to develop military science and technology.

1961-1965: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) started to research sharing information in small, phone-linked networks. ARPA is one of their main sponsors.

1966: The first ARPANET plan by Larry Roberts of MIT- Packet switching technology is used.

1969: The U.S. Department of Defense commissions ARPANET for network research. The first node to node message was sent from UCLA to SRI.

1971: More nodes including Harvard and NASA join the network.

1973: ARPANET goes global.

1974: Data is transmitted more quickly and efficiently with the design of Transmission Control Program (TCP).

1976: Unix is developed; Queen Elizabeth sends out her first email message.

1979: USENET, the mother of all networked discussion groups, is developed.

1982: Transmission Control Protocol and Internet Protocol are developed - (TCP/IP).

1984: Number of hosts is now up to 1000, with more being added every day.

1985: The first registered domain is Symbolics.com.

1987: Number of hosts breaks the 10 000 mark.

1988: First large-scale Internet worm affects 1000s of Internet hosts.

1991: Tim Berners-Lee develops the World Wide Web (www).

1993: The World Wide Web's annual growth is now at a staggering 341,634%.

1994: ARPAnet celebrates 25th anniversary.

1995-1997: RealAudio introduces Internet streaming technology, dial-up systems emerge (America Online, Compuserve), the Internet backbone (the physical component of the Internet) is strengthened, Microsoft and Netscape fight for WWW browser supremacy; there are now more than 70 000 mailing lists.

1998-present: The Internet continues to experience staggering growth. More people use the Internet to get connected to others, find information, conduct business, and share information than ever before in history.

Adapted from Boswell (2005)

ARPANET itself formally ended in 1989, a happy victim of its own success and was eventually superseded by the Internet in 1992. Its users scarcely noticed, for ARPANET's functions not only continued but progressively improved Boswell (2005). The use of TCP/IP standards for computer networking is now global.

What is extremely fascinating, is that in 1971 there were only four nodes in the ARPANET network; today there are tens of thousands of nodes in the Internet, scattered over most parts of the world, with more coming on-line every day. According to Boswell (2005), millions of people from all corners of the globe use this gigantic network. The Internet is often referred to as a network of networks or a network of interconnected computers (Gelernter, 2001).

The beginning of the World Wild Web (WWW) is closely linked to the work of Tom Bernes-Lee who created hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP). HTTP was able to do the following:

- write Internet addresses,
- scan the Internet for sites linked to the addresses and
- retrieve documents from the addresses automatically.

Soon Bernes-Lee had created a browser which he named the World Wide Web; he used hypertext markup language (HTML) to create web pages, which people could then access (Deak, 2004).

The World Wide Web has since become the largest body of information available to people around the world, and it is still growing (Boswell, 2005). A report has shown that there are ±100 billion hypertext links available on the web (Deegon & Tanner, 2002).

There is no specific governance of the Internet. There is, however a voluntary body called the Internet Society (ISOC) who work towards advancing global information exchange through Internet technology. They are assisted by the Internet Architecture Board (IAB) who approve standards to allocate different resources and the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) who concern themselves with the technical problems of the Internet. These are the bodies that set the rules that should be followed by networks connected to the Internet (Krol, 1992 in Patterson, 1996).

2.3 The Internet Today

Internet access today is more easily available than ever before. Most libraries provide free access (Gelernter, 2001). According to Gelernter (2001), the Internet, as a communication tool, enables users to perform various activities such as just searching for information to performing various other activities such as chatting, joining support groups and playing games, amongst others. People communicate with others from all corners of the globe every single day, but the choices made are dependent on the individual (Amichai-Hamburger, 2005).

According to Internet World Stats (www.Internetworldstats.com, 2007), latest statistics (updated 10-06-2007) reveal that there are approximately 1133 million Internet users in the world; in South Africa, the number of Internet users is approximately 5.1 million. The growth rate of Internet users since 2000 in the world is 214 percent while in South Africa it stands at 112.5 percent and in Africa

there has been an enormous growth of 640 percent. This clearly indicates the growing number of Internet users both locally and internationally.

The greatest numbers of users are from first world countries such as the United States, Canada, Europe and Great Britain. However, countries in Asia like China, Hong Kong and Japan are fast becoming some of the largest Internet users. In Africa, apart from South Africa, Internet connectivity is very limited. The table below illustrates world Internet usage as at 10 June 2007.

WORLD INTERNET USAGE AND POPULATION STATISTICS

World Regions	Population (2007 Est.)	Population % of World	Internet Usage, Latest Data	% Population (Penetration)	Usage % of World	Usage Growth 2000-2007
Africa	933,448,292	14.2 %	**33,421,800**	3.6 %	2.9 %	640.3 %
Asia	3,712,527,624	56.5 %	**409,421,115**	11.0 %	36.0 %	258.2 %
Europe	809,624,686	12.3 %	**319,092,225**	39.4 %	28.2%	203.6 %
Middle East	193,452,727	2.9 %	**19,424,700**	10.0 %	1.7 %	491.4 %
North America	334,538,018	5.1 %	**230,987,282**	69.0 %	20.4%	113.7 %
Latin America/Caribbean	556,606,627	8.5 %	**102,304,809**	18.4 %	9.0 %	466.2 %
Oceania / Australia	34,468,443	0.5 %	**18,756,363**	54.4 %	1.7 %	146.2 %
WORLD TOTAL	6,574,666,417	100.0 %	**1,133,408,294**	17.2 %	100 %	214.0 %

Table 1: *World Internet Usage* (from http://www.Internetworldstats.com)

The table (Table 1) clearly depicts Africa as having the lowest 'percentage population penetration' as far as Internet access is concerned. One may argue that there are far more urgent issues that need to be dealt with before one suggests that the Internet is the solution for Africa. As South Africa's then deputy president, Thabo Mbeki, stated at a meeting of G-7 countries on the information society, in 1995, that there were more telephone lines in Manhattan, than in sub-Saharan Africa, one must take cognisance of the fact, that technological advancement cannot be ignored and that there are various ways and means of bringing the Internet to the people such as cyber-cafes. Cornu (2005) suggests that a dual approach be applied, i.e. exploring technological possibilities and ways of using the Internet. Rather than count the number of users, the objective should be to look at how people use the Internet and how it really has an impact on the individuals (Cornu, 2005).

Dillner (2000) suggests that the Internet today has become the latest craze for both young and old. It is a means of communication and is made up of various services such as the World Wide Web, electronic-mail (e-mail), newsgroups, FTP sites and Internet relay chat (IRC) (Buys, 2004). Through the media, people have also become aware of cases of sexual predators on the Internet who thrive on the sexual exploitation of children whom they meet in chat rooms (Dillner, 2000).

The most popular and highly used tool by Internet users is the World Wide Web (Pfaffenberger, 2002). The World Wide Web, as mentioned earlier, is a collection

of web pages created by Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and viewed by web browsers. According to Deegon and Tanner (2002), web pages contain anything from personal information to broad topics of interest. Anybody that has Internet access can create web pages. Web pages may be used to give personal information or general information or even advertisements for products, services, jobs and various other types of information. As web pages are being added or removed continuously, the information on the web is therefore not constant but rather fluid in nature. Therefore, the manner in which the web grows is somewhat random and a matter of concern is that it is sometimes difficult or impossible to tell how valid the content actually is (Deegon & Tanner, 2002).

Users use search engines to look for information. Most search engines are made up of three parts, viz. a crawler which creates a list of relevant web pages, an index and searching software (Dillner, 2000). One should recognize, however, that among the links or pages retrieved, one will find both relevant and irrelevant information. Most people have had the experience of performing a search using a search engine, and some normal words or phrases typed in results in one being taken to web pages containing explicit information (Dillner, 2000). Despite their drawbacks, search engines still perform their tasks well enough for people to successfully find information on topics of interest (Deegon & Tanner, 2002).

2.4 University Users and Information Seeking

A study conducted by Jones (2002) has revealed that compared to the general populace, 78% of students at tertiary institutions go online just for fun. They often use the Internet just to browse, read e-mails, download music or send instant messages. The study also revealed that 79% of the students agree that Internet usage has had a positive influence on their studies and academic progress.

College or university students have the greatest access and use the Internet more than any other demographic group (Jones, 2002),

An enquiry into leisure activities on the Internet in the study by Jones (2002), showed that students were twice as likely to download music files than the general population; they are also three times as likely to have done this on any specific day. Apart from downloading music, these students also spend a lot of time chatting online or sending instant messages.

Similarly, a study by DeBell and Chapman (2006) on schools in the United States revealed that children tend to use the Internet for virtually the same reasons as students at university, i.e. homework, fun (such as games), e-mail, chatting and instant messaging.

According to Don Turnbull, cited in Fisher, et al. (2006), there have been many studies, though on a small scale, that have added information and substance to information-seeking theories and models. These models are based on Internet usage by individuals in respect of content (what is being accessed) as well as context (the circumstances or reasons relating to such access). Turnbull, in Fisher, et al. (2006) further suggests that these studies could assist future researchers to conduct further studies and make conclusions that are concerned with information seeking and retrieval patterns / models. He suggests that some quantitative studies such as the one by Pirolli and Card (1995) (cited in Fisher, et al., 2006) which focuses on individual use and information-seeking behaviours, could add another dimension to qualitative studies conducted; however this involves making sense of quantitative data that is available.

Various individuals and groups access the Internet for different reasons; e.g. teachers can supply students with resources and doctors can share medical data – there is something for everyone (McBride, 2002). The phrase "surf the net" is often used to refer to the act of accessing and searching the Internet. Research, e-mail, downloading music/videos, games and social networking are the commonly accessed genre of sites.

Research and education

Internet research refers to the use of the Internet for research. There is an exceptionally large range of information available on the Internet; information is

being added and modified constantly (Harris,1997). The Internet is widely accessibe to many millions of people all over the globe and information on almost anything can therefore be accessed instantly (Boswell, 2005).

The Internet could be widely used in the field of education. The Internet has made distance learning possible, especially at tertiary education level. Students register online, and complete their coursework this way. This form of distance learning is sometimes conducted through what is referred to as "virtual universities" (Wikipedia, 2007).

The following applications are already being used to a certain extent in both schools and tertiary institutions (Meyer, Roberta & Pfaffenberger, 2000).

Computer Based Education (CBE) refers to instruction in the classroom or the lecture-room with the aid of computers. Firstly, facilitators can use the computer to present lessons in a fascinating way to captivate the attention and interest of the students. Secondly, computers can be used interactively, in that both facilitators and students are utilizing computers while engaging in the process of teaching and learning.

Computer assisted Instruction (CAI) like CBE is used to facilitate the process of instruction through the use of computer programs that have been designed for a specific purpose. Students interact directly with the computer; items are

presented and then tested. Students have the opportunity of learning at a pace that is convenient to them, and receive feedback at the same time. Facilitators therefore have more time for other activities such as assisting others.

Computer based training (CBT) is the term used for CAI when it is applied in business and industry; it is a type of education in which students learn by executing special training programs on a computer.

Computer managed instruction (CMI) is an instructional strategy whereby the computer is used to provide learning objectives, learning resources and assessment of learner resources. Through the use of CMI, facilitators are able to keep track of student attendance and performance.

E-mail

Electronic mail (e-mail) is a means of communication between people electronically, provided that the people who want to use it have access to the Internet and an e-mail address. It is one of the cheapest ways in which one can keep contact with others for either personal or other reasons (McBride, 2002). Users send messages to others who have e-mail addresses; however, this form of communication is not in real-time, meaning that users access messages at their own convenience.

Downloading music / videos

The term downloading refers to the transfer or copying of files or data from the Internet to ones computer (McBride, 2002). Hence downloading music refers to downloading sound files in, for example .mp3 formats and downloading of video files refer to files in video clip format.

Games

Online games refer to games that a user plays on the Internet. There are two ways in which these games are played:

- between the user and the computer and
- between various users.

According to Yee (2007) millions of people are engaged in role-playing types of online games with each other; these online environments are referred to Massively-Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs). Chin-Sheng Wan and Wen-Bin (2006) describe MMORPGs as a system of achieving certain goals through some form of social interaction; e.g. a player may need to join a "clan" in order to move forward in the game. The report on the study by Yee (2007) implies that many people prefer playing online games since these games actually accommodate and allow for different kinds of styles of playing. Hence users are drawn to such applications. The study also showed that males were drawn to these games more for the competition it offered, as well as the thrill afforded by advancement; females on the other hand enjoyed the social aspect

and the role-playing that these games offered. The study by Chin-Sheng and Wen-Bin (2006) also suggested that these games allow players a means of escapism.

Social networking

Social networking is a means by which people communicate with friends, family and others in an online community. Social network sites (SNSs), although they may seem new to the current users, have been on the Internet since 1998 with the first social networking website being unveiled in 1997. FaceBook, a commonly accessed site was developed in 2004 by Mike Zuckerberg during his studies as a student at Harvard University (Green, 2006). Included in sites of this nature, are chat rooms – Internet Relay Chat (IRC).

IRC was created by Jarkko Oikarinen in 1998 and was initially called multi-user-talk (MUT); however it only became widely used by the general public in 1991. It now seems to be the most commonly used Internet chat system worldwide (Crocker, 2000). IRC is a means by which users chat on the Internet in real-time, meaning that all users are online at the same time. It can be used for one-to-one (private) or many-to-many (open to all) communication. A spin-off from IRC is instant messaging (IM) which is very popular among the younger generation one can just go online, check if any of ones contacts are there and then begin chatting (Goldsborough, 2001).

Apart from IRC, some of the other applications available on social network sites are:

- Group Information – which contains information pertaining to the group
- Discussion Board – also known as a discussion forum, where users can post messages
- Comment Wall – users can comment about the group on a discussion board
- List of Associates – contains a list of groups having a similar connection
- Upload Photos – allow users to post photographs that can be viewed by all or a specific group or individual
- Publish News posts – publish information of any past or planned events.

It must be noted that not all social networks carry all of the above facilities (Phillips, 2007).

Chat rooms allow users to communicate with others in an online environment. Each user has a nickname by which he or she is identified (Dillner, 2000). Users can chat with individuals they know, as well as individuals that are unknown. The latter can pose dangers, as there have been incidences where criminals use this environment to lure unsuspecting individuals into their lair. In order to avoid possible problems that could occur, some schools (and even universities) do not allow access to open chat rooms, however, students still have access to these sites when they access the Internet at home (Cutajar, 2004).

The popularity of the Internet has launched many legal, social and ethical issues.

2.5 Legal, Social and Ethical Issues

The Internet provides students access to all kinds of information and people; however, not all of them practice suitable or ethical behaviour on the Internet (Dillner, 2000).

Legal, social and ethical issues are often a topic for debate amongst academics and the general public (Rogerson, 1997). Users are compelled to consider their behaviour and face responsibilities associated with Internet usage (Lynch, 2000). In order for students to use computers effectively, they need to learn many skills related to its application. Similarly, they need to develop attitudes that will promote legal and ethical issues (Callaghan, 2000).

Cyber law refers to the legal issues related to communications technology, predominantly the legal, legislative and rights issues (Sangonet, 2003 and Wikipedia, 2007). Cyber law concerns itself with computer crime. Computer crimes may be defined as "*any illegal, unethical or unauthorized behaviour involving data processing and/or transmission of data*" (Buys, 2004, p.16). Cyber law therefore is the law that protects the public against such crimes. However, according to Van der Merwe and Janse van Vuuren (2004) technological

development has simply exceeded legal development, creating a serious problem with regards to the law and the Internet.

According to Pfaff-Harris (1996), copyright exists at the time of creation of a piece of work and represents the exclusive rights of the creator or owner to publish and sell his or her work such as books, art and music. Furthermore, copyright gives the owner the right to make alterations to or create different versions of the original piece of work (Bowen, 2006). Many students ignore the copyright law which then leads to plagiarism. According to Standler (2000), plagiarism is a huge crisis at tertiary institutions in the USA which needs to be addressed. Plagiarism refers to the act of submitting someone else's work as though it were your own (Bowen, 2006). Plagiarism also encompasses the act of using parts of an original piece of work - even though it may have been amended - without permission or acknowledgement of the source (Pfaff-Harris, 1996, Standler, 2000). Carbone (2001) argues that incorrect citing of sources is also plagiarism; students tend to use the excuse of having made a mistake with their references when they are caught plagiarising although there is evidence of copying and pasting from documents on the Internet.

The study by Jones (2002) found that students spend a large percentage of their total time on the Internet on social communication. It was found that students spend one to three hours a week online for social reasons such as e-mailing, chatting and instant messaging. Students use the Internet to communicate with

students on campus as well as maintain contact with friends they had at school as well as students at other campuses. One can therefore notice how technological advancement has allowed people to easily maintain contact with others.

The tendency of certain individuals spending too much of time on the Internet is a cause for concern, and a study by (Stevens, Schade, Chalk & Slevin, 1993) has shown that Internet addiction, is no longer a myth, but a reality. Internet addiction is referred to as Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD), and those affected, display symptoms that are similar to those experienced by individuals suffering from other types of addiction disorders (Goldberg, 1997 in Stevens, et al., 1993).

This study (Stevens, et al., 1993) revealed that those affected by IAD were drawn to sites such as chat rooms, where they could meet and socialise with others. Sufferers admitted that this addiction did, in fact, impact on other aspects of their lives such as normal interpersonal relationships (Stevens, et al., 1993).

Ethical issues relate to the moral choices that individuals make in relation to the community, society or public at large i.e. acceptable standards of behaviour, and rules applicable to a specific community (Lynch, 2000).

Online standards and norms of behaviour (netiquette) are based on the norms of the group in which the network is situated. Nonetheless, it should be noted that

these norms and values may vary from the core values and traditions of various communities. According to Lynch, most users tend to conform to acceptable codes of conduct on networks, which, in themselves, tend to possess different standards. A bane of concern, however, is that users can do as they please due to the anonymity that the Internet offers. Fortunately, long-term network users watch over and 'control' the behaviour of others on these networks; basically, users are required to be civil towards other users and respect the rights of others (Lynch, 2000).

Schools and tertiary institutions offer courses in information technology (IT). It has been suggested by Buys (2004) that computer ethics should also be addressed at school level and that both ethics and values should be taught at university. It is further advised (Buys, 2004) that the government be involved in educational programmes that will promote values and ethics related to computer usage. As the number of applications and users of the Internet increases, so does the need for guidelines regulating its use.

2.6 Conclusion

According to Sehgal, Mulligan, Naydenova and Peach (2007), Internet usage or online activity is bound to increase exponentially year by year. Jupiter Research in its Worldwide Online Population Forecast, 2006 to 2011, defined online users as users who regularly access the Internet. This report projects a 38% increase in Internet users by the year 2011 (Sehgal, et al., 2007).

The report (Sehgal, et al., 2007) predicts that the United States will still be the country which has the highest number of people having access to the Internet. However, it is also expected that China and India will reach an online penetration of 17% and 7% respectively, and that Asians will make up about 42% of the world's population with regular Internet access.

Regular Internet usage trends are set to increase (Amichai-Hamburger, 2005), and we cannot deny the effect that it will have on society in general, especially those at a young and impressionable age. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks behind this study, is highlighted in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER THREE:

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

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THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Theoretical framework

3.1.1 Introduction

The research investigated certain trends of learning and actions which may have resulted from Internet usage. The *Phenomenological Theory of Personality* by Carl Rogers' and the *Theory of Communicative Action* by Jürgen Habermas were therefore used to structure the theoretical framework to this study which was conducted within the *Interpretive Research* paradigm.

3.1.2 Paradigms

According to Popkewitz (1984), a paradigm is a general belief or model that defines the ways in which people think or act, and which makes people understand the world they live in. Popkewitz (1984) asserts that each paradigm entails an underlying principle based on thought, reason and inquiry (Popkewitz, 1984); this implies that each paradigm in research is characterized by its own:

- **Ontology**: The way things are, their existence, their traits of reality and the nature of being.
- **Epistemology**: The theories of knowledge, i.e. how we know what we know.

- **Methodology**: How a researcher goes about studying whatever he / she believes can be learnt (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

There are four paradigms under which research is conducted in the social sciences, viz. positivism, the critical approach, constructivism and interpretivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Positivist research is used to examine, explain, build and test theories (Sarantakos, 2005). The main purpose of critical research is social critique; it focuses on the conflicts and contradictions in today's society, and seeks to be emancipatory (Myers, 1997). The term constructivism implies that the researcher is partly responsible for the creation of data. In other words, individuals do not 'discover' knowledge, but 'construct' it (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). This study has been conducted within the interpretive paradigm as it aimed at exploring the 'how', 'what' and 'why' of Internet usage by the students.

3.1.3 Interpretive paradigm

Interpretive research is steered by a set of views, beliefs and opinions on the world and how it should be interpreted and studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Every individual has his or her own interpretation of everything that goes on around us; for this reason, the ontology associated with this approach, is a subjective reality – referred to as *nominalism* by Falconer and Mackay (1999); subsequently, the epistemology is one where the values of the participant as well as the observer / researcher become interlaced. Hence the methodologies that

lend themselves to subjectivity and interpretation, such as interviews and participant observation are employed (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The purpose of such studies, therefore, is to attempt to understand and explore phenomena from the point of view of those being studied.

The researcher is concerned with the subjective meaning individuals attach to their experiences. Although there may be multiple interpretations and perceptions of a single event, the meaning attached to the event by any single person may differ from that of another. Individuals are unique, therefore they interpret events in ways that are relevant to them. They therefore act on the basis of these exclusive interpretations. In order to acquire a greater understanding, the researcher must rely on rich or thick descriptions of a particular event or situation as the theories that may arise from this mode of research is based on the data that is generated. It is however important that the researcher study these meanings within the context of social and cultural systems in which the individuals find themselves. Therefore, the theories generated by interpretive research are as varied as the groups of meanings attached to them as well as the contexts supporting them (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002).

3.1.4 Habermas

The *Theory of Communicative Action* by Jurgen Habermas, according to (Mitrović, 1999), is part of a series of modern, post-Marxist theories; it is argued

that this theory is not a new meta-theory, but a new social theory or paradigm of communicative action; this theory represents a critical synthesis of other social theories such as those of Parsons, Weber and Marx. Habermas argues that current socialist and capitalist norms in modern / postmodern society should be replaced by universal communication ethics which can be developed through democratic procedures among various groups and people in general (Mitrović, 1999). Mutual negotiation and communication processes could be used to achieve this goal (Mitrović, 1999).

According to Outhwaite (1994), Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action* implies in part, a reconstructive theory, i.e. to recover, elicit and contribute to the practical development of human ability for communicative action. Habermas suggests that instead of just acting in a way that is beneficial to ourselves, we should act in a manner that contributes to the interests of society in general. Using the Internet as a means of communication can therefore be built on this theory. Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action illustrates how the Internet can promote communication – by revealing that, learning Internet skills, as well as social aspects related to the Internet are equally important (Perzynski, 2004). Moore (2002) suggests that Habermas' theory of Communicative Action consists of two type of rationality that shape knowledge to guide action; the first refers to those actions aimed at influencing the decisions of others while the second,

refers to action aimed at reaching consensus in order to create harmony between different interpretations of the world.

Szczelkun (2003) argues that Habermas Theory of Communicative Action relates to both objective and subjective worlds by making full use of language functions. This implies that individuals make certain decisions through communication and mutual criticism. This theory also embodies the interpretive researcher's viewpoint as Habermas asserts that all processes of understanding are positioned against a backdrop of culturally ingrained pre-understanding. Furthermore, one can identify with communicative acts as they are also entrenched in situations which are aimed at gaining understanding; knowledge is therefore obtained against a background of that which exists and is already known. According to Habermas (Szczelkun, 2003), background is absolute, holistic & instinctive, thereby playing an important role in thoughts and actions. Therefore one should guard against claiming that any phenomenon is universally valid, but rather allow for conclusions that are relative to a given situation against a relevant cultural and social background.

Habermas (Szczelkun, 2003) asserts that mans' conduct is governed by his interests, but at the same time, he notes that his individual thoughts and ideas determine the direction in which these interests are pursued and the resultant actions that are taken. Actions may be defined as human behaviour with subjective meaning attached to it (Weber in Szczelkun, 2003).

The theory of Habermas makes reference to what individuals may interpret as knowledge as well as how knowledge is generated and interpreted. According to Fischer, et al. (2006), information seeking is a means of acquiring knowledge; on consideration of what applies directly to information seeking, one may conclude that the ultimate aim of information seeking is to provide information which may be regarded as appropriate to information seekers. Hence, regarding information seeking as communicative action implies considering how one interprets, understands and applies the information sought (Fischer, et al., 2006).

Finally, it should be noted that critics argue that the Habermas paradigm is highly attainable due to the roles played by mass media and the various forms of symbolic communication which currently exists through the process of globlisation (Mitrović, 1999). Habermas believes that it is unjust that the public, who are most affected by technology, are in fact the ones that have the least control over it.

Reference is made to the concept *lifeworld* (Moore, 2002) which includes the cultural tradition of a specific group or community, the people being able to abide by the rules of the group and also becoming productive individuals of their environment. The lifeworld is regarded as a critical part of communicative action since it exists within the lifeworld in which communication develops. He asserts that technology should be controlled by the public. He has therefore presented a

theory that attempts to democratise technology; it is argued that this can be achieved by involving the public in communicative action through open communication. Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action is therefore regarded as the only theory that correlates directly with democratising technology (Moore, 2002). The Internet (and issues related to its use), as part of the global communications network, is therefore an important component of the realization of Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action, as a paradigm.

3.1.5 Carl Rogers

Carl Rogers' phenomenological theory asserts that an individual's perceptions and experiences are not only part of his or her own reality, but that it also results in his or her actions (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1983). The researcher therefore regards this theory as a definite basis to the research as it is seen as a link to, or being parallel with, possible actions young students may take as a result of knowledge gained from the Internet and / or their subjective experiences on the Internet.

Rogers asserts that humans have the ability to develop and improve themselves in positive and healthy ways. He is of the opinion that people judge their experience by how well it sustains or develops them; experiences that are fulfilling are viewed positively, while those that result in dissatisfaction are viewed negatively.

The basic principles of phenomenology assert that our immediate experience of the world is the source of all knowledge (Sherman & Webb, 1990). Phenomenology refers to the interpretation of an individual's perceptions or the analysis of life from the point of view of an individual. Rogers (Sherman & Webb, 1990) declares that nobody, including God can take precedence over personal experiences. He further suggests that no two people can have identical life experiences (Józef, 2004). Therefore, how one perceives or interprets certain information on the Internet, invariably will differ from another, as each experiences it differently.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

3.2.1 Introduction

In the context of this study, broad meanings that have been attached to the core concepts are as follows:

- *Internet*: A system of linked computer networks (Pfaffenberger, 2002).
- *World Wide Web (WWW)*: Is that part of the Internet service which allows users to move between linked resources (Straubhaar & Larose, 1997).
- *Netiquette*: A set of behaviour guidelines for various Internet services that are available (Pfaffenberger, 2002).

3.2.2 The Internet

The word Internet is traditionally written with a capital I. The Internet may be described as a network of networks, i.e. it can be regarded as a collection of

interconnected networks, all generously exchanging information, thereby making up the world's largest network. The Internet is truly international in scope, with users on every continent, including Antarctica. The Internet allows users to find and use information, and also communicate with others (Stair & Reynolds, 1999).

The Internet and the World Wide Web are not one and the same.

3.2.3 World Wide Web (Web or WWW)

The Web is a portion of the Internet service which allows users to move between linked resources which are often rich in graphics (Straubhaar & Larose, 1997).

3.2.4 Netiquette

The word netiquette is a combination of the words '*network*' and '*etiquette*'. Netiquette refers to a set of rules or guidelines for interacting in a courteous manner with others online – specific guidelines for the various Internet services are available (Pfaffenberger, 2002).

3.3 Conclusion

Using the Internet as a means of searching for information, correlates with Habermas' theory, which, according to Fischer, et al. (2006) is a means of communicative action since information seeking is a means by which knowledge is obtained. Similarly, the theory of phenomenology, according to Sherman and Web (1990), avers that one's experiences are a source of knowledge.

Hence both these theories contribute to the study as individuals use the Internet as a means of acquiring knowledge. The research methodology used in the study therefore aimed to reflect the theory of communicative action as well as phenomenology.

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CHAPTER FOUR:

RESEARCH

METHODOLOGY

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Chapter 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the theoretical background on research methods. Research methodology refers to the manner in which a researcher goes about studying whatever he / she believes can be learnt (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The two broad categories under which research is conducted are referred to as quantitative research and qualitative research. The former refers to studies that are statistical in nature while the latter is normally conducted within the realm of social sciences and lends itself to a more descriptive format.

Quantitative research generally refers to an objective study that is statistically valid and is normally associated with numeric data. These methods were originally developed in the natural sciences to study natural phenomena (Myers, 1997). This type of epistemology aims at explaining and predicting what happens by looking for relationships between the elements involved (Falconer, & Mackay, 1999). The methodology is characterized by the use of empirical methods that will validate and not influence that which is being examined (Kim, 2003). Hence, this type of research is conducted under strict, stable experimental conditions, as opposed to natural conditions, while the researcher remains totally neutral. This form of research is logical and involves objective

analysis. More often than not, the quantitative technique is applied in the positivistic approach.

Qualitative research, on the other hand, is more subjective; it is more in-depth, exploratory, interpretive and open-ended in nature. Studies are conducted on entities in their natural settings as opposed to quantitative studies, which are conducted in controlled settings (Falconer & Mackay, 1999). Qualitative research methods were developed in the social sciences so that researchers could study social and cultural phenomena (Myers, 1997). The researcher is at the centre of the research, as he / she is involved in the collection of various empirical materials, which he / she interprets in different ways so that he / she can obtain a better understanding of the data at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The qualitative methodology has been used in this study.

4.2 Qualitative research

4.2.1 The nature of qualitative research

According to Strauss and Corbin (1950) in Stevens, et al. (1993), qualitative research refers to research where the findings are not produced by quantification. Qualitative research methodology produces descriptive data which is often produced by the spoken word, written information and / or observable behaviour (De Vos, et al.,2002). The data produced in qualitative research can be termed as 'soft' since it describes and represents many facets of the participants. Furthermore, the beliefs of the qualitative researchers themselves are often

reflected in their research and findings may also be shaped by their individual interests and branch of study. The research begins with only vaguely formulated research questions and the research follows a flexible design (Taylor, 1984).

4.2.2 Qualitative research designs

The types of research designs that are qualitative in nature include those that aim to gather and describe new observations or interpretations where little or no prior information exists (Seaman, 1991). The purpose of such studies, therefore, is to attempt to understand and explore phenomena from the point of view of those being studied.

According to Taylor (1984), qualitative research is naturalistic and researchers interact with the participants in a natural and self-effacing manner. People are studied in the context of their past and the situations in which they find themselves while researchers try to understand them from their own reference; researchers develop concepts and insights from the patterns in the data produced. Qualitative research is designed to ensure that there is a close fit between the data produced and what the participants are actually saying, thus allowing us to stay close to the empirical world (Taylor, 1984).

The four main types of qualitative research designs include Ethnography, Case Study, Grounded Theory and Phenomenology (Stevens et al., 1993). For the purpose of this study, the researcher has concentrated on phenomenology since

the objective of phenomenology is to describe any phenomenon as experienced by the individual; this suited the purpose of the research which centred on the phenomenon of how students interpreted and used the information which they obtained from the Internet.

4.3 Phenomenology

Phenomenology focuses on an individual's interpretation of his / her own experience. Researchers adopting this approach are concerned with how individuals and / or groups perceive their world as well as how they experience and interpret what goes on around them from one situation to the next. According Mickunas (1974) as cited in Stevens *et al.* (1993), actions and words reveal and convey more than they appear to. The task of the phenomenologist is therefore, to uncover both the conscious and unconscious ways in which people communicate and 'live' their experiences.

According to Taylor (1984), central to phenomenology is idea of experiencing reality as others experience it. The researcher must set aside his / her own beliefs and aim at obtaining a detailed understanding of other peoples perspectives; the researcher should also rid himself / herself of any preconceptions of what is expected from the participants. Observation questionnaires and in-depth interviewing techniques are often applied for this type of research (Taylor, 1984). Choosing an appropriate sample forms an integral part of the research process.

4.4 Sampling Techniques

4.4.1 Sampling

Sampling refers to the procedure applied for choosing samples. Samples may be created by self-selection (volunteers), or by the researcher who chooses the participants using various methods; samples may be chosen randomly (random sampling) or selectively (purposive sampling) (Sarantakos, 2005).

People as participants are required for most of the research which is conducted in the social sciences. However, it is impossible to involve the entire population in ones field of research. The researcher therefore chooses a subset of the population that can produce data that is representative of the larger population under study (De Vos, et.al, 2002). This subset of people who participate in the research is referred to as the sample (Sarantakos, 2005). Sampling is a significant part of any research project as the method used to derive the sample will determine whether the sample does or does not actually represent the entire population from which it is drawn (Seaman, 1991).

According to Cohen et al. (2002), the following points must be considered during sampling:

- The sample size
- The representativeness of the sample
- The access to the sample
- The sampling strategy

It is important for the researcher to ensure that the sample chosen actually represents the whole population in question; this is done by setting the parameter characteristics of the wider population before choosing a sample. The researcher must also ensure that he / she has the permission of and access to the participants in the study in order to conduct the research as planned (Cohen, et al., 2002). Since sample size is an important criterion to consider when selecting a sample, Sarantakos (2005) suggests that the sample size should be as large as one requires it, but also as small as possible.

This study was specifically aimed at university students who use the Internet. Due to the above, the parameters were pre-determined; hence purposive sampling was employed.

4.4.2 Purposive Sampling

In this method, the sample is chosen for a very specific reason; the researcher purposely selects or 'hand picks' information-rich participants who are relevant to the study. While this type of sampling may suit the requirements of the researcher, it should be noted that the sample is deliberately selective and may not necessarily represent the entire population under investigation (Cohen, et al., 2002).

Maximum variation purposive sampling (Patton, 1990) was applied in this study in order to have students of various socio-economic, cultural and ethnic

backgrounds participate in the study. Furthermore, the case of *snowball* purposive (Patton, 1990; Taylor, 1984) sampling was also employed.

Snowball purposive sampling is often employed when the target population is unknown to the researcher or difficult to reach. This method requires that the researcher identify one or a few members from the population of interest, who then refers him / her to another person and so on. However, a limitation to this form of sampling is that friends can refer friends, etc and not people that they do not like (Patton, 1990; Sarantakos, 2005; Taylor, 1984).

4.5 Methods of data collection / production

4.5.1 Interviews

The purpose of interviews, according to Patton (1990), is to gather information which is not directly observable. Interviews may be regarded as questionnaires that are conducted verbally. Interviews are the 'favoured digging tool' for qualitative researchers. Face to face encounters between researchers and participants enable the researcher to gain some insight into the perceptions, views, experiences and lives of participants through their words (De Vos, et al.,2002). Notes are taken or the interviews are often recorded on tape and then transcribed before analysis (Taylor, 1984). The flow of data often depends on how unobtrusive the method of recording actually is (Stevens, et al.,1993). It is imperative that researchers allow the participants the freedom to verbalise their thoughts without imposing their personal views on them (the participants).

Interviews also facilitate validity checks and triangulation. They further allow the researcher to discover the subjective side to the issues at hand.

There are three types of interviews that may be used, viz. structured interviews, unstructured interviews and semi structured interviews. A structured interview includes a schedule of questions in a particular order; the same wording and procedure must be applied for all participants. An unstructured interview is very open-ended and therefore encourages the participants to raise and explore issues as they wish. Semi-structured interviews are a combination of both structured and unstructured interviews and a great advantage of this type of interview is that it allows the researcher freedom to move in directions that are most productive (Seaman, 1991). This form of interview is very flexible; hence for the purpose of this study, focus group and one-to-one semi-structured interviews were used.

4.5.2 Focus group interviews

Focus group interviews are a form of group interviews where the group discusses a topic which is supplied by the interviewer. Participants interact with each other, and are encouraged to share their experiences with each other; it is through this interaction that the data is produced (De Vos, et al, 2002). Focus group interviews are often used when multiple viewpoints are required on a specific

subject. It also allows for large amounts of data to be produced in a short space of time (Seaman, 1991).

A focus group comprises a specifically chosen group of people to discuss a particular topic. This type of interview is advantageous in that it produces large amounts of data in a short space of time. Furthermore, these interviews may generate insights that may not have emerged in a face-to-face interview (Cohen, et al., 2002). Focused interviews allow the researcher to deviate from the schedule, provided that the information required for the study is covered by the end of the interview (Seaman, 1991).

For the purpose of this study, a focus group interview (comprising 6 participants) was conducted. The basic issues addressed during the interview, is attached as Appendix 1. Topics that were addressed here as well as other issues that emerged from this interview were addressed in the semi-structured one-to-one interviews that followed.

4.5.3 Semi-structured one-to-one interviews

According to De Vos, et al. (2002) semi-structured interviews contain the elements of both structured and unstructured interviews. In structured interviews there is strict adherence to the wording and order of the questions while unstructured interviews consist of open-ended questions which may be presented in any order. The degree to which the interview is structured is

dependent on, amongst others, the topic and the type of information required (Sarantakos, 2005). Semi-structured interviews are conducted with a fairly open framework which can be used both to furnish and obtain information. They allow for focused, conversational, two-way communication (Tool 9, 2005).

Semi-structured interviewing starts with more general questions or topics; these questions then become the basis for more specific questions which may or may not be prepared in advance (Sarantakos, 2005). Semi-structured interviewing is guided only in the sense that part of the interview is directed by the prepared schedule. The schedule increases the richness of the data and makes data production fairly systematic for each participant (Cohen, et al., 2002).

Most questions are created during the interview, allowing both the interviewer and the person being interviewed the flexibility to probe for details or discuss certain issues. Probing allows for the researcher to dig deeper and follow up on topics raised by the participant. The researcher may constantly ask the participant to elaborate or clarify issues until he / she is satisfied that he / she understands fully what is being said (Taylor, 1984).

The participants act as the researcher's observer of goings-on that the researcher cannot observe personally; the participants are the eyes and ears of the researcher. The setting for the interviews can either enhance or limit the data production. The ambience, according to De Vos et al. (2002), created for the interview should therefore be one that would be suitable and pleasing to the participants. The researcher should create a comfortable environment in which

the participants are made to feel relaxed. The researcher must also establish a rapport with the participants by asking non-directive questions first in order to learn what is important to them and then progress to questions that are more focused to the study (Taylor, 1984). Interviewers should possess skills not only to encourage the participant to talk, but to also absorb what is being said (Stevens et al.,1993). Paying attention and showing an interest in what is being said could also help promote an agreeable atmosphere, thereby producing rich data.

The limitations to this form of data production, is that participants may be shy about revealing certain information and may therefore hold back. This could however be overcome by making participants feel comfortable in the knowledge that they are not being judged and that anonymity is offered (De Vos, et al., 2002).

4.6 Data Analysis

Like numerical or other forms of data collected during research, descriptive data cannot speak for itself. It needs to be linked with concepts and ideas that can help create some form of order (Singleton, et al., 1993). The steps involved in data analysis, as proposed by De Vos, et al. (2002) after it has been produced, recorded and managed involve describing, classifying, interpreting and representing the data. Once the data had been produced, units of meaning were selected. Concepts were then grouped, related and categorised (Rice & Ezzy,

2000). Themes that emerged were then identified and re-contextualised by referring to the literature (De Vos et al., 2002).

4.7 Conclusion

Using the background knowledge that was obtained from literature, and bearing in mind the limitations that it encompasses, the research was conducted.

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CHAPTER FIVE:

THE RESEARCH

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE RESEARCH

5.1 Introduction

The main reason for choosing to conduct this study on university students is that what sets them apart from the populace who are non-university students, is that these students are familiar with the Internet. Many would have had access to the Internet from a very young age, either at home or at school (Jones, 2002); if this were not the case, then students would have access at university these institutions do provide Internet facilities for their students .

One characteristic that sets them apart from past generations of college students is their degree of familiarity with the Internet. According to Jones (2002) today's typical college student was introduced to the Internet at a relatively early age. The 18-year-old college freshmen of 2002 were born the year the PC was introduced to the public, and they are less aware of a "pre-Internet" world as they are of one in which the Internet is central to their communication. Surveys of college students conducted for this report (Jones, 2002) revealed that one-fifth (20%) reported that they began using computers between the ages of 5 and 8 and by the time they were 16 to 18 years old all of them had begun using computers. About half (49%) first began using the Internet at college, and half (47%) first began using it before entering college. The great majority (85%) of

college students own their own computer, and two-thirds (66%) use at least two email addresses.

5.2 Data production

Interviews were used as a source of data production. This method of data production, according to Hughes in Greenfield (2002) has among others, the following advantages:

- Large amounts of data can be obtained quickly
- The researcher can have access to the participants for follow-ups and clarification
- Validity checks and triangulations is made possible
- Data is collected in natural settings
- Interviewing allows for flexibility in the formulation of hypothesis
- The researcher is able to uncover the subjective side of the responses

The following disadvantages are also noted:

- Data is open to misinterpretation
- Data is dependent on the small group of participants and may be difficult to replicate
- The success of the data production is dependent on the level of honesty of the participants
- The interview process can cause discomfort to the researcher and the participant

Taking cognizance of both, the advantages and disadvantages, of interviewing, the research was undertaken using focus group interviews and semi-structured one-to-one interviews. The sample chosen met the following two criteria, viz. participants had to be university students who spent time on the Internet.

5.2.1 Sampling

The sample of participants was produced using purposive snowball sampling. A student that was known by the researcher to spend a great deal of time on the Internet was identified. Having agreed to participate in the study, the participant was asked to identify other students (who are high Internet users) that may be interested in participating in the study. The researcher informed the participant that it would be preferable to have both male and female participants from different socio-economic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds if possible.

A further stipulation by the researcher was that not all participants should be from the same campus or university. The reason for this specification was that the study did not intend to focus on students from a particular university or a particular campus. Two students from different campuses were then identified, and subsequently approached others on behalf of the researcher. Ten students were originally identified; a total of six participated in the focus-group interview.

5.2.2 The focus group interview

Through consultation with the participants, a suitable time and venue for the interview was arranged.

Contact was made with the participants two weeks before the interview was scheduled to take place. Participants were informed of the subject to be covered by the researcher. A confirmation letter was then forwarded to the participants (De Vos, et al., 2002). Participants were then called the day before the interview in order to confirm their attendance.

All participants arrived on time. Some time was spent chatting and socializing over coffee and muffins before the interview began. Each participant signed the "Informed Consent" form (Appendix 7). Permission was obtained for the use of a tape recorder, and all participants consented.

The researcher discussed the nature of the study and offered to answer any questions that the participants may have before the interview began. They were informed that they could withdraw from the process at any time if they so wished. Anonymity and confidentiality was also guaranteed. An appeal was made by the researcher that the participants try not to speak while others were speaking. There being no apparent fears or further questions from the participants, the process began. The questions that were used to guide the process are attached as Appendix 1. The focus group interview lasted approximately 45 minutes.

At the end of the interview, the researcher enquired whether any of the participants would be willing to participate and be available for one-to-one interviews. The response was good and arrangements were made to set up appointments for these interviews.

5.2.3 One-to-one interviews

Semi-structured one-to-one interviews were chosen as the next step in view of the fact that this type of interview increases the comprehensiveness of the data. This also contributed to the process of triangulation which offered the researcher the opportunity to verify the truthfulness of responses obtained and therefore the validity of the data produced during the focus group interviews.

Four students participated in the one-to-one interviews (two that formed part of the focus group and two others). Each interview was conducted at a venue and time that was most suitable to the participant. Similar and sometimes identical questions that were asked during the focus group interviews were asked. The researcher decided to raise a few salient points which emerged from the focus group interview, in the one-to-one interviews so as to obtain / produce data that may not have been forthcoming by participants in a group (De Vos, et al., 2002). It was easier to probe during these sessions as it was observed that the

participants seemed more relaxed and more at ease to give details of their individual experiences. Each interview lasted approximately 25 minutes.

5.2.4 Mini survey

In order to ensure validation of data by means of triangulation (De Vos, et al., 2002), a mini survey (Appendix 2) was conducted on fifty randomly selected students at two campuses. The researcher explained the purpose of the survey to the administrators of the LANs at the two campuses and obtained their permission to hand out the mini surveys. Once permission was granted, the researcher visited the LAN and handed out the mini surveys to students who were willing to participate. The completed questionnaires were collected by the researcher once the students had filled them in.

5.2.5 Recording the data

With the permission of the participants, the interviews were recorded on tape since tape recording allows for a more complete record than note-taking (De Vos, et al., 2002). Notes were also taken to record overt body language and facial expressions. The cassettes were labeled according to the type of interview which was recorded on them. The researcher chose to keep the tape recorder switched off during the first few minutes of some of the interviews when it seemed as though the participant was slightly nervous. A conversational atmosphere was maintained before any salient issues were raised. The tape recorder was also switched off at times when highly sensitive and private issues

(such as pornography) emerged and the participant offered to speak off the record.

5.2.6 Transcription

According to De Vos, et al. (2002), it is good practice to transcribe and analyse the interviews while it is still fresh in the researcher's memory. Each interview was therefore transcribed within a week or two of the interview having been conducted, so as to retain as much of the essence of the sessions as possible. Transcripts of the interviews were stored on computer using file names which pertained to the type of interview conducted. Hard copies of the transcripts were also made as a precaution if the computer had to crash; they were also used for verification by participants.

Transcripts and summaries of the interviews were taken back to the participants; this provided the individuals with the opportunity of clarifying and / or withdrawing anything that that they did not feel comfortable with. All participants were in agreement with the transcriptions. The researcher was then in a position to proceed with the analysis of the data.

5.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis refers to the procedures involved in organizing and adding meaning to the collected data (De Vos, et al., 2002). According to Cresswell, in De Vos, et al. (2002), classifying of data implies searching through the data for

emerging categories and themes. It is suggested that five or six themes should be identified; this was accomplished by sorting the data in a way that allowed the researcher to extract the important from more trivial data produced, thus reducing the data collected to a small manageable set of themes. Significant themes with recurring views and concepts were thereby identified. The mini survey was analysed quantitatively, in order to verify the frequency of the verbal responses (relating to genres of sites accessed) obtained from the interviews.

5.4 Conclusion

The analysis was followed by an interpretation of the data, i.e. making sense of the data produced (De Vos, et al., 2002). As categories and patterns surfaced, an attempt was made to conceptualise the reasons for probable connections or lack thereof. The results were then represented as "Findings".

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CHAPTER SIX:

FINDINGS

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FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

The findings herein contained emanate from the study conducted with a group of university students in Durban, KZN who access the Internet on a regular basis viz. daily or weekly; most of the participants were full-time students while a few were part-time students. From this study it emerged that students use the Internet mainly for:

- Research
- E-mail
- Chat rooms
- Downloading music / videos
- Games
- Social networking

These uses featured prominently in the interviews conducted.

The three central themes (together with the units of meaning) that emerged from the data are represented in Table 2.

Theme 1	Commonly accessed genre of sites accessed
	➢ Research
	➢ E-mail
	➢ Downloading music / videos
	➢ Games
	➢ Social networking
Theme 2	**Reasons for access of these sites**
	➢ Education
	➢ Entertainment / fun
Theme 3	**Ethical issues related to Internet use**
	➢ Cyber law
	➢ Ethical issues
	➢ Netiquette

Table 2: Themes and units of meaning

The first question in the focus group and one-on-one interviews related directly to the number of hours spent on the Internet. The responses were given in terms of hours per day and hours per week. Of the total number of participants, 70% responded in terms of hours per week; however 30% of the respondents spent long hours per day on the Internet. The Figures below illustrate the results.

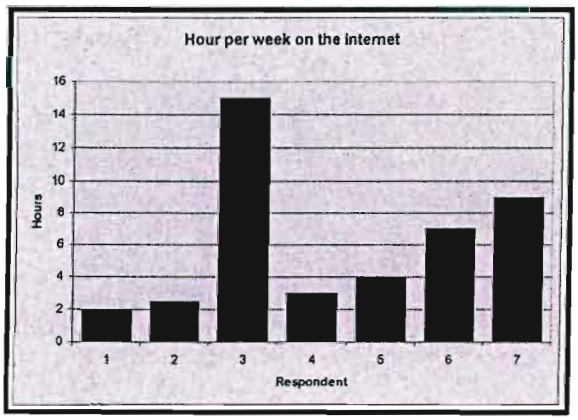

Figure 1: Hours per week spent on the Internet

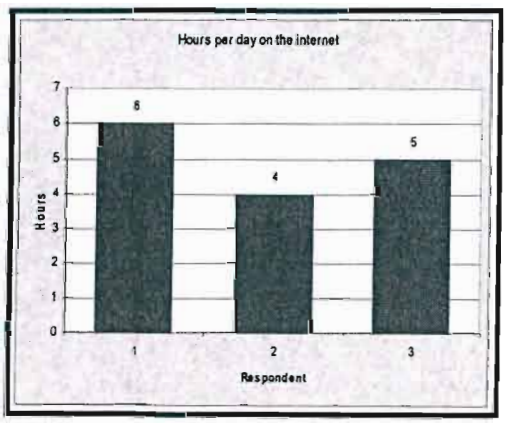

Figure 2: Hours per day spent on the Internet

The average number of hours per week spent by 70% of the respondents was 6 hours while the average number of hours per day spent by 30% of the respondents was 5 hours. The average number of hours per week spent on the Internet by all participants, collectively, was 14.75 hours (14 hours and 45 minutes) per week.

6.2 Theme 1: *Commonly accessed genre of sites accessed*

The interviews revealed particular sites or types of sites accessed. Following the focus group interview, a survey regarding the extent to which these sites were accessed was carried out. Participants indicated their usage using the following rating scale: ***always, mostly, sometimes, never***. This survey revealed that the majority of the users (90% → 95%) always used the Internet for research, educational purposes and e-mail. An analysis of the genres of sites or specific sites that were ***always*** or ***mostly*** accessed revealed the following results. Refer to Table 3.

Type of activity / site	Percentage who always or mostly access these sites
Research	100%
University work	100%
E-mail	100%
Chat rooms	100%
Listen / Download Music	85%
Games / network games	70%
Listen / Download Movies	60%
FaceBook	55%
MySpace	45%

Table 3: Type of activity / site always or mostly accessed

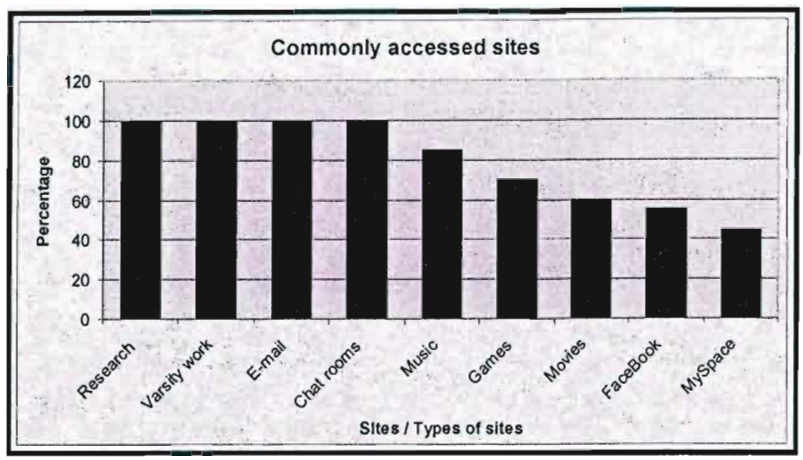

Figure 3: Commonly accessed sites/ types of sites

An analysis of the units, i.e. genres of sites or specific sites that were ***always, mostly*** or ***sometimes*** accessed, revealed the following. Refer to Table 4.

Type of activity / site	Percentage who always, mostly or sometimes access these sites
Research	100%
University work	100%
E-mail	100%
Chat rooms	100%
Listen / Download Music	100%
Games / Network games	100%
Listen / Download Movies	95%
FaceBook	85%
MySpace	85%

Table 4: Units always, mostly or sometimes accessed

Table 4 clearly indicates that 85% or more of the students access these sites at some point or the other. Having defined these units or sites accessed, the following categories or genres were defined as being most common uses of the Internet.

Categories (Genre of sites)	Percentage who always, mostly or sometimes access these sites
Research	100%
E-mail and IRC	100%
Chat rooms (IRC)	100%
Downloading (Music / Movies)	100%
Games	100%
Social Networks	85%

Table 5: Genre of Internet application

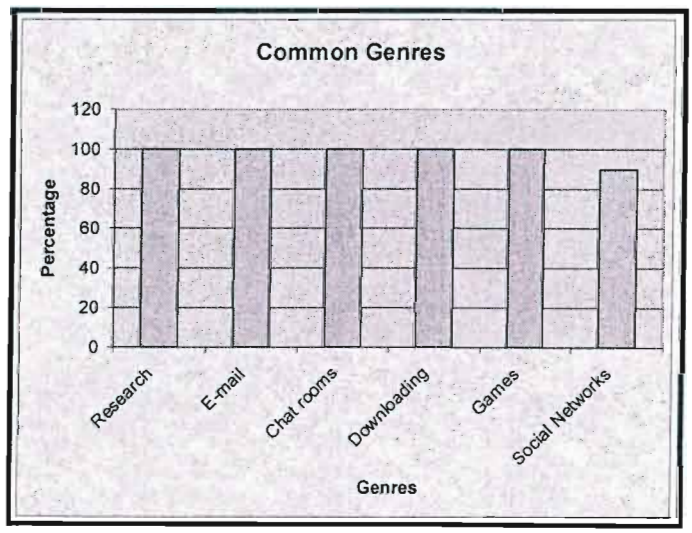

Figure 4: Common Uses / Applications

The mini survey was used to verify responses, but the discussion that follows is based mainly on the interviews conducted.

6.2.1 Research

The term research, for university students, it seems, refers to looking or searching for information on a particular topic. Internet research is when one uses the Internet or World Wide Web to search for information on a topic of one's choice. As one participant stated, when asked what he meant by research: "*I mean searching for information about a particular thing on the Internet.*"

The study revealed that all students spent their time searching for information on the Internet by using some form of search. One participant even said, "*...research – anything – Google it...* "; the same participant in the focus group even went on to say "*...research anything out of boredom ...*". Others stated "*...Research information for projects...*" , "*...Go on sites to check out cars...*", "*...Research project analysis – due to my interest in IT ...*" and "*...I also look for information and pictures of cars...*" These statements clearly reveal that, apart from doing research related to course content, students often spend time searching for information on any random topic or topics of interest.

6.2.2 E-mail

The mini survey indicated that 100% of the participants use e-mail. Almost all of the individuals who participated in the interviews indicted that they use e-mails for various reasons.

One of the participants said "*If you think you gonna have a bad day, and you go and look at your e-mail. You might have an e-mail from a friend either videos or pics or something...*", while another said "*I think I spend more time on "junk" mail like jokes, pictures, video clips etc. which I enjoy because I can just open them, enjoy them and then forward them to other people...*". These responses clearly imply that many students access e-mail just for fun.

E-mail is also used as a pastime where students access and send messages when they feel lazy or bored. Responses such as "*We spend more time on e-mails than we actually need to...*" and "*I don't really send e-mails that I have typed out myself unless I really have to...*" reveal that time can be spent on e-mail doing things that the students themselves are aware, they do not really have to do.

In response to the question about forwarding mails that promise you something in return, most participants believed that it was just nonsense, as one participant said "*...I think that those e-mails are just a whole lot of nonsense as well as a waste of time...*". However one or two did admit to forwarding mail that they received from others; evidence of this is supported by the following statement. "*I don't really send e-mails that I have typed out myself unless I really have to...*".

On the other hand there were those who use e-mail for academic reasons. The responses, "*We also access coursework through e-mail...*" and "*Sometimes you don't need to go for a lecture, 'cos you can access the lecture content and notes...*" indicate that some students do indeed use e-mail to supplement their lectures. This revelation offers hope that students can and do use e-mails for personal growth as well as educational applications and not just for entertainment. We can deduce therefore that there is a light at the end of the tunnel as far as the appropriate and profitable use of e-mail by students is concerned.

6.2.3 Downloading (music / movies)

Downloading music or movies in the context of this study, is when users copy music or video files from the Internet and store them on their computer. One of the participants even went to the extent of saying that he would "...*download anything that is downloadable...*". This exemplifies the degree to which students go with regard to downloading files off the Internet.

Many of the respondents admitted to spending time downloading music or videos. Common responses were, "*Downloading music – pass time...*", download the maximum amount at any given time – ","*Download music onto my flash disk...*" and "*Download music, music videos...*". It is obvious that downloading material is a common practice, the ethical issues of which will be addressed later.

6.2.4 Games

Participants admitted to spending time playing games. As one respondent stated, "*...I do go onto sites where I can play games quite often...*". During the interviews it was observed that a greater number of the males who spent long hours per day on the Internet, were those that actually spent lots of time playing online games. In response to the type of games played, a statement such as the following was made: "*...Online games. Network games – a whole group of us would be playing...*". Participants then went on to state how much of time was spent on games. The following response "*...I played games the whole day...*" *and "...I was playing games for the whole week...".* For this individual, the games became his main focus and he therefore lost sight of his reason for actually being at university.

Students also admitted to coming to a realisation that this kind of behaviour was not acceptable. Declarations such as "*...I was also hooked on games...*" *and "...there was no studying and then I decided this must stop..."* suggest that there are students who do get into this kind of a rut, are able to pick themselves up and move forward with their studies.

However, there may be others that just get addicted to this kind of pastime, and can never pull themselves out of this. There is therefore a need for some kind of education and some form of intervention that can prevent students from moving toward this kind of addictive behaviour.

6.2.5 Social networks (Including Internet Relay Chat (Chat rooms))

The social networking sites that are commonly accessed globally are MySpace, FaceBook, Friendster and Xanga. *Figure 5* illustrates the breakdown of usage of these four sites (Phillips, 2007).

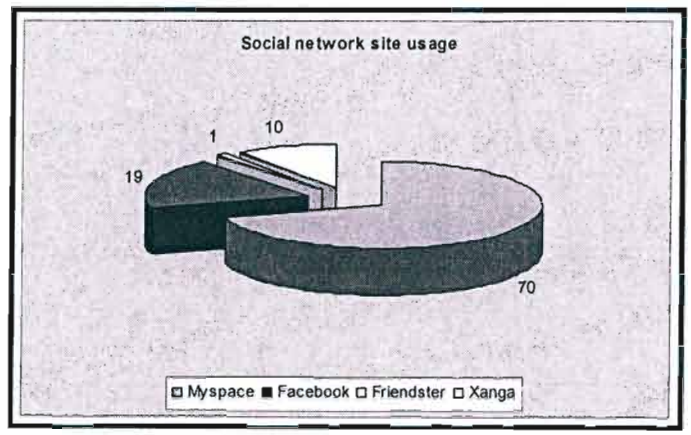

Figure 5: Access of social network sites globally

Furthermore, the growth in the use of MySpace alone has been astronomical and is represented in the *Figure 6* below.

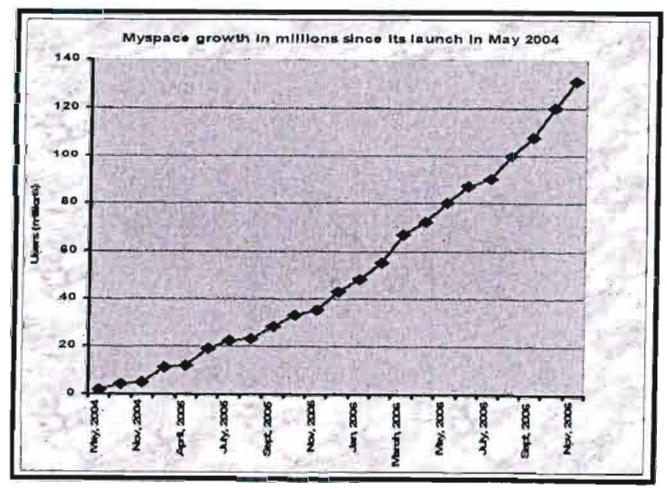

Figure 6: Growth of MySpace since its launch in May 2004.
(Data taken from http://www.mychurch.org)

The two most commonly accessed social network sites in this study were MySpace and FaceBook. The findings were that 80% of the respondents to the survey accessed both MySpace and FaceBook, while 5% accessed MySpace only, 5% accessed FaceBook only and 10% accessed neither.

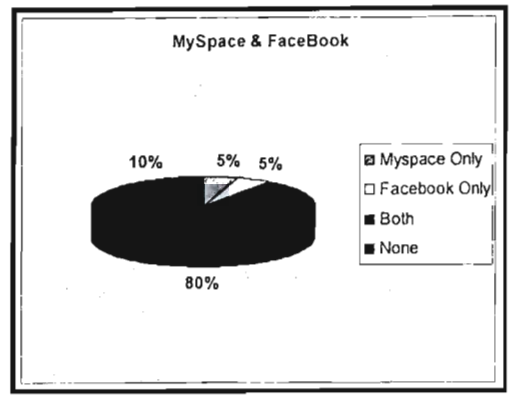

Figure 7: Users of MySpace and FaceBook

As was evident in the interviews, in reply to the question *"What genre or types of sites do you access?"*, responses were *"...FaceBook, MySpace..."*. FaceBook, like others SNSs, allows users to create their own online profiles, read the profiles of other users and join groups where members may share common interests (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007).

Sites of this nature give the user a sense of anonymity, as some of the participants said, "*You can describe yourself and you can totally lie and they believe you..* " ...and *"...you know you are making up stuff, you know they are making up stuff. That is like stupid 'cos I know I'm lying and they are lying..."*

This sense of anonymity provides a sense of security, hence users are more willing to share private information or even lie to other users (Amichai-Hamburger, 2005).

It also allows users to make an impression, as one participant said "*It also gives you a chance to show off. Like, I will put up some glam pictures of myself or with my friends or family.*" As Rogers' theory (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1983) suggests, individuals will display characteristics that will encourage others to like them (Amichai-Hamburger, 2005); hence, placing these "glam" pictures of oneself on the net allows others to see only that side of the user which he / she wishes to be made public – the real person is still hidden from the public eye.

6.3 Theme 2: *Reasons for access of these sites*

6.3.1 Education

Students use the Internet firstly for research for the courses they offer. Responses to this effect was evidenced by "*...Research information for projects...*" and "*...I research for IT and also for coursework which is on-line...*". Secondly, it is used to access coursework; this was revealed by the responses "*...Sometimes you don't need to go for a lecture, 'cos you can access the lecture content and notes...*". Thirdly, students used their e-mail for both access to coursework and to communicate with their lecturers. The following "*We also access coursework through e-mail. It comes in handy ...*" and "*You do get the*

opportunity to e-mail your lecturer if you have any questions, etc., then they will respond and maybe explain it to you ..." clearly signifies that students do in fact find the Internet useful to them. They do acknowledge the advantages that the Internet has for their studies, but their responses indicate that they do not use it as much as they could for this purpose as they tend to find the leisure applications more interesting.

6.3.2 Entertainment

In terms of entertainment or fun, respondents admitted to using the Internet for games, gambling, watching porn, viewing their horoscopes and taking IQ tests. In addition to games, as discussed above, evidence of entertainment-associated access was obtained.

In relation to accessing porn, the following responses were received: "*...when I was in school, I used to go onto porn sites...*", "*... I know some people that go onto porn sites..*" and another participant who in addition to visiting other types of sites mentioned "*... as well as porn sites...*".

Many of the respondents revealed that they also spent time taking IQ and EQ tests. Responses such as, "*...There is this one site that I used to go to – Tickle.com. This site has a whole lot of tests, IQ tests, personality tests and stuff like that...*" and "*...*Hmmm... *I also enjoy sites which offer IQ Tests...*" alluded to access to sites of this nature.

Online gaming and gambling was another activity that participants admitted to participating in. One respondent stated, "*...and on the odd occasion I visit online gambling sites...*". In response to what else participants accessed on the Internet another said "*...online gaming and casinos...*".

Other types of sites mentioned (although participants did not really admit to going on these sites personally) were astrology and dating sites. The following responses, respectively were made in this regard: *A lot of people spend a lot of time going on astro sites. It depends on what happens. If you not happy with what happens on one, then you go onto another...*" and "*...I have many friends that go onto dating sites to find partners merely because they are too shy or quiet to approach girls, so they find it easier to hook up with girls through dating sites on the Internet....*".

6.4 Theme 3: *Ethical issues related to Internet use*

6.4.1 Cyber law

Cyber law refers to the laws governing the use of communications technology (Sangonet, 2003). An example of a computer crime that is often committed by users is that of illegal downloading of music. In response to the question, "Are you aware of the laws regarding the downloading of music?", one of the respondents said: "*Let's just say that I am aware that there are laws regarding the downloading of music, but I am not exactly sure of what those laws are. I*

mean, everybody nowadays just download whatever they want whenever they want and don't really care much about the laws regarding the downloading of stuff because everything is so easily available and accessible to you". This statement clearly reveals that many users are aware that there are laws governing the use of computers and the Internet, but are not educated on what these laws really are.

6.4.2 Ethical issues

On the question of ethical issues related to Internet usage, most participants admitted to not being aware of such issues. An enquiry as to whether they were aware of any ethical issues related to Internet usage, responses such as "*I don't think we have been...*" and "*Nothing that I am aware of...*" were given. One of the respondents in the focus group however stated "*I know that there are restrictions on children accessing certain sites – due to the age restrictions...*" but was unable to state anything further. It is therefore obvious that students have not been made aware of the ethical issues related to Internet usage.

6.4.3 Netiquette

Students were not aware of what was meant by the term netiquette. Responses received clearly indicated that the students did not therefore practice netiquette. They basically indicated that one should not be swearing in chat rooms; the response "*...You can't swear...*" was given. On the other hand, a completely

different response, "..., *you synchronize your updates once a day...*" was given in response to the query on knowledge of netiquette.

6.5 Conclusion

The aims of this research were to determine:

- Which genres of sites are accessed?
- What are the reasons for students accessing these sites?
- What ethical issues associated with Internet usage (including netiquette), are students aware of?

The following conclusions to the findings have been made in this regard:

Critical Question One (1): *Which genres of sites are accessed?*

The research has revealed that the genres of sites commonly accessed by students are:

Search engines for research

All of the students stated that they used the Internet for research. It is clear that when students speak of research, they mean that they are searching for information on the Internet using any of the search engines available, the popular choice being *Google*. When students are searching for information, there are no set rules or ideas relating to proper or adequate searches. Their searches are merely random searches done by typing in the key words.

E-mail

Students access e-mail mainly because they are bored or have nothing else to do. They very seldom type out messages that they wish to send out. They, however, spend more time reading arbitrary e-mails which have been sent to them by their friends, and in turn forward it to others.

Music downloads

Students spend a large amount of time downloading music that they like as they see it as a way of listening to the music and assessing it before actually going out to purchase. None of the participants admitted to downloading music for the sake of resale; however, one did indicate that a friend of his made money by burning CDs of music that he had downloaded, and selling them to others. It was rather alarming that all the participants in this study (100%) admitted that they downloaded music off the Internet. Similarly, a study conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project revealed that 56 percent of college students admitted to downloading music (Zernike, 2003).

Network games

A majority of the participants confessed to playing network games. Those that did spend long hours on this genre of applications indicated that it became

almost addictive, but that they managed to pull themselves out of it. The study by Chin-Sheng and Wen-Bin (2006) in Thailand, indicated that those who do become addicted to the Internet, tend to do so as they use the Internet as a means of escape from reality. As educators, it is our duty to guard against this kind of addictive-forming behaviour from developing. Based on the anonymity offered by the Internet, users become less self-conscious, and able to operate at a level at which they may not during face-to-face confrontation (Chin-Sheng & Wen-Bin, 2006).

Social networks

Every single one of the participants in the interviews alluded to spending time on social network sites such as FaceBook and MySpace. They use these sites to keep in contact with friends and as suggested by Phillips (2007), also use them as a means to find new friends and build up relationships. As stated above, social networking allows users to be less self-conscious; communication therefore becomes easier. However, this ease can also lead to addiction; this seems to be in line with studies conducted by others (Chin-Sheng & Wen-Bin, 2006).

Critical Question Two (2): *What are the reasons for students accessing these sites?*

Participants did not indicate any particular usefulness of sites or genre of sites accessed. It is evident that students go onto the Internet "just for fun" most of the time, unless they are doing something specific related to their coursework. They

sometimes accessed course notes, submitted assignments or communicated with their lecturers.

Critical Question Three (3): *What ethical issues associated with Internet usage (including netiquette), are students aware of?*

With regard to legal issues associated with Internet applications, all students were aware that the laws did exist; however, students were not acquainted with the real laws.

Ethical issues of a general nature were mentioned by participants, e.g. that one should not swear at others or use vulgar language when communicating via the Internet. It was evident that none of the students had received any formal indication of suitable behaviour on the various sites accessed. As far, as netiquette is concerned, students seemed to be clueless.

As a result of the findings, it is the opinion of the researcher that students at school level and at tertiary institutions need to be instructed and informed on issues related to Internet usage. The following chapter therefore contains some guidelines that could be used at educational institutions for this purpose.

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CHAPTER SEVEN:

RECOMMENDATIONS

AND CONCLUSION

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Chapter 7: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

CHAPTER SEVEN
RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

The findings clearly indicate the need for facilitators to provide students with the knowledge and skills that will promote a culture of healthy and safe practices when using the Internet. This is advocated for both schools and tertiary institutions since in KZN there are many students who access the Internet for the first time only after they have left school and have entered a tertiary educational institution. In order for this culture to be promoted, the facilitators (educators and lecturers) need to be equipped with the relevant tools that will enable them to perform this task effectively.

The following recommendations are therefore proposed:

- Schools and tertiary institutions (that do not already have one) should develop an Internet Policy
- Facilitators must be equipped with the required knowledge and skills to educate students on safe Internet practices
- Students must be tutored in safe Internet practices
- Netiquette (Internet etiquette) must be highlighted

7.2 Developing an Internet Policy

The Internet allows users access to various genres of sites, with many applications available to students at school and tertiary institutions. The Internet is an extremely valuable resource, but at the same time it contains information that may not be suitable for younger users (Cutajar, 2004).

Chat rooms, for example may expose younger people to users who are not really who they pretend to be. In the same light, downloading of music under certain circumstances is illegal. Hence, developing an Internet policy will provide a framework that could protect the institution, educators and students from unnecessary problems or issues (legal or not), that may be encountered due to improper Internet usage (Cutajar, 2004).

Stakeholders that should be involved the development of this policy should include:

- School / university management
- Educators / Lecturers
- Parents
- Students
- An IT specialist

A committee should be formed, and together, an Internet policy should be developed specifically for the institution. A copy of a sample Internet policy is attached as Appendix 4.

Once the policy has been finalised, it should be circulated to all students, parents and staff members. This Internet Usage Policy should also be posted on the institution's website (if the institution has one).

7.3 Empowering facilitators (Educators and Lecturers)

Teachers and lecturers should be in a position to educate the students on safe Internet practices. Educational institutions should make it their duty to provide staff with appropriate training that will enable them to equip the students with the relevant information which will ensure that they become responsible Internet users (Cutajar, 2004). This can be achieved by sending personnel on courses that can prepare them suitably for this task.

Parents should also be empowered in this regard. Apart from students being taught safe Internet practices at school, it is imperative that parents be informed of the schools policy since skills learnt at school could be easily ignored at home; the parents could therefore reinforce the school's guidelines at home (Phoenix, 2005). Schools should make parents aware of the dangers associated with Internet use. Furthermore, if the resources are available, arrange a workshop that is specifically for parents (Cutajar, 2004).

7.4 Safe Internet practices for students

Once a school policy is in place, and the necessary personnel have been trained, students must be educated on safe Internet practices. Generally, students must be made to realize that when they access the Internet at an educational institution, they should do so for the purpose of complementing or enhancing their education as well as the culture of teaching and learning (Cutajar, 2004). Behaviour which is not acceptable must be emphasized; at the same time, acceptable behaviour (including netiquette) must be highlighted. Copyright and privacy issues should also be included in this document. Appendix 5 is a sample of an undertaking which students may be asked to sign.

7.5 Usage guidelines and netiquette

In addition to the Internet Usage Policy (Appendix 5), a sample set of guidelines for Internet users is attached as Appendix 6. Included in this set of guidelines are some simple netiquette rules for common Internet applications.

7.6 Conclusion

This research was conducted on university students, who, as young adults, were able to provide invaluable information on Internet use. This wealth of information produced, which may otherwise have not been forthcoming from students at school, made it possible for the researcher to obtain an in-depth knowledge of practices relating to Internet use.

As a result of the information produced, the researcher was in a position to propose a policy as well as guidelines, which, it is hoped, will be used by educational institutions to promote a healthy culture of Internet use. In following the proposed guidelines, it is envisaged that students at all levels of education, will access the Internet for specific reasons, from an informed point of view and not just out of boredom. All stakeholders, including management, educators, lecturers and parents should be involved in the process of enlightening the students. Students should therefore be encouraged to **conform** to the regulations and guidelines, in order to enjoy the **freedom** of exploring and surfing the net.

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Appendix 1

Interview Schedule

- Which genres (types) of sites do you access?
- What content on these internet sites do you find useful?
- How do you use the information that you obtain from the internet?
- What ethical issues associated with internet usage are you aware of?
- What do you understand by the term netiquette?
- Is there anything further, relating to this study that you would like to mention?

Appendix 2

Internet Usage

Indicate your choice with a tick (√) or a cross (**X**)

Type of activity / site	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Never
Research				
University work				
Listen / Download Music				
Listen / Download Movies				
Chat rooms				
Discussion Forums				
Bloging				
MySpace				
FaceBook				
UTube				
Porn Sites				
Astrology Sites (your star sign)				
IQ Tests and EQ Tests				
E-mail				
Games / network games				
On-line gambling				
Internet Banking				
Internet Shopping				

Appendix 3

ETHICAL CLEARANCE

UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL

RESEARCH OFFICE (GOBAN MBEKI CENTRE)
WESTVILLE CAMPUS
TELEPHONE NO.: 031 – 2603587
EMAIL: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

2 MAY 2006

MRS. CB KADER (203515179)
EDUCATION

Dear Mrs. Kader

ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL NUMBER : HSS/06120A

I wish to confirm that ethical clearance has been granted for the following project:

"An investigation on how young 'gay' men in Durban , KZN, use the internet to explore their sexual orientation, with special reference to netiquette"

Yours faithfully

MS. PHUMELELE XIMBA
RESEARCH OFFICE

PS: The following general condition is applicable to all projects that have been granted ethical clearance:

THE RELEVANT AUTHORITIES SHOULD BE CONTACTED IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE NECESSARY APPROVAL SHOULD THE RESEARCH INVOLVE UTILIZATION OF SPACE AND/OR FACILITIES AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS/ORGANISATIONS. WHERE QUESTIONNAIRES ARE USED IN THE PROJECT, THE RESEARCHER SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE QUESTIONNAIRE INCLUDES A SECTION AT THE END WHICH SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY THE PARTICIPANT (PRIOR TO THE COMPLETION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE) INDICATING THAT HE/SHE WAS INFORMED OF THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT AND THAT THE INFORMATION GIVEN WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

cc. Faculty Research Office (Derek Buchler)
cc. Supervisor (Mr. B Khoza)

Logo of institution

Name of Institution

Sample Internet Policy

(Date: e.g. January 2008)

Institution Logo	Institution Name	
	Author : C. Kader Date : 2007-12-01 Revision : 1	Internet Usage Policy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Institution Logo	Institution Name	
	Author : C. Kader Date : 2007-12-01 Revision : 1	Internet Usage Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

The computer systems at this institution have been provided for the exclusive use of the students and staff as they form an integral part of the curriculum. The Internet connects thousands of computers all over the world with millions of users around the globe. It is an information-rich resource which both complements and supplements the culture of learning and teaching. All students have open access to the Internet via the Library, Resource Centres and I.T. centres. Access to the Internet is provided mainly for academic support activities; the facility may occasionally be used for personal use. Every endeavor is made by the institution to block or filter access to information and graphics that may be obscene, pornographic, and harmful to students.

2. PURPOSE / RATIONALE

The purpose of this policy is to:

a) Regulate the use of electronic communications tools in the institution;
b) Guarantee the most favorable use of electronic communications;
c) Regulate the use of the internet in the institution;
d) Educate individuals in acceptable practice associated with internet usage;
e) Protect the institution against any legal action which may arise from unacceptable usage.

Institution Logo	Institution Name	
	Author : C. Kader Date : 2007-12-01 Revision : 1	Internet Usage Policy

3. AUDIENCE / APPLICABILITY

Only current students and staff may access the network. The policy shall apply throughout the institution to all individuals who have been granted access to the internet.

4. DEFINITIONS

a) "Institution" refers to the institution to which this policy applies and the management;
b) "User" refers to any individual who is using the internet facilities at the institution.

5. POLICY STATEMENT

Whilst it is hoped that all electronic communication should be used for educational purposes, the management at the institution acknowledges that students and staff my have valid reasons for access to the network for personal reasons. The use of electronic communications at the institution, therefore, needs to be controlled in a way that is appropriate and fair to students, staff and management.

6. INTERNET USAGE

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Internet access at the institution is a privilege and not a right. Students and staff are therefore required to have a clear understanding of expected behaviour when using the internet at the institution and be accountable for such use.

6.2 PRIVACY AND MONITORING

The institution respects the privacy of students and staff, but reserves the right to monitor online activities and to access, review, copy and store or delete any electronic communication or files and disclose them to others if and when necessary. Electronic files created, sent, received, or stored on information resources owned, leased and / or administered by the institution are not private.

6.3 ACCESS

Access to the internet will be regulated in terms of sound educational practices. There are three types of internet access:

a) No access: There is no access to the internet.
b) Restricted access: Restricted access is available to students during lesson time, where students may not access material that is not in line with instructions from the facilitator. Excessive social e-mail use can interfere with learning and may also be restricted.
c) Full access: Access to all genres of sites within the sphere of education.

Students are therefore expected to follow the rules of acceptable behaviour as set out under (Sections 6.4 and 7). Any unacceptable behaviour or inappropriate use will result in cancellation of the privilege offered (Section 8). The system administrators, management and facilitators will determine what is regarded as "inappropriate use" and their decision is final. The institution may deny, revoke, or suspend specific user access. Legal action against the transgressor may also be taken.

6.4 GENERAL USE

a) Software for browsing the internet is provided for educational purposes only.
b) Do not use any pirated software on the computers.
c) Do not access other users' accounts.
d) All sites accessed must comply with that which the institutions deems acceptable.
e) No offensive or harassing material may be downloaded or uploaded.
f) Internet access may not be used for personal financial gain.
g) Users may not perform any acts that can lead to the spread of viruses on the system
h) Users may not perform any acts that could harm others or cause damage to their property.
i) Students may not use the computer to pursue hacking.
j) Apply all copyright laws when utilizing information gained from the internet.
k) Refrain from all illegal activities.

7. NETIQUETTE

All students and staff are expected to follow and abide by the commonly accepted rules of netiquette (network etiquette). The following are some of the generally acceptable norms:

a) Do not use the network in a way that will disrupt the use of the network by others.
b) Be polite at all times.
c) Do not be abusive to others.
d) Use appropriate language – do not swear or use vulgar language.
e) Do not disclose any personal information about yourself or others.

8. DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS

Any wrongful or misuse of the computer systems (depending on the severity of the transgression) can lead to the following:

a) restrictions being imposed
b) cancellation of the privilege of access and use
c) suspension
d) expulsion
e) disciplinary action
f) legal action
g) criminal prosecution

The institution will make every effort to adapt any disciplinary action to the specific concerns related to each contravention.

Appendix 5

<Institution Letterhead>
Example :

Institution Name
Address Line 1
Address Line 2
Address Line 3
Postal Code

Date : yyyy-mm-dd *<Date on which letter is sent out>*

The Student / Parent / Guardian *<Name of whichever is applicable>*

Internet Usage Policy

Access to the internet is available to all students and staff members at the institution. The aim is to provide access to various resources, that may otherwise be unavailable to them, to promote excellence in education.

Students need to have a clear understanding of expected behaviour when using the internet at this institution, and be held responsible for such use. Technology allows the institution to encourage responsible use and ensure accountability.

Consequently, we have developed and introduced an ***Internet Usage Policy*** that will promote responsible use of the internet. Furthermore, the policy aims at safeguarding both the institution and the student from any legal implications that may be associated with improper use of the facility.

Find attached a copy of the Internet Usage Policy. Once you have read and understood the contents thereof, please sign the acknowledgement below (on Pg 2) and return to the institution; the acknowledgement will be kept on file and will be valid for the duration of the student's stay at this institution. Should the document be revised, you will be notified of such revisions. Your support and co-operation is appreciated.

Feel free to contact the institution should you have any questions regarding this policy.

Regards

_____ _____

Head of Institution Date

Appendix 5

Institution Name

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

(Internet Usage Policy)

Part 1: *To be completed by the student*

As a student, I understand and will abide by the terms and conditions as laid out in the **Internet Usage Policy** document. I further understand that any violation of the regulations is unethical and may constitute a criminal offense. Should I commit any violation, my access privileges may be revoked, school disciplinary and / or appropriate legal action may be taken. I have read, understand, and agree to abide by the provisions of the **Internet Usage Policy**.

Date		Institution	*Institution Name*
Student Name		Student Signature	
ID Number			
Contact Details	Home Number		
	Cell Number		
	Address		

Part 2: *To be completed by the parent / legal guardian - if student is under 18*

As the parent / guardian of the student, I have read the terms and conditions as laid out in the **Internet Usage Policy** document. I understand that the service is provided for educational purposes. I also acknowledge that it is not possible for the institution to restrict access to **all** controversial materials and I will not hold the institution responsible for information accessed from the Internet.

Further, I accept full responsibility for supervision when my charge's internet access is not at the institution. I hereby give my permission to grant access for my child / ward and certify that the information contained on this form is correct.

Parent/Legal Guardian Name		Parent/Legal Guardian Signature	
ID Number			
Contact Details	Home Number		
	Work Number		
	Cell Number		
	Address		

Appendix 6

School Name

Guidelines for Internet Use

A. Introduction

The computer systems have been provided for students for educational purposes. It is therefore a privilege and not a right for students to have access to the system at any given time. In the event of students not abiding by the rules, as laid out in the policy document, the institution has a right to revoke the privilege of access to the computers or the network.

B. What students must do

- Login using your own user name and password.
- Use the internet only for educational purposes.
- Access only regulated educational chat environments.
- Always follow the instructions of the facilitator.
- Respect copyright laws.
- Respect the privacy of other users.

C. What students cannot do

- Do not participate in any activities that may interfere or hinder the learning experience of others.
- Do not vandalise any of the computer hardware or software.
- Do not give your login and password to other students. If you suspect that others have access to this, ask your network administrator to change it for you.
- Do not give any personal details such as your telephone number, address, etc. to other users on the net.
- Do not play games during lesson time.
- Do not access your e-mail during lesson time.
- Do not access unregulated chat sites.
- Do not download any music, movies, programs, etc.
- Do not forward, junk mail, chain letters or letters promising "get rich quick" schemes.
- Do not use the internet for any activities that lead to personal financial gain.
- Do not use the internet for any illegal activities.

D. Netiquette

Netiquette is a combination of common sense and common courtesy established by users of the internet.

1. General Netiquette

All students are expected to follow the generally accepted rules of netiquette. Common rules of netiquette include the following:

- Do not use the network in a way that will disrupt the use of the network by others.
- Be polite at all times.
- Do not be abusive to others.

2. Specific Netiquette

2.1 *E-mail netiquette*

- Respect others
    - Use appropriate salutations; e.g. address a person by their first name only if you know them personally or if they have inserted their first name in their mail to you.
    - Include meaningful subject headings.

- Ensure that your signature (information appended to end of each message) is pertinent.
- Use plain text.
- Protect the privacy of e-mail addresses – when sending a message to a group, use the **bcc:** (Blind Carbon Copy) instead of the **to:** or **cc:** fields.
- Be brief – ones communication should not waste the time of others.
- Resist the urge to flame (write emotionally).

➢ Respect e-mail conventions and symbols

- Do not type a message in all caps – use mixed case. Caps can mean that you are shouting. You may however use caps to emphasise something.
- Use emoticons to show emotion since text is devoid of any emotion.
- Try not to make spelling and grammar mistakes.

➢ Respect the network

- Do not forward .EXE files.
- Keep your system virus free.
- Do not forward chain letters.

2.2 Chat and instant messaging netiquette

- Be polite at all times.
- Do not swear.
- Be brief – keep messages as short as possible.
- Choose appropriate nicknames in order to chat without revealing your true identity.
- When you enter a chat room, greet the group, and say goodbye when leaving.
- Do not enter "private" chat rooms or lurk.

Appendix 7

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I, Cheryl Kader, am currently registered for a Master's degree in Education (MEd), specializing in Educational Technology. A major portion of this study comprises a research study / project. The title of my study is: "*An investigation on how young university students in Durban, KZN, use the internet during their spare time, with special reference to netiquette*".

The purpose of this study is to investigate the ways in which university students in Durban use the internet during their spare time, with special reference to netiquette (a set of behaviour guidelines for the use of various internet services such as chat rooms). I chose to undertake this study for the following reasons; firstly, the number of internet users in South Africa has grown by 3700% since the year 2000; secondly, there has been very few studies conducted in this field in South Africa; thirdly, I wish to examine whether users surf the internet in a responsible manner. I therefore wish to explore:

- Which genre of sites are accessed.
- What content on these internet sites do students find useful.
- How do students use the information that they obtain from the internet.
- What ethical issues associated with internet usage are students aware of.

As a participant, you will be involved in a one-to-one and / or a group interview (±45 minute duration) conducted by me; with your consent, a tape-recording of the interview will be made. Questions put forward to you will be based on issues referred to in the above paragraph. Anonymity is guaranteed and all information offered by you will be treated as confidential. The data gathered will be used specifically for this study only and disposed thereafter by deleting computer files, destroying audio tapes and shredding all notes and transcripts of interviews.

Your choice not to participate in the study will not disadvantage you in any way; if you choose to participate, you are at liberty to withdraw from the study at any stage without having to provide any reason. For any further queries, you may contact my project supervisor, Mr Bheki Khoza (a lecturer at UKZN) on 031-260 7595

_____ _____

C.B. Kader
(Tel : 084 584 7500)

Date

Appendix 7

DECLARATION

I, _____ (full name of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of the 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 desire.

_____ _____

Signature of participant Date