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**The use of social media for academic purposes by postgraduate information studies
students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal**

By

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DECLARATION

I, Idowu Febishola Kutu, declare that:

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(Name of student)

Sign ..███████████

Mr Athol Leach

……………………………………………………   Date …18/02/2021…..…...

(Supervisor)

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful husband, Dr A.A. Kutu, who encouraged and supported me throughout my studies and my lovely children, Daniel Obaloluwa Kutu and Davies Olaoluwa Kutu.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the use of social media for academic purposes by postgraduate information studies students on the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). The study was prompted by the recognition, as reflected in the literature, of problems associated with their use and uncertainty regarding their use in the South African context. It was anticipated that the findings of the study would contribute to the debate and literature on the use of social media for academic purposes. The theoretical framework underpinning the study was provided by the new "paradigm of collaboration and communication" and rooted in communication theory.

The study employed a quantitative research design in the form of an online questionnaire using Google Forms. Fifty-five post-graduate students were sampled of which 51 participated, giving a response rate of 93%. Findings, in the form of frequencies and percentages, were presented via tables and charts. The vast majority of the respondents (94%) indicated that they used social media for academic purposes, and the most used social media for such purposes was WhatsApp and Zoom, mentioned by 83% and 79% of the respondents, respectively. WhatsApp was also the most frequently used social media, followed by Google+, YouTube and Facebook. The two least used social media were Pinterest (10%) and Instagram (15%). Smartphones (96%) and laptops (88%) were the two most used methods to access social media, while 85% of respondents accessed social media for academic purposes from their homes. The main academic purposes for which respondents used social media were learning, personal research/development, personal growth and assignments. Finally, the high cost of data bundles (78%), poor Internet connectivity (77%) and high cost of social media enabled phones (69%) were identified by respondents as the main challenges to the use of social media for academic purposes.

The practical implications of these findings are that students may find it difficult to cope with the disruption to their studies brought about by the global pandemic (COVID-19) as well as take full advantage of using social media for academic purposes to enhance their academic performance. Being unable to do so could have a negative effect on students' success rate especially postgraduate students at UKZN.

Recommendations made included the need for the government, in collaboration with institutions of higher learning, to investigate the increased distribution and provision of laptop computers and Internet data bundles. University library staff need training and awareness-

raising on how staff and students can be kept up-to-date in using, integrating and taking advantage of social media application software in their teaching and learning. Library staff can then offer such training as part of their user education services.

The study ended with suggestions for further research.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

APP: Applications (APP) software

CMS: Content Management System

COVID-19:   Coronavirus-2019

GPS: Global Positioning System

ICT: Information and Communication Technology

ISP: Internet Service Provider

LAN: Local Area Network

MS Teams: Microsoft Teams

PC: Personal Computer

PGDIS: Postgraduate Diploma in Information Studies

PhD: Doctor of Philosophy

PMB: Pietermaritzburg

UKZN: University of KwaZulu-Natal

WEB: World Wide Web

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Note #1: The term "social media" is treated as both singular and plural in the literature. While preference in this study is for it to be treated as plural, this does vary depending on the context.

1.1 Introduction

Nández and Borrego (2013) believed that social media are amongst the greatest modern advances in the establishment of digital information and communication and help to enhance digital literacies (Misir, 2018). In the 1980s and 1990s, email was developed as the original method to exchange messages from one computer to another using the Internet. Today, social media like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Telegram, Skype and Zoom, among others, have been widely accepted as official means to allow users to transmit messages and access information globally (Gerlitz, 2016; Malatji, 2019; Iqbal, Alradhi, Alhumaidi, Alshaikh, AlObaid, Alhashim and AlSheikh, 2020; Ajayi and Ajayi, 2020). In addition, on-line social media enhances digital literacy which includes network literacy, media literacy, computer literacy and visual literacy, among others (Aczel, 2014)

According to Alvarez-Jimenez, Alcazar-Corcoles, Gonzalez-Blanch, Bendall, McGorry and Gleeson (2014), online social media are defined as "primarily internet- and mobile-based tools for sharing and discussing information between users." Obar (2014) viewed social media as Internet-based applications developed using a Network 2.0 foundation that permit the formation and interchange of ideas. The technological foundations of social media include blogs, wikis, multimedia distribution tools, interacting platforms, and computer-generated worlds. These social media foundation tools foster social interactions or digital communication between users and promote digital literacies.

This study investigated the use of social media for academic purposes by information studies students on the Pietermaritzburg (PMB) campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). In this introductory chapter, the background of the study in which, amongst other issues, the

benefits of social media for students are discussed. The research problem, the aim of the study, its objectives, questions and significance are then outlined. This is followed by a brief overview of the theoretical framework and research methodology adopted. The chapter ends with the delimitations of the study, the structure of the dissertation and a conclusion.

1.2 Background of the study

The UKZN postgraduate information studies students on the Pietermaritzburg (PMB) Campus were the focus of this study for three reasons. Firstly, they are burgeoning specialists in the field of library and information science and, as such, are expected to utilise a range of information sources in their studies. Secondly, since the university library has adopted the use of electronic (digital) resources and information and communication technologies (ICTs) for students to access, amongst others, journals, newspapers, textbooks, audio-visual materials and maps, it was considered pertinent to assess how social media were being used by the future librarians and information workers (that is, the information studies students) as they acquire specialist knowledge in the field. Finally, the researcher was able to easily liaise with the Information Studies Programme to contact all the registered students. This enabled her to gather sufficient data from the students without delay or incurring unnecessary costs when carrying out the study.

Academic activities carried out by the UKZN's information studies students on the PMB campus include assignments, classwork and the sharing of educational materials. It is evident that these activities are increasingly being conducted with information in digital format, and students are formulating coursework, making study notes and analysing data for their research projects using the information in such a format. It is also evident that many students send emails to each other and their lecturers for study-related purposes. In addition, students are staying up-to-date in their areas of interest by accessing news posted on websites by individuals and organisations and are accessing library collections, bibliographic databases and other educational resources, including visual resources on the Web (Parmar and Desai, 2018). What is also evident (from the researcher's observation and participation) is that while students are using social media to socialise, play games, share news, share pictures and videos, among other uses, they are also, seemingly, increasingly using social media for more academic purposes. It was this latter use of social media that prompted the researcher's interest and provided the

context in which the study needs to be seen. A positive "spin off" of the use of social media is, as pointed to above, the promotion of (and arguably improvement in) students' digital literacy.

Among the most frequently cited advantages of the use of social media by students is their ability to aid collaborative learning and communication amongst their peers and others in academia (Ketonen-Oksi, Jussila and Kärkkäinen, 2016; Khan, 2017). Further commonly stated benefits of social media are their notable capability to aid digital literacy and information distribution. Among the examples of such media are blogging tools used by many students to circulate information among their peers and persons worldwide (Ahmad, 2014; Aria and Izadpanah, 2017). Other than communication, academics who use Twitter refer to "information distribution" as one of the main advantages of using the medium. Its use has proven popular, particularly in academic conferences (Holmberg and Thelwall, 2014).

Social media sites benefit students by providing platforms that foster communication and life-long learning and facilitate access to distance and open education, e-learning resources and e-libraries (Saleh, 2020). Lecturers who impart knowledge to students also benefit from the use of social media by sharing educational materials, exchanging ideas, reading through colleagues' research, getting updated on research trends and, most significantly, establishing their own professional networks (Akram and Kumar, 2017). Social media created precisely for educational audiences provide a distinct opportunity for those audiences to learn and create a robust academic discussion among themselves. They also encourage personal connections that can lead to the establishment of new information and knowledge. Furthermore, social media have the potential to aid more rapid interactions between libraries and their users (Ezeani and Igwesi, 2012) regardless of where the users are located or how they decide to learn about or access the library services and resources.

The emergence of social media has generated a great deal of interest from researchers, and this study can also be viewed as part of this development. Studies have been conducted to ascertain the types of social media used by students, their frequency of usage and the challenges associated with their use. The findings of these studies will be elaborated on in Chapter two (the literature review and theoretical framework), as will be the types of social media available and those social media that were focused on in the study. The significance of social media will also be further discussed.

1.3 Research problem

Despite the benefits that can be derived from the use of social media for academic purposes, as alluded to above, the literature relating to the use of social media reveals that there are problems associated with their use. Issues such as access, delivery, originality and copyright have led to information use constraints among students and comprise the challenges (among others) facing them in accessing and using digital content on social media (Park, 2010; Al-Rahmi and Othman, 2013) as academic materials are not freely accessible. In addition, students and teachers/lecturers are sometimes not up-to-date in terms of using social media for teaching and learning and are not familiar with integrating and taking advantage of social media application (APP) software in their teaching and learning (Abdul Wahid and Sajiharan, 2019). This will negatively affect their ability to take full advantage of using social media for academic purposes. There are also financial implications such as the cost of data and cost of buying social media enabled phones (smartphones), tablets and laptops (Chawinga, 2017; Pindayi, 2017). If not resolved, all these are problems are capable of contributing to poor academic performance among the students and reducing their success rate. While research has been done on the use of social media for academic purposes, there is uncertainty concerning their use in the South African tertiary educational context. Indeed, no study on the use of social media was identified as having been done at the UKZN. This study addressed these problems and suggests ways in which social media could be better utilised for academic purposes particularly in the context of the increasing use of on-line education necessitated and spurred on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.4 Aim of the study

In light of the above research problem, the study aimed at examining the use of social media for academic purposes among postgraduate information studies students on the PMB campus of the UKZN. In doing so, it was anticipated that the findings would contribute to the debate and literature on the use of social media for academic purposes, shed light on digital literacy and social media usage by a selection of postgraduate students, provide recommendations, and suggest areas for further research.

1.5 Objectives of the study

The specific objectives of this study were to:

- Identify the various types of social media available to postgraduate information studies students for academic purposes on the PMB campus of UKZN;

- Determine which social media are used for academic purposes by students and the frequency of the usage;

- Ascertain the various academic activities that necessitate the use of social media by students;

- Ascertain how and where do students access social media for academic purposes; and

- Determine the challenges experienced by the students when using social media for academic purposes.

1.6 Research questions

The following research questions were asked:

- What are various types of social media available to postgraduate information studies students for academic purposes on the PMB campus of the UKZN?

- Which social media are used for academic purposes by students and what is the frequency of the usage?

- What are the various academic activities that necessitate the use of social media by students?

- How and where do students access social media for academic purposes?

- What are the challenges experienced by students when using social media for academic purposes?

1.7 Significance of the study

The study should be of significance to both staff and students in the Information Studies Programme, PMB campus in the following ways:

- It provides findings on some fundamental questions relating to the use of social media, the types of social media used, the frequency of their use and how and where they are used.

- It, through both the findings and the literature review, suggests ways in which social media could be better utilised for academic purposes particularly in the context of the increasing use of on-line education necessitated and spurred on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- It identifies the challenges students are experiencing when using social media for academic purposes and how they possibly could best be responded to.
- It could benefit the university community by alerting it (the community) to the possibility of students making the best use of technology in a manner that valuable time is saved by engaging in productive academic interactions between themselves and between themselves and staff members.

1.8 Theoretical framework

With the aid of social media, virtual proximity becomes a substitute for physical remoteness or distance in case of normal communications or meetings (Georgescu and Popescul, 2015). Therefore, this study used the new "paradigm of collaboration and communication" in order to achieve its aim and objectives. Doing so meant that the study is rooted in communication theory. This theory argues that knowledge is formed through socialisation and communication and that barriers to physical proximity can be diminished through virtual proximity (Schwarz, 2012). In line with this theory, Leonardi (2014) revealed that social media have a specific application in that they provide various ways to communicate visually and are a form of knowledge sharing and innovation. This view is supported by Lam (2015) who argued that the problem of isolation in learning could be remedied through social media and online learning, and especially with effective communication among students. Law (2020) noted that communication theory in the use of social media enhances digital information and digital literacy among institutions of learning.

The theoretical framework and its relationship to the study are discussed in more detail in Chapter two.

1.9 Research methodology

The study made use of a descriptive quantitative research design, using the survey method and a semi-structured questionnaire to collect data. The population of the study comprised the postgraduate students registered in the Information Studies Programme in 2020. However, for the purposes of the study only the Postgraduate Diploma in Information Studies (PGDIS), Honours and Coursework Masters students were sampled. The PhD and Research Masters students were excluded due to the nature of their studies, that is, purely research-based. There were 55 students in total identified of which 51 completed the survey giving a response rate of

93%. The instrument was made available online using Google Forms and students were approached to participate in the study and provided with a link to the questionnaire via WhatsApp. The choice of this data collection method was to align the study with the University's online teaching and learning system as all educational activities have been moved on-line due to the global pandemic. To establish the validity and reliability of the instrument, a pretest was conducted with 10 postgraduate students from disciplines other than information studies. Based on the pretest, slight adjustments were made to the questionnaire. Data analysis was largely quantitative in the form of frequency counts and percentages and the findings were presented using tables and charts.

The research methodology is discussed in more detail in Chapter three.

1.10 Delimitations of the study

In line with the requirements of a "Short dissertation" the study was delimited in the following ways:

- It focused on postgraduate students registered in the Information Studies Programme on the PMB campus of the UKZN only (thereby excluding postgraduate students from other programmes and campuses of the university).
- As noted above, it excluded both PhD and Masters by Research students in the Programme due to the nature of their studies, that is, purely research-based with no coursework component.
- In addition, the focus was on students only and not on academic staff. It is acknowledged that staff have an important role to play in the use of social media for academic purposes but their inclusion could be the basis of a subsequent study.
- Finally, the study employed a purposive sampling technique due to the nature and focus of the study. It is acknowledged that such non-random sampling does not allow for the generalisation of the findings beyond the actual sample used.

1.11 Structure of the study

The dissertation comprises five chapters as follows:

- Chapter one provided the introduction to the study. It consisted of the background to the study, statement of the problem, aim, research objectives and research questions and the significance of the study. Also included were a brief overview of the theoretical

framework and research methodology adopted. The chapter ended with the delimitations of the study and a chapter summary.

- Chapter two reviews the extant empirical literature (both international and national) on the use of social media for academic purposes. The literature is discussed in light of the research questions guiding the study. The chapter begins with the types of social media available, those that were focused on in this study and ends with a discussion of the theoretical framework adopted.

- Chapter three covers the research methodology followed in conducting the study. Among others, issues relating to data collection, sampling, and validity and reliability of the findings are discussed.

- Chapter four presents and discuss the results of the survey as derived from the data analysis. Findings to each question asked are presented in the form of tables and charts and each set of findings is discussed in relation to the relevant literature and, where appropriate, the theoretical framework.

- Chapter five, the final chapter, contains a summary of the dissertation. This is followed by the main findings of the study, the conclusions stemming from those findings and the study recommendations. A limitation of the study is given and the study ends with the suggestions for further research.

1.12 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the introductory and background of the study was presented and the statement of the problem was outlined. This was followed by the aim and objectives of the study as well as the research questions. The theoretical framework and methodology adopted were briefly described. The chapter highlighted the delimitations of the study and ended with the structure of the dissertation.

Chapter two, which comprises the literature review and theoretical framework underpinning the study, follows next.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the literature relevant to the study as well as the theoretical framework. To begin with, the chapter outlines the types of social media available and then describes the social media that were focused on in the study. The significance of social media is then discussed. The research questions posed in Chapter one provide a basis for the content of the review that follows. The chapter ends with a discussion of the theoretical framework which underpinned the study.

2.2 Types of social media

The difficulty of determining what constitutes social media has been pointed to. Obar and Wildman (2015), for example, noted that the "challenges to the definition of social media arise due to the broad variety of stand-alone and built-in social media services currently available", but they also noted that they have some common features. These include:

- "All social media are interactive Web 2.0 Internet-based applications" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).
- All social media have user-generated content like comments, digital photos, and data generated through online interactions (Obar and Wildman, 2015). According to Boyd (2007), "all social media have user-created service-specific profiles for the website or app that are designed and maintained by the social-media organization."
- "All social media aid the development of online networking by connecting a user's profile with those of other individuals or groups" (Obar and Wildman, 2015).

Parveen, Jaafar and Ainin (2016) revealed eight different types of social media networks:
- Social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Academia.
- Discussion forums such as Quora, Digg and Reddit.
- Blogging and publishing networks such as WordPress, Tumblr and Medium.
- Cybernetic worlds such as Second Life and Open Sim.
- Presentation sharing network tools such as Scribd, Slide Share and Slide Rocket.

- Video and audio sharing networks such as YouTube, Instagram, Flickr and Livestream.

- Writing and research collaboration tools such as PBworks, Wikispaces and Wikipedia.

- Meeting, project management and collaboration tools such as Big-Blue Button, Skype and Zoom.

In this study, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Zoom, Twitter, Skype, YouTube, WhatsApp, Google+, Blogs, ResearchGate, Pinterest and MS Teams were the forms of social media focused on because they were the popular ones used for academic purposes as reflected in the literature (see, for example, Owusu-Acheaw and Larson, 2015; Mungofa and Peter, 2015; Muriithi, Horner and Pemberton, 2016; Harrison, Burress, Velasquez and Schreiner (2017); Nsizwana, Ige and Tshabalala, 2017; Budree, Fietkiewicz and Lins, 2019). Each is briefly described below:

Facebook: This social media links people around the world. Founded by Mark Zuckerberg, it has over 2.7 billion monthly active users and helps people to create social awareness, relationship building, customer service as well as academic discussion (Niu, 2019).

Instagram: This is a media sharing network that is used to share video, photographs, audio and various other media formats on the Web. It has over one billion monthly active users and has gained exceptional popularity especially among students (Erarslan, 2019).

LinkedIn: A social media site mainly used by researchers and academics to share their research papers and find collaborators (Muriithi, Horner and Pemberton, 2016). LinkedIn has more than 760 million users and over 260 million active users monthly.

Zoom: This is an online chat service through a cloud-based software platform that is used for meetings, conferences and lectures, among other purposes (Secules, Gupta, Elby and Turpen, 2018). It has over 300 million daily meeting and lecture participants. Users can also place phone calls to each other through the Zoom Mobile App.

Twitter: An on-line social medium and small-blogging package that permits registered users to send and read "tweets" with 330 million active users per month and 145 million active users daily. Registered users can read and "post tweets" but unregistered users can only read posts.

Owusu-Acheaw and Larson (2015) revealed that Twitter is among the most used social networks for academic purposes.

Skype: A service that lets people connect with peers using a microphone, video (through webcam) and direct messaging on the Internet. Budree, Fietkiewicz and Lins (2019) revealed Skype as a convenient tool for collaboration and the sharing of knowledge among users in the South African context.

YouTube: This audio and video tool permits the sharing of videos online among students, groups, families and the world. Derakhshan, Lee, Bhama, Barbarite and Shaye (2019) indicated that YouTube is the most frequently used educational video source for online learning and for sharing educational videos.

WhatsApp: "WhatsApp is a cross-platform centralized messaging service that allows users to send text messages and voice messages, make voice and video calls, and share images, documents, user locations and other content" (Udenze, 2017). There are two billion WhatsApp users around the globe.

Google+: "This is an online social networking or social relationship site that share similar features to Facebook including personal profiles for posting status updates, photos and videos" (Curran, Morrison and Mc Cauley, 2012). It contains unique features like "Hangouts for video chatting." A study by Mohammad, Ghazali and Hashim (2018) revealed that Google+ has revolutionised the way learning takes place and students had positive perceptions of its usage for learning purposes. Google+ underwent significant changes that resulted in its redesign in November 2015 and continued to be available as "Google+ for G Suite" with all users transitioned to "Google Currents" (Welch, 2019). Google Currents provides users with access to an electronic library of magazines and, as of June 2020, it is a public beta for Google Workspace clients (Velasco, 2019).

Blogs: Blogging and microblogging sites are used for sharing text, photographs and videos. "A blog (short for weblog and derived from the combination of Web and log) is similar to an online journal that includes chronological entries made by individuals" (Mewburn and Thomson, 2013). Blogs typically focus on a specific subject such as library studies, the economy and entertainment news and provide users with forums to talk about each posting. In

the education sector blogs can be used, for example, to post articles and links to resources of value. Alsamadani (2018) revealed how online blogging was effective in improving students' individual and group writing skills and that it has transformed the pedagogy and methodology of learning and teaching in higher education.

ResearchGate: This is similar to LinkedIn and according to the site itself it is "a professional network for scientists and researchers. Over 19 million members from all over the world use it to share, discover, and discuss research" (ResearchGate, 2021).

Pinterest and MS Teams were two social media suggested by the pretest participants (see section 3.7 in Chapter three). In line with the literature, Pinterest and MS Teams aid students' engagement and interaction with both the university community and the outside world (Hansen, Nowlan and Winter, 2012). As stated by Carpenter, Cassaday and Monti (2018), "these social media have transformed the way educators teach and present information and ideas to their students."

2.3 Social media and their significance

While social media have their disadvantages such as the decrease in face-to-face communication, the conveying of inauthentic expression of feelings and being a cause of distractions (Drahošová and Balco, 2017), their advantages are significant and it is these advantages which are focused on below. For example, Bryer and Zavatarro (2011) stated that social media are important technologies that facilitate collaboration and social interaction and enable discussion among stakeholders worldwide. Skoric, Zhu, Goh and Pang (2016) postulated that social media's capacity to boost participation because of their connectedness, conversational nature, openness, and the appeal of their audio-visual characteristic underscore the significance and benefits associated with their use.

In South Africa (and elsewhere), social media are an important development for online participation where people share, contribute and communicate knowledge and content on the Internet. According to Steenkamp and Hyde-Clarke (2014), the use of the Internet, and social media networks in particular, are becoming progressively more relevant for 21st-century politics and education in South Africa. They facilitate the sharing of knowledge and social

cooperation on open-access platforms. People who have common interests can share information via the various social media platforms that are available.

The increase in the use of social media sites for educational purposes has expanded in popularity over the last 10 or so years. The sites have attracted millions of users worldwide (Holmes and O'Loughlin, 2014) and have been an engine for the growth of the South African economy (Goldstuck, 2012). Consequently, many people are changing the manner in which they access or search for information, news, entertainment and business. Oeldorf-Hirsch and Sundar (2016) noted that "These social media sites allow users to create personal profiles, upload photographs, make a post as well as connect with other users of the sites."

In terms of higher education, Rutherford (2010) and Collins and Halverson (2018) point out that social media have helped to transform and accommodate how lecturers teach, students learn, and how education managers and policymakers formulate curricula. Because of the functional utilisation of social media by students and staff and the need for institutions of higher learning to satisfy students' needs, "social media have been used for many activities, including growing the general university experience and educational possibilities, making admission choices, providing library services and counselling students" (Omaggio, Baker and Conway, 2018).

Gikas and Grant (2013) pointed out that social media are both Internet and mobile-based tools that enable people to discuss and share information. Therefore, the importance of the numerous social media platforms in improving the socio-cultural, economic, political, educational and technological development of nations and their citizenry cannot be overemphasised. In academia, as alluded to above, social media are being used to advance scholarship by institutions of higher learning the world over. By their nature, social media have the capability of educating, informing and entertaining their audience (Gleason and Von Gillern, 2018). Further, they have the potential to meet the different information needs of their users and these range from education and socialisation to entertainment and personal development (Kircaburun, Alhabash, Tosuntaş and Griffiths, 2020). They serve as a means of getting information and allowing people with common interests to share, communicate, and create information efficiently.

Kircaburun *et al*. (2020) also revealed that social media have become significant phenomena in the public and academic environment. For instance, they are useful for communication purposes in that they allow "individuals and organisations to create, engage, and share new user-generated or existing content in digital environments through multi-way communication" (Chung, Han and Koo, 2015). In addition, the authors pointed out that "their features contain design elements that create virtual social spaces that encourage interaction, thereby broadening the use of technology and promoting face-to-face engagement."

Social media have further expanded discussion online where people create content, share, bookmark and network regularly. Due to their effectiveness, ease of use, speed and reach, social media are enabling society to set agendas and trends on subjects ranging from the politics and the social sciences to the entertainment industry and technology (Brooks, 2015). The emergence of social media has enabled men and women globally to exchange personal information, ideas, videos and pictures among themselves.

One of the characteristics that make social media unique is its interactive capabilities. Like never before, social media are transforming how people receive and share information. As Adelabu (2011) noted, one of the major qualities of social media is its high-level of interactivity that contributes value through its capacity to expedite meaningful conversations among users.

Al-Bahrani, Patel and Sheridan (2015) highlighted some benefits of using social media in education. According to the authors, "social media permits students to increase their engagement and build communication skills by allowing them to feel more comfortable in expressing themselves in a less intimidating environment". In addition, students use social networking sites to post a resume and search for potential employers in order to find a job.

Zanamwe, Rupere and Kufandirimbwa (2013) explained that social media have the potential to improve student learning. They pointed out that social media enriches the learning environment by supporting students in their formative assessment, establishing classroom community and student engagement, increasing students' sense of achievement and assisting in information management. The authors also pointed out that social media eliminates the marginalisation of students and provide venues for lecturers to facilitate a strong sense of engagement that can lead to the creation of new knowledge and collective learning among students. Zanamwe *et al.* (2013) further stated that "social media are effective in developing

important skills such as creating knowledge in user-defined or negotiated contexts, selecting relevant information, critically interpreting and analyzing the socio-cultural context, working in groups and collaboratively, enhancing communication and interpersonal skills, and sharing knowledge and information."

Finally, Murire and Cilliers (2017) summarised the important benefits of using social media. These include: "increasing social interaction; providing access to information sources; encouraging creativity among individuals and groups; creating a sense of belonging among users; providing more choices to promote engagement among individuals and groups; reducing barriers to group interaction and communications; and increasing the technological competency levels of users."

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the remainder of the literature review relating to social media is structured according to the research questions on which this study was based.

2.4 Social media used for academic purposes and the frequency of their usage

As already indicated above, social media have been very useful in the educational environment, especially for academic purposes as various studies have shown that students have taken the opportunity provided through this platform to facilitate their learning and research. In South Africa, Murire and Cilliers (2017) reported on the use of social media in higher education and revealed that their popularity among students has necessitated their adoption by university lecturers. Facebook was found to have significant potential for involving students since it continued to have a dominating presence among the vast majority (90%) of higher education classes (Blattner and Lomicka, 2012). In addition, Manca and Ranieri (2016) revealed that video sharing sites such as YouTube and Vimeo also provide considerable potential for university communications and marketing offices who have the goal of increasing their messaging efforts among the student population without adding to their post-production and distribution costs. Some institutions have adopted social media like Twitter and Facebook to provide messages for students particularly in the case of emergencies.

Stutzman (2012) looked into virtual learning platforms, namely, Facebook and YouTube that students and researchers regularly worked with and on which they shared their plans. It was found that Facebook was considered a reference point for knowledge sharing among students.

The study conducted by Wiid, Cant and Nell (2014) on "South African students' perceptions and uses of social media networking systems" revealed that social media was mostly being used by students for social rather than educational purposes and that Facebook was the most popular social media networking system being used. Mitchell and Watstein (2007), however, in an earlier study on students' utilisation of Facebook at the University of Cape Town, found that lecturers' engagement with students through social media networking sites (especially Facebook) was shown to have a positive effect on students learning and teaching methods. This was because, through social media, students are able to share helpful information along with others around the world. Academics and researchers see the benefits of using social media for educational purposes in gathering information and growing their network. For instance, researchers are using social media like LinkedIn, ResearchGate and Facebook, among others, to build their professional networks.

A study conducted by Muriithi and Muriithi (2013) on students' motive for utilising social media network sites in private universities in Dar Salam, Tanzania, found that Facebook was the most used social media network for academic purposes. It had the highest number of users with 46.1% of respondents and it was followed by Twitter (15.5%), Badoo (9.7%), Sky Blog (8.7%), Google+ (8%), MySpace (6.5%), Friendster (2.8%) and Linkedin (2.3%). The researchers also found that some of the respondents used more than one social network site.

Harrison *et al*. (2017) and AlFaris, Irfan, Ponnamperuma, Jamal, Van der Vleuten, Al Maflehi and Ahmed (2018) highlighted the top 10 social media platforms use by students for academic purposes. These were Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Zoom, Twitter, Skype, Telegram, YouTube, WhatsApp and ResearchGate. According to the researchers, these sites offer staff and students the opportunity to learn and collaborate with one another. Niu (2019) concurred and revealed that students reported positive effects of using Facebook, Telegram, YouTube, Zoom, Twitter and Skype in their studies.

Negussie and Ketema (2014) studied the "academic impacts of social networking sites" from the perspective of 1000 students in six Universities in Pakistan. Findings revealed that the vast majority of respondents (91.3%) indicated that they made use of Facebook, while only 3.4% used Twitter, and 2.2% made use of Orkut ("a social media designed to help users meet new and old friends and maintain existing relationships"). Most of the respondents (75.3%) stated

that they made use of the social media sites between one and three hours daily, while 19.5% used social media between what could be considered a high four and six hours a day.

Buhari, Ahmad and HadiAshara (2014) surveyed the "use of social media for academic purposes by students" at a polytechnic in Kaduna, Nigeria. They found that the time spent on usage was extremely high with most of the respondents using social media between 6 am and 6 pm, while others indicated that they spent more than five hours per day using social media. Results from these studies established that even though university students utilise different types of social media sites, Facebook was the most used and most students spent considerable time using it and other social media sites.

Talaue, AlSaad, AlRushaidan, AlHugail and AlFahhad (2018) carried out a study on the social media used for academic purposes and their frequency of usage. The study identified Facebook, Zoom, YouTube and Twitter as the social media platforms most frequently used by students for academic purposes. According to the authors, these platforms can be used for posting lectures, videos, graphics and other academic materials. Talaue *et al.* (2018) revealed that "the students need to connect with other students in different zones, post online lectures, create interest groups, access online libraries, post class notes, make announcements, schedule events, brainstorm, share files, tag books and also get assistance with homework" using Facebook, Zoom, YouTube and Twitter.

In the South African context, Harerimana and Mtshali (2018) shared the same view as Talaue *et al.* (2018) above, believing that Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and other social media have the potential to support learning activities in South Africa through community networking services including wall posting of research publications, students chatting, content sharing and tagging.

Muriithi, Horner and Pemberton (2016) examined students' motives for utilising social networking in Kenya. The findings revealed that Facebook was the most used social network for academic purposes as indicated by 46.1% of respondents, followed by Twitter (15.5%), Blogs (9.7%), Skype (8.7%), Google+ (8.0%) and LinkedIn (2.3%).

The study by Owusu-Acheaw and Larson (2015) of Ghanaian students had findings similar to those reported above. Findings showed that 66.4% of the respondents identified Facebook as

the most used social media for academic purposes, followed by WhatsApp (19.9%), Twitter (6.2%), Skype (3.3%), YouTube (2.6%) and ResearchGate (1.3%). The amount of time spent on social media was, however, lower and varied. In this regard, a majority of the respondents (66.3%) stated that they made use of the social media sites between 30 minutes to one hour per day, 33.2% between two and three hours and a very small minority (1.5%) between four and five hours.

2.5 Academic activities that social media used for

Students regardless of their mode of education (whether part-time or full-time) need to engage in academic activities before completing the requirements for the award of either a diploma or degree. The academic activities engaged in by postgraduate library and information studies students are not entirely different from students in other disciplines. Numerous activities that students engage in have been highlighted in the literature. These include classwork that is theory-based or practically oriented, reading, seminars, examination preparation and assignments completion among others (Chawinga, 2017).

In line with what was reflected in the literature the academic activities that social media were being used for and which were considered as most applicable to the postgraduate students in this study (and used in the research instrument) were: "Learning", Personal research/development", "Assignments", "Exam preparation", "Group discussions", "Continuous assessment preparation" and "Personal growth". An "Other" category was also provided.

Manan, Alias and Pandian (2012) conducted a study on the "possibility of blending traditional face-to-face courses with online instruction using Facebook." Third-year undergraduate students were used as the population of the study and Facebook used as a discussion platform for the group. The results revealed that the majority of the respondents agreed that Facebook was a good learning tool for personal growth and development.

Gachago and Ivala (2012) examined social media sites such as Zoom and Skype which were used for academic lectures and meetings by students and provided a means of discussing course materials. According to the authors, Zoom and Skype provided students with access to resources, ease of access to information when needed, creativity in learning and made learning

more engaging. The sites also gave students the opportunity to use them for examination preparation and group discussions.

Murire and Cilliers (2017) highlighted the academic activities carried out on Google+ and LinkedIn by university students in the Eastern Cape Province. These included research work, journal and book searching, research publication, workshops and conferences. The activities illustrated how extracurricular activities also contributed to the academic learning and advancement of students. Murire and Cilliers (2017) found that both Google+ and LinkedIn provided an environment where students discussed and shared different types of books, and the fun of interaction and discussion of the content of the information contained in the books built up the academic competence of students.

Sánchez, Cortijo and Javed (2014) pointed out that WhatsApp and Facebook enable students to enter new types of collaborative learning according to their shared interests and for their personal growth and educational success. In South Africa, Mbodila, Ndebele and Muhandji (2014) revealed that some academics have welcomed the ability of social media services to afford teachers a forum for learning and positive networking with students.

Chipps, Pimmer, Brysiewicz, Walters, Linxen, Ndebele and Gröhbiel (2015) listed the academic activities of students influenced by YouTube and Instagram as listening to educational materials, downloading, and the sending and receiving of educational pictures and videos. The various academic activities reviewed showed that students' academic success and development could be enhanced through social media.

Häkkinen, Järvelä, Mäkitalo-Siegl, Ahonen, Näykki and Valtonen (2017) identified, among others, informal and formal assessment, assignments, examination preparation, group discussions, continuous assessment preparation, presentation and role-play as academic activities that students are supposed to participate in when using social media such as blogs, ResearchGate, LinkedIn, Twitter, Zoom, Facebook and WhatsApp. These academic activities revealed that students are not expected to be passive learners but rather actively involved. The authors argued that doing so would boost their self-esteem, inter-personal relations and public speaking abilities. Thus, through social media, students can effectively take active roles in these activities. In a similar vein, Onyancha (2015) revealed that South African universities were

rapidly adopting social media for use in students' oral presentations, learning activities, class participation, group discussions and for meeting their research needs.

Sobaih, Moustafa, Ghandforoush and Khan (2016) investigated whether social media such as Zoom, Facebook, blogs, Instagram, WhatsApp and YouTube should be used for academic purposes in higher education in developing countries. The study outlined academic activities that are important for students such as examination preparation and the improvement of lecture notes. Findings revealed a need for students to use social media as they would be able to develop their personality and build their competence in various ways during their academic studies and doing so would assist them to prepare for the future. Junco (2014) revealed that students strategically plan academic activities such as assignments, professional examinations, learning, research and assessments through social media.

Finally, Boholano (2017) revealed that Zoom, Facebook, YouTube, ResearchGate, blogs, LinkedIn and Twitter are quick and easy to use for listening, downloading, reviewing, updating and editing learning material and that this could be done anywhere and at any time. Also, those sites allow for options to select learning materials from a large number of courses offered online and which the student needs for learning, examination preparation, assignments and personal growth/development (Boholano, 2017). This means that social media help to increase satisfaction and reduce stress among students. They allow each student (slow or quick) to study at his or her own pace (self-pacing). Furthermore, it is easy to join online discussions at any time or visit classmates and instructors remotely in chat rooms. Social media can provide a stronger understanding and increased retention of subjects studied due to their utilisation of various forms of e-learning, for example, multimedia, quizzes and interaction (Akram and Kumar, 2017).

2.6 How and where students access social media for academic purposes

In ascertaining how and where students in higher learning access social media for academic purposes, Karlson, Iqbal, Meyers, Ramos, Lee and Tang (2010) in their study revealed that mobile devices such as smartphones, iPads, tablets and Kindles have enabled social networking to take place across numerous platforms. The social networking sites are normally accessed from homes and institutional libraries by the students in higher learning.

Heinrichs, Lim and Lim (2011) carried out a study on "the influence of social networking sites and user access methods on social media evaluation". Findings revealed that individuals used desktop computers and mobile devices (such as notebooks) as methods to access the social networking sites. This was done from the comfort of their homes, university library or university LAN mainly using mobile devices and desktop computers. These findings are similar to that of Sobaih *et al.* (2016) and Shava and Chinyamurindi (2018) who in their studies found that laptops and smartphones were the most used methods for accessing social media for academic purposes by students and this was largely done from their homes.

The study carried out by Shehu and Shehu (2014) among Ahmadu Bello University students in Nigeria found that 52% of respondents accessed social networking sites via their cell phones, while 33% of the respondents accessed them through their laptop computers. Those students that could not afford personal cell phones or laptops used cyber cafés and they constituted 10% of the respondents.

A study conducted by De Kock and Futcher (2016) investigated students' motives for utilising social media network sites within higher education institutions in South Africa. The study found that highest number of respondents (46%) used social media through their mobile phones, 23% of the respondents used laptops only, while 30% of the respondents used both mobile phones and laptops. Other studies in South Africa such as those of Ng'ambi, Brown, Bozalek, Gachago and Wood (2016), Murire and Cilliers (2017) and Harerimana and Mtshali (2018) also found that students mainly accessed social media for academic purposes through their mobile phones and laptops.

Finally, Lembani, Gunter, Breines and Dalu (2020) compared the digital divide and access points between rural and urban distance education students in South Africa. It was revealed that "UNISA students seemed to create a general hierarchical location of access to a computer (social media) as Home access (31%), followed by Work access (21%), UNISA LAN centres (15%) and Public access such as Internet cafés (4%) for students living in urban areas while non-urban dwellers were: Work access (19%), UNISA LAN centres (11%), Home access (11%) and Public access (19%)". It is evident that where UNISA students live influences where they access social media.

2.7 Challenges experienced by students when using social media for academic purposes

Despite the enormous benefits derived from using social media, critics maintain that there are many challenges to using social media for academic purposes. For example, according to Guy (2012) "there are educators and instructional designers who believe that social media technologies are not always a successful vehicle for teaching and learning activities." Manca and Ranieri (2016) also noted that there are "challenges that may arise when using social media in education such as workload concerns for faculty and students, lack of trust in peer feedback, ownership issues regarding public and collaborative spaces, and difficulty in adapting publicly available tools."

Another challenge highlighted by Hwang, Lai and Wang (2015) relates to the proper integration of social media technologies into the curriculum. Their view is that the successful integration of social media technology into the curriculum should be seamless. Lester and Perini (2010) identified "third-party Web-based innovations as a major concern for most colleges and universities because the information is stored outside secure campus servers while alternative arrangements may be too costly for many higher institutions of learning."

Jain (2014) identified the challenges that students at the University of Botswana faced in using social media. These were a lack of awareness, bandwidth problems, technophobia, a lack of maintenance culture, an unreliable power supply and copyright issues. Sanusi, Omowale and Kayode (2014) revealed that the constraints that students in Nigeria face in the use of the social media for education included a lack of basic amenities, lack of a conducive environment, lack of access to computers, the cost of Internet connectivity and a lack of enthusiasm on the part of instructors.

The study by Yin Lim, Agostinho, Harper and Chicharo (2014) on the engagement with social media technologies by students in Malaysia revealed that most of the respondents (81.48%) indicated that the main challenge they encountered in the use of social media for academic purposes was the blocking of some applications by their university. Other students (62.96%) expressed that they experienced slow Internet connection/low bandwidth, 44.44% identified privacy issues as constraints, 38.27% stated that all their activities were being monitored and 22.22% said their social media accounts were hacked.

Shava and Chinyamurindi (2018) investigated the factors affecting the use of social media among higher education students and academic librarians in South Africa. They found that lack of time, lack of access to the Internet, lack of interest in online groups, and the lack of the necessary skills required to use social media were the factors or constraints mentioned by students that limited their access to, and use of, social media for academic purposes. Students also mentioned the cost of social media enabled phones and other devices. It was noted that some of the academic librarians did not have the necessary skills to engage students on social media – a finding which might well apply to some academic staff (lecturers) as well. Also noted by the librarians were the cost implications of using social media for academic purposes.

In Nigeria, Mohammed and Suleimon (2013) examined students' knowledge and utilisation of social media. Their study used a questionnaire as a method of data collection. When asked about the factors limiting their use of social media, the results showed that 14.89% of the respondents indicated that the cost of data was a constraint, 43.97% acknowledged that lack of time constituted a challenge, 14.18% stated that the poor Internet service provided was a constraint and 26.95% mentioned all three challenges/constraints.

Finally, while not focusing on students as such, Mabweazara (2014) highlighted the challenges to the use of social media among library staff at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa and the National University of Science and Technology, Zimbabwe. The study found that network failure hindered librarians from using social media. Other obstacles mentioned by the library staff included the use of passwords that they frequently forget and the subsequent need to contact the information technology administrator before they could gain access to the Internet – a process which sometimes took a great deal of time. While these were challenges experienced by library staff, it could be safe to assume that they were ones also experienced by students in those institutions.

2.8 Theoretical framework

Creswell (2013) stated that a "theoretical framework arises from repeated observation, incorporates facts, laws, predictions, and tested hypotheses that are widely accepted and a well-established principle that has been developed to explain some aspect of the natural world." According to Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014), theoretical frameworks are

important in a research study because they provide a focus for the study. The authors pointed out that theories provide guidelines for researchers about what to research and also assist them when constructing the research questions to be used for collecting data from participants.

Given the argument put forward by Georgescu and Popescul (2015) on the use of social media that "virtual proximity can become a substitute for physical remoteness or distance in case of normal communications or meetings", this study, to achieve its aim and objectives, was rooted in communication theory as a new paradigm of collaboration and communication. The foundation of communication theory is linked to the development of information theory (the theory that studies the quantification, storage and communication of information) proposed by Claude Shannon in 1948. According to Cooren (2012) and Dainton and Zelley (2019), Shannon focused on how best to code the information that a sender wants to transmit and to reproduce it either exactly or approximately for a receiver who may be there physically, or at a distance in case of physical remoteness, to pass the message or information across. This helps to promote digital information and digital literacy (including, as mentioned previously, network literacy, media literacy, computer literacy and visual literacy, among others).

According to the communication theory, knowledge is formed through socialisation and communication and barriers to physical proximity can be diminished through virtual proximity (Schwarz, 2012). This means that interpersonal and intrapersonal communication can be promoted through the message medium (such as social media) and the information gap in academic learning can be eradicated. According to Craig and Muller (2007), the communication theory captures the "process of expression, interaction, and influence, in which the behaviour of humans or other complex organisms expresses psychological mechanisms, states, and traits and, through interaction with the similar expressions of other individuals, produces a range of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural effects."

In line with this theory, Leonardi (2014) revealed that social media have a specific application that provides various ways to communicate visually and that social media are a form of knowledge sharing and innovation, particularly in the educational sector. As pointed out, social media also contribute to digital literacy as well as an information learning environment (Meyers, Erickson and Small, 2013). This view is supported by Lam (2015) who argued that the problem of isolation in learning could be remedied through social media and online

learning, and especially with effective communication among students. Lam (2015) further revealed that social media allows students to develop higher-level thinking skills and increases their confidence and self-esteem in their various learning courses.

The theory, therefore, relates to this study as it links to how social media can be employed to communicate in an academic context during a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic currently being experienced. It corroborates the literature review and that social media provide an opportunity for discussing and sharing course-related topics and for fostering collaborative connections across content areas. Social media also provide a remedy to the problem of isolation or distance in learning.

Wigand (2014) also linked the significance of communication theory to the collaboration potential of social media in fostering interactive conversations and the exchange of user-generated content or ideas. This study argues that communication theory is important because it plays a significant role in understanding human beings and helps to explain how a relationship can be built between two or more students. That is, it is concerned with the process of how students create meaning and how messages are understood intellectually, and how ambiguity arises and is resolved with the intention of promoting harmonious working relationships.

2.9 Appraisal of the literature

As shown in the chapter, various studies have been conducted on different types of social media, the significance of social media, social media access points, and academic activities that social media are used for. However, literature on the cost implications of using social media for academic purposes and the prerequisite knowledge or training needed to keep students and lecturers up-to-date in terms of using social media for teaching and learning is lacking. Therefore, this study sought to address this lack by examining the use of social media for academic purposes among postgraduate information studies students on the PMB campus of the UKZN. The study is topical, timely and policy-relevant because of its novelty in tackling the challenges associated with the use of social media by students. In addition, the study illustrates the expanding role of social media as a source of disseminating information and as a stepping stone towards bridging the educational gap among students in South Africa.

2.10 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the literature relevant to the study was reviewed. The chapter began with a broad outline of the types of social media available. It then went on to give brief descriptions of the social media presented and focused on in the study. This was followed by a discussion of the significance of social media in both general terms and the academic context. The remainder of the literature review was structured around research questions posed in Chapter one. The final section of this chapter presented and discussed the theoretical framework on which this study was based.

Chapter three, which follows, outlines and discusses the research methodology adopted for the study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the methods and procedures used in carrying out the study. The research paradigm, the research design, population of the study, sample and sampling technique, the research instrument used, the validity and reliability of the instrument and the data collection procedure are outlined and discussed. The chapter ends with how the data collected were analysed and the ethical considerations of the study.

The chapter justifies the choice of research design and data collection technique employed to answer the research questions and achieve the objectives of the study. Schensul (2012) pointed out that the research methodology is the strategy that researchers employ to ensure that work can be repeated, critiqued, and adapted. The research methodology, therefore, serves as a guide concerning the choices that a researcher makes about the sampling, data collection and analysis methods. Govender (2018) refers to the research method and defines it as "the entire nature of the procedures that are carried out in the research." As outlined above and covered in this chapter, these would include the research design, sampling procedure, reliability and validity of the instrument, data collection, and data analysis. Creswell and Creswell (2017) added that while carrying out a study, a proper research methodology or research design will specify the mode (such as quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods approaches) by which the research project will be carried out.

In summary, this chapter provides the methodology for the study providing insight into the specific procedures followed in obtaining, organising and analysing the data gathered.

3.2 Research paradigm

Bryman (2008) defined a research paradigm "as a model or framework for observing likely occurrences that encompass a set of theoretical assumptions and guide one's approach to enquiry." In other words, a research paradigm enlightens the researcher on how research can be successfully undertaken. As such, Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) argued that a research

paradigm makes up the abstract opinions and rules on how a researcher understands the world and how he/she understands and acts inside that world.

Based on the preceding and given that there are three major research paradigms, namely, interpretivism, positivism and post-positivism, this study was conducted within the post-positivism paradigm because of its uniqueness and relevance to the study. For example, Ngulube and Ukwoma (2019) revealed that the post-positivism research paradigm allows us to know changes over time. This means that the changes brought to teaching and learning modes (academic activities) through social media can be determined. Henderson (2011) has shown that "post-positivism offers another paradigm that can shift researchers away from a narrow view of positivism to a more comprehensive manner of looking at real-world problems and modes of solving them." Thus, in terms of the study, the paradigm shift provided by post-positivism related to the use of online teaching and learning in solving real-world problems in education such as those brought about by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Finally, educational researchers such as Polit and Beck (2012) and Caldwell (2015) found that post-positivism is more encompassing than positivism because it recognises the impossibility of total objectivity. That is, "it appreciates the impediments to knowing reality with certainty and thus seeks probabilistic evidence of determining the true state of a phenomenon with a high degree of likelihood of knowing the real changes over time" (Caldwell, 2015).

3.3 Research design

The study adopted a descriptive quantitative research design, using the survey method and a semi-structured questionnaire to collect data. This approach was chosen because it is well-suited to the post-positivist research paradigm as it can be mathematically interpreted (Nawrin and Mongkolsirikiet, 2012). In addition, the choice was also to ensure that the results were valid and reliable (discussed under 3.7 below). It was also chosen considering the view expressed by Vetter (2017) that a descriptive quantitative research approach can answer who, what, where, when and how type questions. These were the constructs used in framing the research questions of this study. The research design adopted thus dealt with the systematic collection of data or information from the population or sample of the population using a well-structured questionnaire. The design used is in line with Mbatha, Ocholla and Roux (2011) and Sohail and Ahmad (2017), who employed a descriptive quantitative research approach in their studies. Antwi and Hamza (2015) revealed that a descriptive quantitative research approach

involves computation and mathematics. Therefore, it is often regarded as more precise or valuable than qualitative research, focusing on collecting non-numerical data. This further confirms that the choice of employing a descriptive quantitative research approach for this study was an appropriate one.

3.4 Population of the study

As stated in Chapter one, the population of the study consisted of all postgraduate students in the Information Studies Programme on the PMB campus. Table 1 below provides further detail concerning the population. There are five programmes, and the total number of students registered in 2020 numbered 80. (The PhD and Research Masters students have been combined as the researcher was only able to obtain a combined total for the two programmes.)

Table 1: Study population

Information Studies Programme	
Programme	**Number of Students**
Coursework Masters	7
Honours	15
PGDIS	33
Subtotal	**55**
PhD and Research Masters	25
Total	**80**

Source: Figures supplied by the School of Social Sciences, PMB campus, UKZN

3.5 Sampling technique and sample

In selecting the sample, a purposive sampling technique was adopted. According to Etikan, Musa and Alkassim (2016), purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling that allows researchers to depend on their value judgment when selecting members or units of the population to partake in their study. In terms of this approach, students from the Masters Coursework, Honours and PGDIS programmes were selected on the basis that the programmes were all course-work based. Students attend lectures, interact with lecturers and each other, and, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, are integrated into the UKZN online teaching and learning system. Thus, given the nature of their studies, it was anticipated that students from these three programmes were best suited to participate in the study, as they were most likely to

utilise social media for academic purposes. The PhD and Research Masters students were excluded on the basis that their studies were purely research-based with no course-work components. All the students in the three programmes were included in the sample. As reflected in Table 1 above (the subtotal), they numbered 55 and comprised 69% of the postgraduate students in the Information Studies Programme.

Given the relatively small number of students, no further sampling was done, and all 55 students in the three programmes were targeted for the study and were approached to participate. In effect, a census was taken. In this regard, Isibika (2013) stated that "where the potential population is small, it is often feasible to undertake a census to ensure that all their views are represented." With a small population, a census is thus both possible and convenient. Furthermore, numerous studies such as Idoniboye-Obu (2017), Kuria and Kimutai (2018) and Hussain, Hashmi and Gilani (2018) revealed that the use of a census helps achieve excellent response rates of between 70% and 100%. This was indeed the case in the present study – 51 of the 55 students targeted participated, thereby achieving a response rate of 93% (see 4.2 in Chapter four).

3.6 Research instrument

The instrument used to gather data for the study was a self-administered questionnaire. According to Owusu-Acheaw and Larson (2015), "the use of a questionnaire research design enables a researcher to get direct responses from the respondents, obtain raw data and come up with facts about the sample being investigated." Guru Dev, Rajesh and Senthil Kumar (2015) stated that "a questionnaire is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions to gather information from respondents." According to Wright (2005), a questionnaire has advantages over other instruments used in survey research (such as the interview and observation checklist). It tends to be cheaper to develop and does not require much effort from the researcher in terms of administration. Questionnaires usually have standardised questions and answer categories that make them easier to complete and organise the collected data for analysis purposes. Although there is a problem associated with getting people to respond to a questionnaire, the advantages of the questionnaire outweigh the disadvantages. Given the aforementioned, a questionnaire was considered an effective and efficient instrument to obtain valid and reliable data (see 3.7 below) on the use of social media for academic purposes among a sample of postgraduate students in the Information Studies Programme on the PMB campus.

The questionnaire used in the study was divided into four sections. Section A comprised of three demographic type questions. Section B, with one question, elicited students' responses on their awareness of social media available. Section C, which contained eight questions, focused on the use of social media for academic purposes. Lastly, section D, with one question, elicited responses on the challenges of using social media for academic purposes. A final question asked students to specify any further comments that they might have. Thus, in total, the questionnaire contained 12 questions (there were sub-questions). A copy of the questionnaire is available in Appendix 5.

3.7 Validity and reliability of the instrument

According to Kimberlin and Winterstein (2008), "validity is a complex concept with many variations and subdivisions and measuring its extent can be very involved." In essence, validity "tells us whether an item measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe" (Kimberlin and Winterstein, 2008). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2003) pointed out that there are several ways to ensure the validity of a research instrument, one of which (and the most common) is to subject it to a pre-test. In terms of pretesting the instrument used in the study, the questionnaire was distributed to 10 postgraduate students from disciplines other than information studies but within the social sciences. Based on the feedback received from the students participating in the pre-test, the instrument was adjusted. Some questions were reframed, and Pinterest and MS Teams were added to the lists of social media as suggested by the respondents. In addition, "No specific place/ 'On the go'" was also suggested and added as one of the response options concerning where students access social media. The questionnaire that was finally administered to the study sample thus included the suggestions which emerged from the pre-test. In conducting the pre-test, the study complied with Okite-Amughoro's (2016) contention that "pre-testing is deployed to identify problems that the potential respondents might have in understanding as well as interpreting a question with attendant effect on their responses."

According to Bryman and Bell (2014), reliability relates to whether the results of a study are repeatable. Elsayed (2012) stated that reliability refers to how dependably or consistently a test measures a characteristic. Bless and Higson-Smith (2000) pointed out that a research instrument that yields different scores each time it is used to measure a static variable has low

reliability, while an increase in the consistency of the results obtained indicates that the measuring procedure is more reliable. In reality, achieving reliability in the social sciences is difficult as there are numerous sources of inconsistencies in the discipline. In essence, for research to be reliable, it must prove that if it were carried out on a group of respondents with similar characteristics and in a similar context, then similar results would be found. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) suggested that the concept is more applicable in experimental-type research where researchers would perform the same experiment repeatedly to confirm that the same results were achieved on each occasion. Thus, testing reliability in a social science study such as this one can be both difficult and costly (if not impossible). The questions used in the study instrument were based on questions employed in similar studies (Osharive, 2015), and it could, therefore, be argued that their reliability was, as a consequence, reasonably established. Also, in the pretest outlined above, the students found no difficulty understanding and answering the questions posed. Based on this, the researcher is of the opinion that there is little to suggest that similar findings would not be obtained should the study be repeated.

3.8 Data collection

As noted and discussed above, a questionnaire was used to collect data from the participants in the study. Permission to do so was obtained from various authorities before the questionnaire was administered, that is, made available on the Web (see below). The University Registrar issued the "gatekeeper's letter" (see Appendix 2), while ethical clearance was issued by the University Research Office (see Appendix 1). Ethical issues relating to the study are outlined in section 3.9 below.

The questionnaire was made available via Google Forms – a Web-based application that allows one to generate and edit surveys online. Using this approach, the postgraduate information studies students who were targeted received a message (either via email or WhatsApp) with a link to the Web-based questionnaire, which was compatible with mobile devices. Included in the message was a request to complete the questionnaire and other information related to the study (see Ethical considerations below). The completed questionnaires were submitted online and subsequently downloaded by the researcher. This approach helped the study comply with UKZN's online teaching and learning strategy arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Van Selm and Jankowski (2006), using an Internet-based research survey may

lead to a higher response, cost reduction, efficiency and time-saving. These "benefits" were all applicable to this study.

3.9 Data analysis

The data obtained through the research instrument were, in the main, arranged and analysed using quantitative analysis. Before analysing the raw data, each completed questionnaire via the web was downloaded and checked for missing data, ambiguity, omissions and errors. For instance, it was discovered that some respondents skipped answering some of the questions. It was for this reason that the charts which were automatically generated by Google Forms were not used. Rather, to reflect the no responses, the data from each of the questionnaires were input into an Excel spreadsheet, and new charts and tables reflecting the no responses were generated. Thus, the analysed data (the findings) were presented in the form of tables and charts and were expressed as frequency counts and percentages.

In terms of qualitative analysis, there was no need to analyse the data pertaining to the one open question answered (question 5.1). Only three responses from the three respondents who were asked the question were received. The findings in this regard were simply summarised verbatim (see 4.3.3 in Chapter four).

3.10 Ethical considerations

The university's research ethics guidelines were followed in conducting the study. In doing, so permission to conduct the study was obtained (as noted above) from the University Registrar. This was followed by an ethical clearance letter obtained from the University Research Office, which indicated that the study met the ethical requirements stipulated by the university. Each study participant was presented with an "Informed Consent Document" (see Appendix 3). It, amongst other provisions, introduced the researcher, outlined the purpose of the study and requested their participation. It emphasised the scholarly nature of the research and that their responses would be confidential, that is, no names would be mentioned in the study. Importantly, the voluntary nature of their participation was pointed to and that they had the option of withdrawing from participation at any time. Finally, contact details of the researcher, her supervisor and the Research Office were provided.

3.11 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the methodology used in this study and advanced reasons to support the choice of the methodology and selection of the sample. The chapter covered the research paradigm and research design, the population of the study, the sample and sampling technique, the research instrument, the validity and reliability of the instrument, the data collection procedure, the analysis of the collected data and, finally, the ethical considerations of the study.

Chapter four, which presents the findings and their discussion, follows next.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the results of the online survey directed at postgraduate information studies students on the PMB campus of the UKZN to determine their use of social media for academic purposes. The theoretical framework adopted for this study, namely, communication theory, provided the basis for the online data collection procedure using Google Forms, software that enables one to conduct surveys online (see section 3.8 of Chapter three). This approach enabled the student respondents to share their experiences and observations on the topic of the study. It was particularly useful and pertinent given the trend toward online education spurred on by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Osanloo and Grant (2016), "the theoretical framework is important because it dictates data collection procedure based on theory which has a connection with concepts, constructs and ideas."

This chapter, therefore, is an elucidation of the findings of this study as determined from the analysis of data collected. It is divided into two parts: The first part reports on the respondents' demographic information, while the second part reports the findings to each of the questions posed in the questionnaire. It also discusses the findings in terms of the relevant literature and light of the theoretical framework. However, to begin with, the response rate achieved is outlined and briefly discussed.

4.2 Response rate

All 55 registered students in the three selected programmes were approached to participate in the study (see section 3.5 of Chapter three) and complete the questionnaire using the online survey link provided. Remarkably, 51 students duly completed the survey, giving a response rate of 93%. Table 2 shows the response rate across the three programmes. As can be seen in the table, all seven Coursework Masters students participated. The overall response rate of 93% can be described as excellent in terms of Maxfield and Babbie's (2014) grouping of response rates where 60-69% is considered acceptable, 70-85% as very good, and above 85% excellent.

Table 2: Response rate across programmes

Information Studies			
Programme	**Number of students**	**Response**	**%**
Coursework Masters students	7	7	100
Honours students	15	14	93
PGDIS students	33	30	91
Total	**55**	**51**	**93%**

4.3 Findings and discussion of results

The findings and discussions are presented in terms of each of the questions posed in the questionnaire. To begin with, the demographic characteristics of the respondents are reported.

Note #2: Questions that asked respondents to elaborate on responses (questions 6.1, 7.1 and 8.1) and which asked for further comments (question 12) were not answered by respondents and thus not reported on below.

4.3.1 Questions 2 and 3: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 3 presents the results of questions 2 and 3 of the questionnaire that determined the sex and age of the respondents. The results indicate that there were 33 (65%) female respondents and 18 (35%) male respondents across the three programmes. The preponderance of females indicates that more females than males tend to enter into library and information work, and the registration numbers confirm this. With respect to age, the table reveals that the highest number of respondents were between the age of 26-30 (33%) years followed by those between 31-35 (29%). Five (10%) respondents were 25 years of age or below, while the remaining respondents, 14 (28%), were 36 years and older. The respondents could thus, in general, be described as "mature" in keeping with the postgraduate nature of their studies. It is probable that the honours and masters students, in particular, were needing to improve on their existing qualifications.

Table 3: Demographic characteristics of respondents n=51

Variables		Responses	
		Freq	%
Sex	Male	33	65
	Female	18	35
	Total	**51**	**100%**
Age	18-20	1	2
	21-25	4	8
	26-30	17	33
	31-35	15	29
	36-40	7	14
	>40	7	14
	Total	**51**	**100%**

The findings relating to the programmes, sex and age of the respondents are depicted graphically in Figures 1 to 3 below.

Note #3: While it is acknowledged that the use of figures (pie and bar charts) duplicate the findings presented in the table/s, their use assists in depicting the findings in an easily understood graphic manner with a simple "eyeball" inspection.
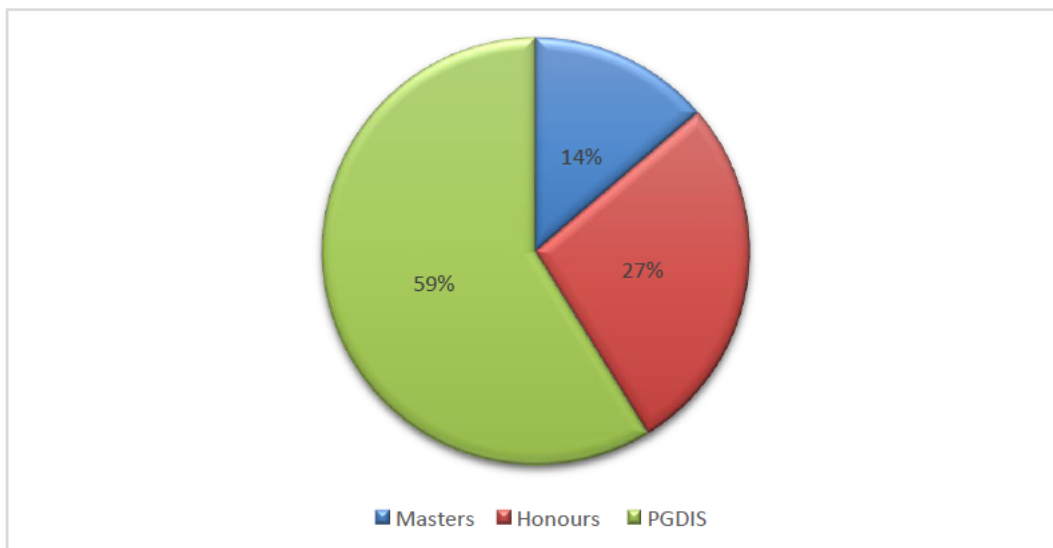
Figure 1: Programme of respondents n=51
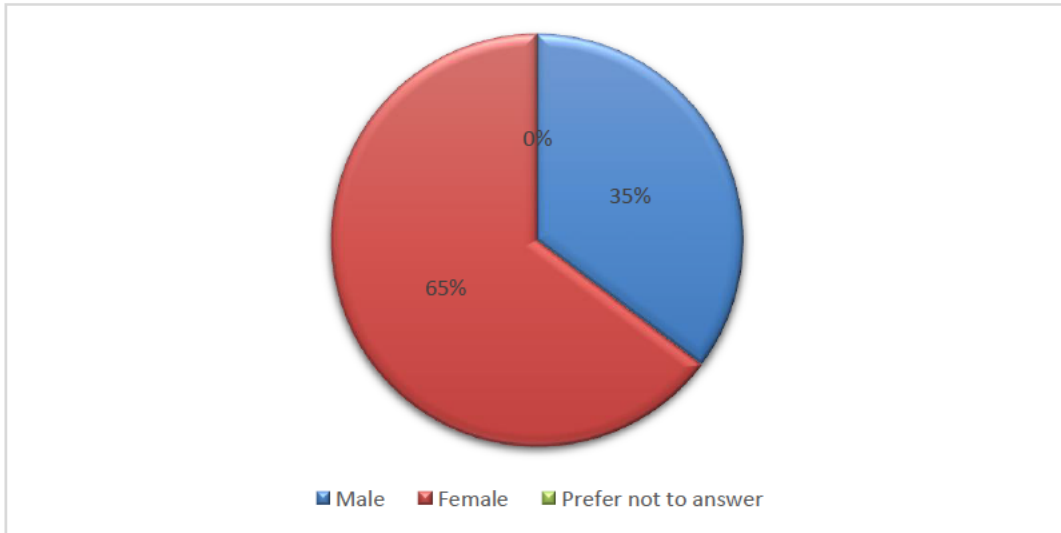
Figure 2: Gender of respondents n=51
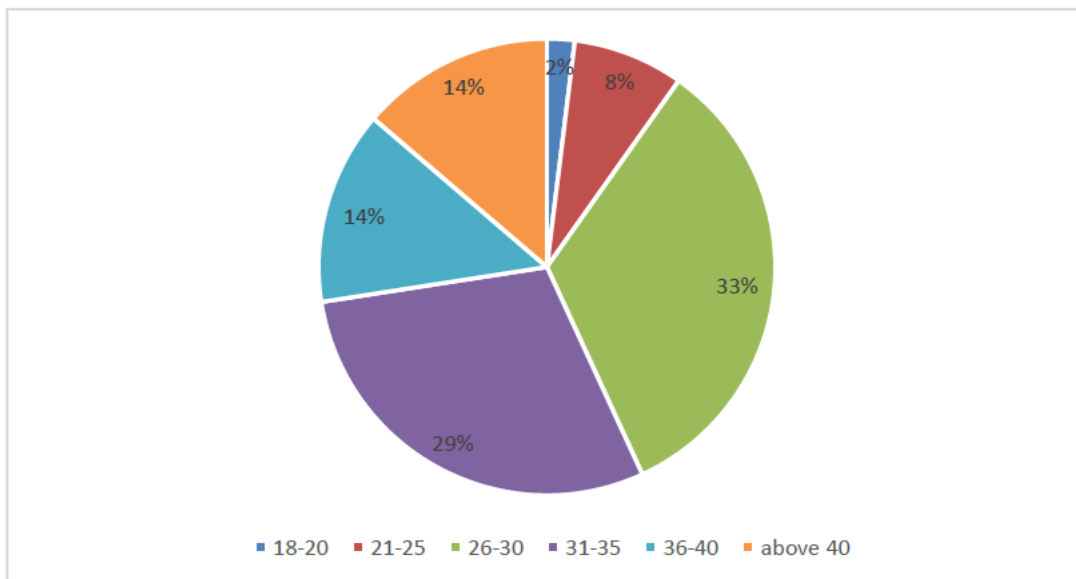
Figure 3: Age of respondents n=51

4.3.2 Question 4: Awareness of social media available

Table 4 and Figure 4 show that majority of students were aware of most of the social media listed. Facebook, Instagram, Zoom, Twitter and WhatsApp were the social media that all 51 (100%) respondents were aware of. The social media that students were least aware of were MS Teams 24 (47%) followed by Pinterest 22 (43%) and ResearchGate with 11 (22%) respondents.

Several factors might be responsible for the awareness (or not) of the various types of social media ranging from the type of communication tool or method used by the students to their

level of exposure to information and communication technologies (ICTs). The latter, in particular, could play an important role and would include the extent to which their peers and family members are embracing social media (and which types). In terms of the former, not all phones and tablets, for example, are compatible with all social media. Still, the extent to which this influences students' awareness of them is debatable. Nonetheless, the findings agree with those of Gambo and Özad (2021), who reported that Facebook, Instagram, Zoom, Twitter and WhatsApp have a dominant presence among the majority of the students who participated in their study. As of 2020, Facebook had 1.69 billion users, WhatsApp had 2 billion, Instagram had 855 million, Zoom had 200 million daily participants, and Twitter had 330 million users – numbers pointing to their popularity worldwide. These numbers, no doubt, will also include postgraduate information studies students on the PMB campus of the UKZN.

Other social media not listed but mentioned by 18 (35%) respondents were TikTok, Telegram, WeChat and Quora. As can be seen in Table 4, Telegram and Quora were the most-mentioned social media not listed. Also mentioned were Sci-Hub, SciFinder, Gmail and Outlook, none of which are social media *per se*. The first two provide access to research literature while the latter two are email programs, and they being mentioned does illustrate some confusion on the part of respondents concerning what social media comprise (as well as the difficulty of defining social media as pointed to in Chapter two).

Table 4: Awareness of social media available n=51

Social media	Aware	%	Not aware	%
Facebook	51	100	0	0
Instagram	51	100	0	0
LinkedIn	49	96	2	4
Zoom	51	100	0	0
Twitter	51	100	0	0
Skype	48	94	3	6
YouTube	50	98	1	2
WhatsApp	51	100	0	0
Google+	48	94	3	6
Blogs	42	82	9	18
ResearchGate	40	78	11	22
Pinterest	29	57	22	43
MS Teams	27	53	24	47
Other	TikTok 2 (3%), Telegram 4 (8%), WeChat 3 (6%), Quora 4 (8%), Sci-Hub 1 (2%), SciFinder 2 (4%), Gmail 1 (2%) and Outlook 1(2%)			
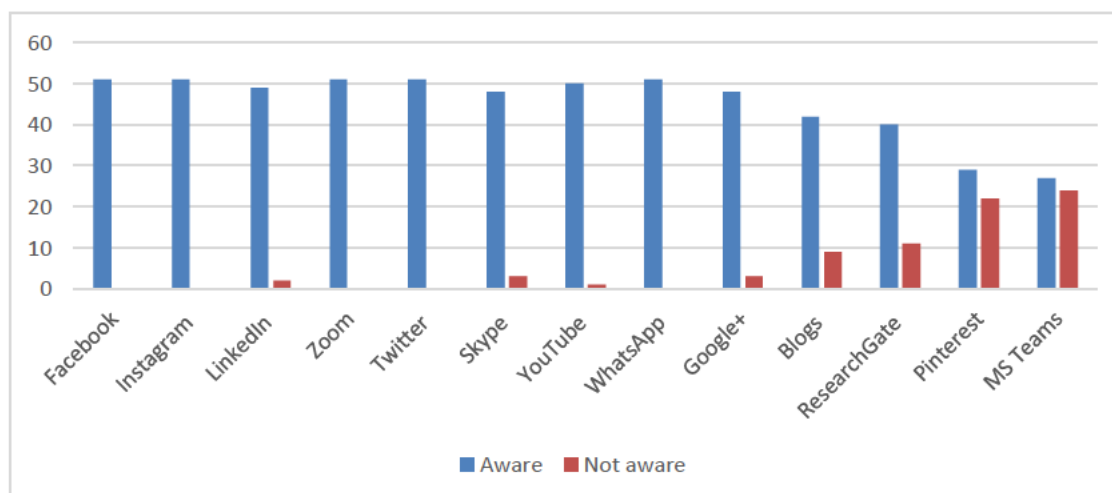
Figure 4: Awareness of social media available n=41

4.3.3 Question 5: Use of social media for academic purposes

Question 5 was a filter question to separate students who use social media for academic purposes from those who do not. Figure 5 presents the findings. The vast majority of

respondents, 48 (94%), indicated that they used social media for academic purposes while three (6%) students did not. The response from the vast majority supports the new paradigm of collaboration and communication theory through which students are willing to learn visually and acquire knowledge and innovations. Findings in the literature such as Tess (2013) and Mingle and Adams (2015) revealed that social media are ever more visible, and students are increasingly making use of them in higher education settings for academic purposes.

A follow-up question asked those who do not use social media for academic purposes to give reason/s why not. The reasons for not using social media provided by the three students were a lack of authenticity mentioned by two of the respondents, while the third referred to the lack of institutional support in training the students on the use of social media. Selwyn (2012) and Gikas and Grant (2013) highlighted a similar challenge: the lack of training for students in their use of social medial for their studies in higher education.
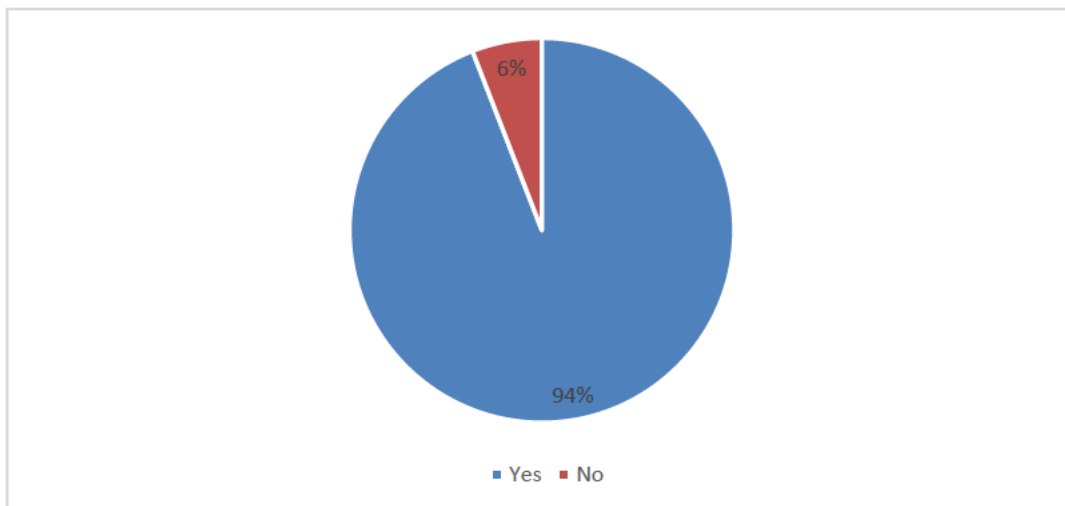
Figure 5: Use of social media for academic purposes n=51

4.3.4 Question 6: Social media used for academic purposes

Question 6 determined what social media the respondents used for academic purposes, and the findings are presented in Table 5 and Figure 6. The three most used social media for academic purposes were WhatsApp mentioned by 40 (83%) respondents, Zoom 38 (79%) and YouTube 32 (67%) respondents. The high usage of WhatsApp by the respondents could be attributed to the fact it consumes less data and thus is among the most available and affordable social media to the students (Delam and Eidi, 2020). The findings regarding WhatsApp are corroborated by those of Habes, Alghizzawi, Khalaf, Salloum and Ghani (2018), whose study found that

WhatsApp was the most used social network by students. A similar finding was presented by Chaputula, Abdullah and Mwale (2020) on the use of WhatsApp as a platform for providing library services. The study revealed that WhatsApp has successfully been used to provide several user and reference services to both students and staff. As noted above, Zoom was ranked the second most used social media after WhatsApp by the postgraduate information studies students participating in the study, and this was followed by YouTube. It took the COVID-19 pandemic for people to realise how useful Zoom is for conferences and meetings and, in the light of this study, distance education. The findings are also in agreement with Fasae (2020), who revealed that Zoom, WhatsApp and YouTube are famous among the students in terms of their use for academic purposes.

The least used social media by respondents were Pinterest with 5 (10%) respondents, Instagram 7 (15%) and Twitter and Blogs with 12 (25%) respondents. This finding is similar to that of Watkins and Lee (2016) who listed Instagram and Twitter as the least popular social media that students used for learning.

Other social media used for academic purposes were Telegram mentioned by 5 (10%) respondents and Quora by 3 (6%) respondents. The findings suggest that to remedy the problem of isolation in learning (as revealed by Lam (2015) while arguing in favour of communication theory), students connect to several social media platforms for effective communication among themselves. This allows them to develop higher-level thinking skills and increases their confidence and self-esteem with regard to the various courses they are studying for.

Note #4: As shown in Table 5, there was a category of students who did not indicate whether they used or did not use the various types of social media. They have been captured as a "No response". Their non-response could be interpreted as not using a specific social media and thus could be combined with the "Do not use" responses. However, these have not been combined in the table, and the "No response" category has remained. It is the researcher's opinion that the figures reflected in Table 5 and Figure 6 concerning social media used for academic purposes are valid as social media usage was the thrust of the question.

Table 5: Social media used for academic purposes n=48

Social media	Use	%	Do not use	%	No response	%
Facebook	15	31	13	27	20	42
Instagram	7	15	16	33	25	52
LinkedIn	23	48	7	15	18	36
Zoom	38	79	3	6	7	15
Twitter	12	25	14	29	22	46
Skype	17	35	11	23	20	42
YouTube	32	67	5	10	11	23
WhatsApp	40	83	3	6	5	10
Google+	26	54	8	17	14	29
Blogs	12	25	12	25	24	50
ResearchGate	30	63	5	10	13	27
Pinterest	5	10	22	46	21	44
MS Teams	17	35	16	33	15	31
Other	Telegram 5 (10%) and Quora 3 (6%)					
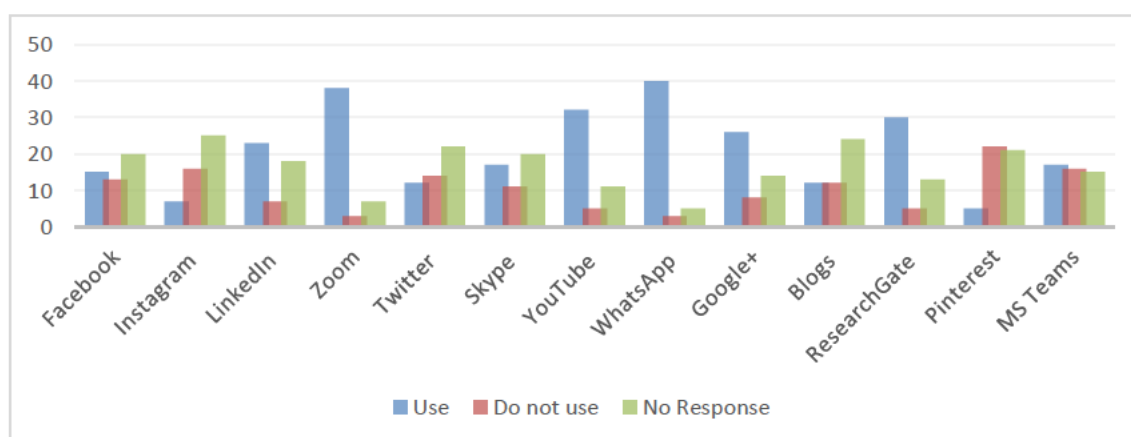
Figure 6: Social media used for academic purposes n=48

4.3.5 Question 7: How social media are accessed by students

Table 6 and Figure 7 present the results on how social media are accessed by the students. The most used "tool" or method to access social media was the smartphone as mentioned by the vast majority, 46 (96%) of the respondents. One can assume that this was largely due to the prevalence of mobile phones with Internet capabilities (smartphones) as made available by

different companies at what could be considered an "affordable" cost. This has allowed cash-strapped students to acquire, in the main, Android-based phones that can access various social media. This finding is consistent with that of Mbodila et al. (2014), who, in their study on the effect of social media on students' engagement and collaboration at a South African university, found that most of the students accessed the social media through their mobile/cell phones. A similar finding was made by Shava and Chinyamurindi (2018) in their study of the determinants of social media usage by students in South Africa. Closely following the smartphone were the 42 (88%) respondents who used laptops to access social media. This finding is in line with Sobaih et al. (2016), who, in their study on the use of social media in higher education in developing countries, found that laptops and smartphones were the leading tools or methods for accessing social media for academic purposes. At the other extreme, the significantly less used tools or methods to access social media were tablets, as mentioned by a quarter (25%) of the respondents and personal computers mentioned by 19 (40%) respondents.

Table 6: How social media are accessed n=48

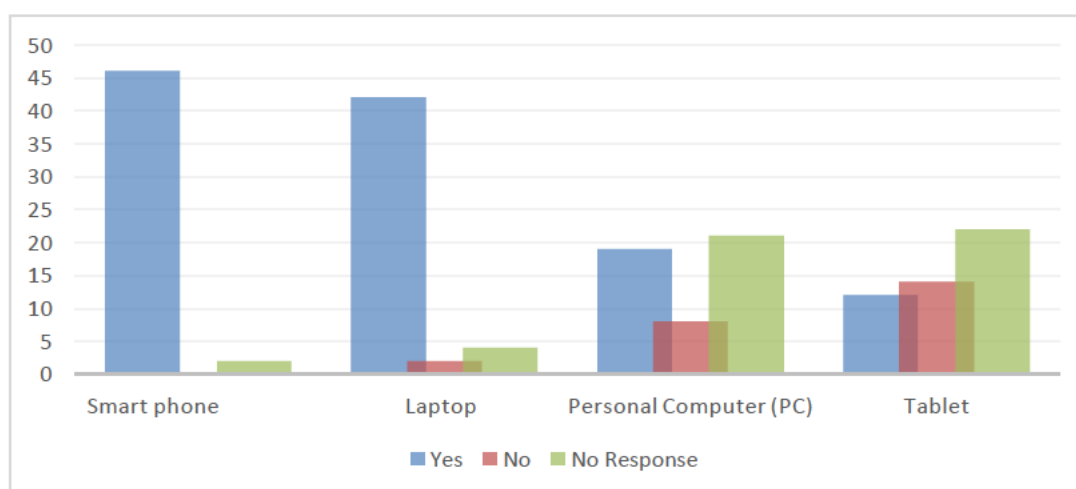| Access method	Yes	%	No	%	No response	%
Smart phone	46	96	0	0	2	4
Laptop	42	88	2	4	4	8
Personal Computer (PC)	19	40	8	17	21	44
Tablet	12	25	14	29	22	46

Figure 7: How social media are accessed n=48

4.3.6 Question 8: Where social media are accessed

Table 7 and Figure 8 reveal the findings relating to where the students access social media for academic purposes. Most respondents, 41 (85%), accessed social media for academic purposes from their homes. This is in line with Manca and Ranieri (2016), who stated that students prefer to sit in the comfort of their home to connect to online teaching and learning. It is also in line with communication theory, which states that "barriers to physical proximity can be diminished through virtual proximity". Importantly, due to COVID-19, the UKZN campuses were closed for much of 2020, meaning that students had little option but to operate from home, given that the LANs and the library on the PMB campus were not accessible. This would almost certainly have influenced respondents answering this question. Access from home was followed by some distance by the university library and the university LAN mentioned by 21 (44%) and 19 (40%) respondents, respectively. This usage does probably reflect, to some extent, the behaviour of students prior to the closure of the university. What is evident, however, is that, in general, students are making less use of the physical library as library holdings become increasingly digitised (Chawinga, 2017). Also interesting is that 23% of the students mentioned "No specific place/'On the go'" pointing to the fact that learning can take place anywhere and anytime – students do not need a "fixed" location to access the Internet for learning and studying purposes. The least used access point was an Internet café, with 4 (8%) respondents indicating this. This lack of usage might well be connected to the cost implications associated with the use of Internet cafés or not having such facilities nearby or available. A place not listed but mentioned under "Other" was the public library – mentioned by 5 (10%) respondents. Most public libraries in South Africa provide free access to the Internet as a basic service.

Table 7: Where social media accessed n=48

Access point	Yes	%	No	%	No Response	%
Home	41	85%	1	2%	6	13
University Library	21	44%	5	10%	22	46
University LAN	19	40%	3	6%	26	54
No specific place/"On the go"	11	23%	11	23%	26	54
Internet café	4	8%	15	31%	29	60
Other	Public library 5 (10%)					
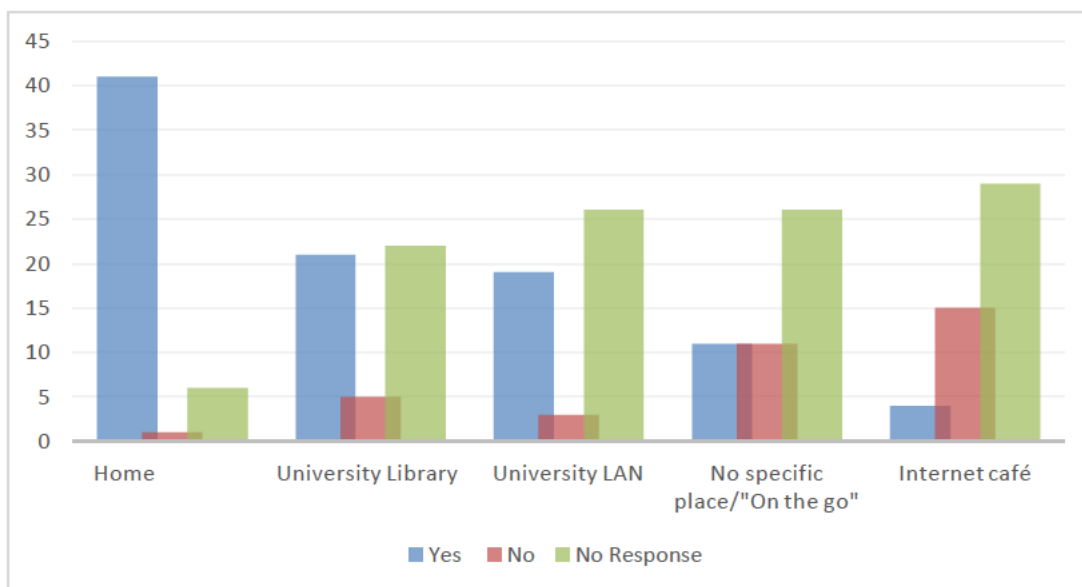
Figure 8: Where social media accessed n=48

4.3.7 Question 9: Academic activities that social media used for

The academic activities that students indicated they use social media for are presented in Table 8 and Figure 9. Social media were used for all the academic activities but the frequency of the usage varied. As can be seen, except for two students, all 46 (96%) respondents indicated that they always used social media for "Learning". This was followed by 42 (88%) respondents who revealed that they always use social media for their "Personal research/development". These findings concur with those of Onyancha (2015) who investigated social media usage for academic purposes in South Africa and Mabweazara and Zinn (2016) who focused on the use of social media tools, in this instance, by library staff at two Southern African universities. Both studies revealed that social media are used for learning and personal research/development.

Table 8: Academic activities that social media used for n=48

Academic activities	Always	%	Sometimes	%	Never	%	No Response	%
Learning	46		1		1		0	0
Personal research/development	42		5		1		0	0
Assignments	39		7		2		0	0
Exam preparation	24		16		3		5	10
Group discussions	32		5		2		9	19
Continuous assessment preparation	28		9		0		11	23
Personal growth	39		3		2		4	8
Other	N/A							

It is worth noting that no respondents skipped the top three activities that students use social media for. Hence, all the respondents indicated their choices in this regard. The academic activities for which social media were least "always used" were "Exam preparation" as mentioned by 24 (50%) respondents and "Continuous assessment preparation" mentioned by 28 (58%) respondents. It could be surmised that social media usage decreases during exam preparation given that the focus of students would be on the forthcoming examinations.

Figure 9: Academic activities that social media used for n=48

4.3.8 Question 10: Frequency of social media use for academic purposes

Table 9 and Figure 10 present the results pertaining to the frequency of social media use for academic purposes by postgraduate students.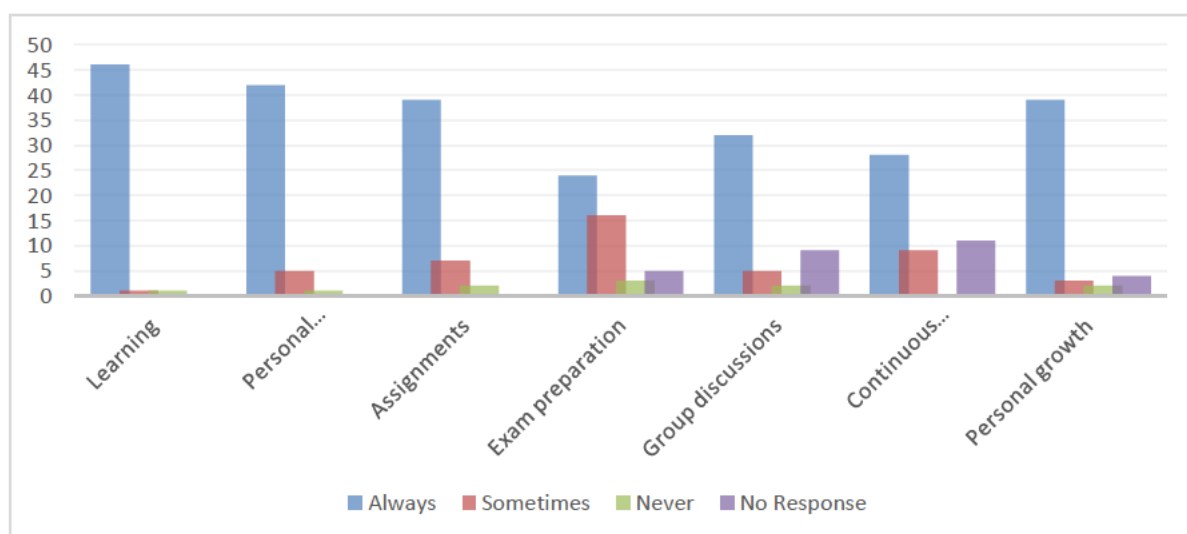 Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the findings above, WhatsApp was the social media most used for academic purposes on a daily basis – mentioned by 34 (71%) of respondents. This may be attributed to the fact that WhatsApp is the most available social media worldwide (Anderson, 2016). The reality of this finding can be seen from the current number of WhatsApp users and the volume of Newsfeed (or group platforms) generated each day, with a current reach of more than 180 countries and two billion people (Srivastava and Singh, 2020). The finding agrees with that of Habes *et al.* (2018) who affirmed that WhatsApp and Facebook are the most available and frequently used social networks by students. Google+ mentioned by 20 (42%) respondents, YouTube 19 (40%) and Facebook 17 (35%) respondents followed WhatsApp by some distance in terms of daily usage. Therefore, WhatsApp, Facebook, Google+ and YouTube were the most used social media on a daily basis. The social media least used daily were Pinterest mentioned by 1 (2%) respondent and Skype by 3 (6%) respondents. As noted in Table 5 above, Pinterest was one of the least used social media (10%) by respondents so this result is not surprising while Skype was used by just over a third (35%) of respondents.

When looking at overall usage frequency (from daily to less than once a month) in Table 9, WhatsApp was still the most frequently used social media with 43 (90%) respondents reporting using it at some stage. Interestingly, Zoom was the next most used social media with 39 (81%) respondents using it. The popularity of Zoom during the pandemic has already been pointed to and according to Nash (2020), the *"Report on digital literacy in academic meetings during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown"* revealed that Zoom was the preferred platform for meetings, teaching and learning and was likely to be so until social distancing and other restrictions associated with COVID-19 end. This also coincides with the communication theory chosen for this study and the view of Georgescu and Popescul (2015) that the use of social media enables virtual proximity to be a substitute for physical remoteness or distance in cases of normal communication, meetings and learning. The least frequently used social media, again unsurprisingly, was Pinterest with less than half, 20 (42%) of the respondents using it on a daily, weekly, monthly or less basis. Telegram was listed under "Other" by one respondent who used it on a weekly basis.

Note #5: Once again the "No response" category with the various social media was quite high. There are also discrepancies concerning usage of the social media with the findings reflected in Table 5. The researcher is not sure of the reason for this but it could be attributed to the respondents not applying their minds consistently while completing the questionnaires.

Table 9: Frequency of use of social media for academic purposes n=48

Social media	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Less than once a month	Never	No response	Overall usage
Facebook	17 (35%)	5 (10%)	5 (10%)	0	8 (17%)	13 (27%)	27 (56%)
Instagram	8 (17%)	9 (19%)	6 (13%0	1 (2%)	10 (21%)	14 (29%)	24 (50%)
LinkedIn	7 (15%)	10 (21%)	8 (17%)	4 (8%)	5 (10%)	14 (29%)	29 (60%)
Zoom	10 (21%)	12 (25%)	14 (29%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)	7 (15%)	39 (81%)
Twitter	7 (15%)	10 (21)	4 (8%)	3 (6%)	8 (17%)	16 (33%)	24 (50%)
Skype	3 (6%)	6 (13%)	6 (13%)	7 (15%)	9 (19%)	17 (35%)	22 (46%)
YouTube	19 40%)	12 (50%)	4 (8%)	1 (2%)	3 (6%)	9 (19%)	36 (75%)
WhatsApp	34 (71%)	6 (13%)	3 (6%)	0	1 (2%)	4 (8%)	43 (90%)
Google+	20 (42%)	7 (15%)	6 (13%)	1 (2%)	6 (13%)	8 (17%)	34 (71%)
Blogs	6 (13%)	4 (8%)	12 (25%)	1 (2%)	10 (21%)	15 31%)	23 (48%)
ResearchGate	12 (25%)	11 (23%)	10 (21%)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)	11 (23%)	35 (73%)
Pinterest	1 (2%)	3 (6%)	13 (27%)	3 (6%)	11 (23%)	17 (35%)	20 (42%)
MS Teams	4 (8%)	7 (15%)	10 (21%)	4 (8%)	8 (17%)	15 (31%)	25 (52%)
Other	Telegram – weekly 1 (2%)						
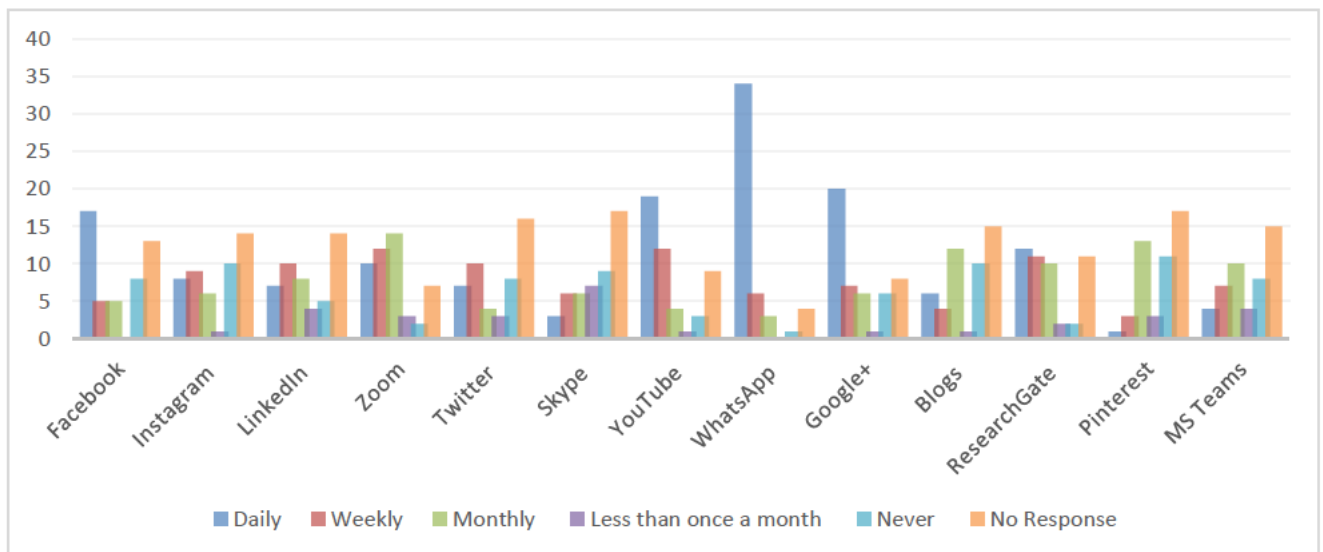
Figure 10: Frequency of use of social media for academic purposes n=48

4.3.9 Question 11: Extent to which challenges are constraints to the use of social media for academic purposes

Question 11, the final question (as mentioned in *Note #2* above, question 12 was one of the questions not answered by respondents) was directed at all 51 of the postgraduate respondents. Table 10 and Figure 11 present the results on the extent to which the challenges were identified as constraints to the use of social media for academic purposes. The two challenges identified by just under half 25 (49%) of the respondents as a significant constraint were the "High cost of subscription to internet data bundles" on the one hand and "Poor internet connectivity" on the other. The third challenge identified as a significant constraint was also a financial one, namely, the "High cost of social media enabled phones (smartphones)" mentioned by 16 (31%) respondents. When adding the number of respondents who identified the three challenges as constraints (either a significant constraint or a constraint) the total percentage of respondents total well over 50% that is, 78%, 77% and 69% for the three challenges respectively.

The high cost of data is probably the major reason why universities in South Africa took it upon themselves to provide data to students during this era of COVID-19. The need to conduct teaching and learning online and the data usage that this entailed (and the associated cost) on the part of the students was recognised by the institutions and the provision of free data would "cushion" the financial demands being made on the students. As noted above, at the UKZN,

the university libraries and LANs were closed for most of the year. There was thus no "free" Internet access as such available to students. While students were given 10 gigabytes of data per month, this was not adequate and despite the Students Representative Council's intervention to have the allocation increased, this amount remained. Students who had used up their allocation before month-end were then required to pay for their Internet access through an Internet Service Provider (ISP) or through data bundles provided by the cellular companies. The UKZN also provided subsidised laptops to students to enable distance learning and that also enabled their use of social media for academic purposes. In line with the findings of this study, Letseka, Letseka and Pitsoe (2018) in their study which investigated the challenges of e-learning in South Africa, identified the cost of Internet connectivity and social media enabled phones as significant factors hindering the use of social media by students.

While not a significant constraint "Low ICT literacy" was nonetheless mentioned as an overall constraint by 35 (69%) of the respondents. A similar number 36 (71%) mentioned "Poor knowledge of social media application software and sites" as an overall constraint as well. Both findings are or concern and suggest that there is room for training and awareness-raising regarding ICT literacy and the use of social media on the part of the university and specifically on the part of academic staff and the university library. The finding regarding apathy on the part of friends when it comes to using social media mentioned by 40 (78%) of respondents as an overall constraint also suggests the need for intervention in terms of raising awareness of the benefits of using social media for academic purposes.

Table 10: Extent to which challenges are constraints to the use of social media for academic purposes n=51

Challenges	Significant constraint	Constraint	Minor constraint	Not a constraint
High cost of subscription to internet data bundles	25 (49.0%)	15 (29%)	9 (18%)	2 (4%)
High cost of social media enabled phones (smartphones)	16 (31%)	19 (37%)	10 (20%)	6 (12%)
Poor internet connectivity	25 (49%)	14 (28%)	9 (18%)	3 (5%)
Low ICT literacy	5 (10%)	17 (33%)	13 (26%)	16 (31%)
Low awareness of the social media for academic purposes	8 (16%)	16 (31%)	12 (24%)	15 (29%)
Apathy of friend to communicate academic issues	10 (20%)	17 (33%)	13 (26%)	11 (21%)
Poor knowledge of social media application software and sites	11 (22%)	10 (20%)	15 (29%)	15 (29%)
Other	N/A			
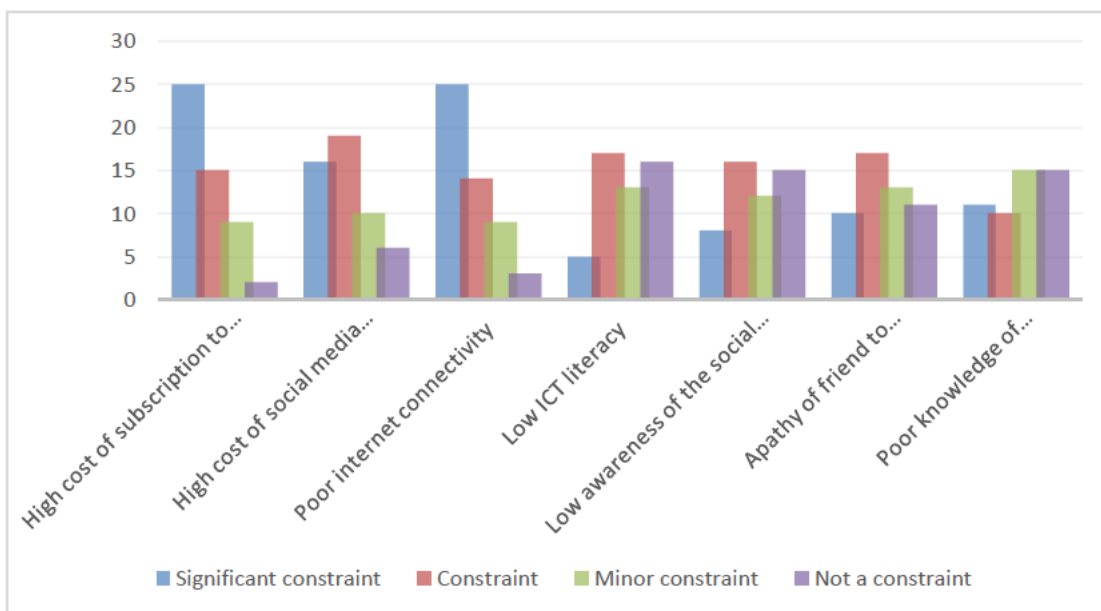
Figure 11: Extent to which challenges are constraints to the use of social media for academic purposes n=51

4.4 Chapter summary

The main aim of this study, as stated in Chapter one, was to investigate the use of social media for academic purposes among postgraduate information studies students on the PMB campus of the UKZN. This chapter presented and discussed the findings as extracted from the online survey using Google Forms. Findings to each question posed were presented in the form of tables and figures (pie and bar charts) and their discussion was done in the light of the relevant literature and the theoretical framework adopted.

Chapter five, the final chapter comprising the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study, is next.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This, the final chapter, presents the summary of the main findings of the study and the conclusions and the recommendations that emerge from them. These are presented in light of the research questions underpinning the study. A limitation of the study is delineated and the chapter ends with suggestions for further research. To begin with, the aim of the study and the research questions and theoretical framework underpinning the study are presented. This is then followed by a summary of the dissertation by chapter.

5.2 Study aim, research questions and theoretical framework

The study aimed to investigate the use of social media for academic (educational) purposes by postgraduate information studies students on the PMB campus of the UKZN. To achieve the aim, the following research questions guided the study:

- What are various types of social media available to postgraduate information studies students for academic purposes on the PMB campus of UKZN?
- Which social media are used for academic purposes by students, and what is the frequency of the usage?
- What are the various academic activities that necessitate the use of social media by students?
- How and where do students access social media for academic purposes?
- What are the challenges (including cost implications) experienced by students when using social media for academic purposes?

The collaboration and communication theory was employed to achieve the study's aim and answer the research questions. The theory focuses on the new growth of the Internet and the emergence of social media for collaboration and communication among the people (Georgescu and Popescul, 2015). Specifically, the study was rooted in communication theory through which barriers to physical proximity are diminished via virtual proximity. As revealed by

Leonardi (2014), social media have a specific application that provide various ways to communicate visually and are a form of knowledge sharing and innovation.

5.3 Summary of the study by chapter

Chapter one introduced the study. It comprised the background of the study in which, among other aspects, the benefits of social media were discussed. This was followed by the research problem, the aim and objectives of the study, the research questions and the significance of the study. The theoretical framework and research methodology employed were briefly introduced, and the delimitations of the study described. The chapter ended with the structure, by chapter, of the remainder of the study.

Chapter two comprised the review of literature relevant to the study. It also presented the theoretical framework that underpinned the study. The review outlined the types of social media available and specified and briefly described the social media that were focused on in the research instrument used in the study. The significance of social media was then discussed, and this was followed by a review of the literature in relation to the research questions posed in Chapter one. This included the use of social media for academic purposes and the challenges associated with their use. The chapter ended with a discussion of the theoretical framework.

Chapter three comprised the research methodology used in carrying out the study. The research paradigm, the research design, population of the study, sample and sampling technique, the research instrument used, the validity and reliability of the instrument and the data collection procedure were outlined and discussed. Finally, the ethical considerations relating to the study were described.

Chapter four presented and discussed the results of the online survey directed at postgraduate information studies students on the PMB campus of the UKZN. The significant findings were discussed in light of the relevant literature on the use of social media for academic purposes. The chapter began with a discussion of the demographic characteristics of the participants and ended with the challenges (constraints) to the use of social media for academic purposes. The research questions presented in Chapter one provided the basis for the discussion.

Chapter five, as noted in the introduction above, consists of a presentation of the main findings of the study and the conclusions and the recommendations that emerge from them. A limitation of the study is described and suggestions for further research given.

5.4 Main findings

As stated above, five research questions were formulated to achieve the aim of the study. The main findings of the study are presented under their respective research questions. To begin with, the response and demographic details of the respondents are given.

5.4.1 Response rate and demographic details of the respondents

- A total number of 55 postgraduate information studies students across three programmes (PGDIS, Honours and Coursework Masters) were targeted as the sample population. Remarkably, 51 (93%) of them duly completed the online survey – a response rate which can be described as excellent.

- A majority (65%) of the respondents were females. Historically there has always been more female than male students registered for library and information studies and this trend continues. At a national level, there are, arguably, more females than males in the profession.

- In terms of age, the findings revealed that the highest number of respondents were between the age of 26-30 (33%) years followed by those between 31-35 (29%). This showed that the respondents were mature and this was in keeping with the postgraduate nature of their studies and, for the honours and masters students in particular, reflected their need to improve their qualifications.

5.4.2 Main findings in terms of the research questions posed

- What are various types of social media available to postgraduate information studies students for academic purposes on PMB campus of UKZN?

It was evident that there are numerous types of social media available to students and the respondents were aware of most of the social media listed. The social media that all (100%) of the respondents were aware of were Facebook, Instagram, Zoom, Twitter and WhatsApp. These were then followed by YouTube 50 (98%), LinkedIn 49 (96%), Skype 48 (94%) and Google+ 48 (94%) while the social media that respondents were least aware of were MS Teams 24 (47%), 22 (43%) and ResearchGate 11 (22%).

- Which social media are used for academic purposes by students and what is the frequency of the usage?

The vast majority of the respondents, 48 (94%) indicated that they do indeed use social media for academic purposes. The main reason cited by the three (6%) respondents who did not use social media for academic purposes were a lack of authenticity and institutional support or training for the students. A majority of the respondents 40 (83%) indicated that the most used social media for academic purpose was WhatsApp. This was closely followed by Zoom 38 (79%), YouTube 32 (67%) and ResearchGate with 30 (63%) respondents while Pinterest 5 (10%), Instagram 7 (15%) and Twitter and Blogs with 12 (25%) respondents each were the least used for academic purposes.

In terms of the frequency of social media usage, WhatsApp 34 (71%), Google+ 20 (42%), YouTube 19 (40%) and Facebook 17 (35%) were the social media mostly used daily by respondents. The social media least used on a daily basis were Pinterest 1 (2%) and Skype 3 (6%) respondents.

- What are the various academic activities that necessitate the use of social media by students?

With the exception of two students, all 46 (96%) respondents indicated that they use social media for "Learning". This was followed by 42 (88%) respondents who revealed that they use social media for their "Personal research/development". The academic activities for which social media were least "always used" were "Exam preparation" mentioned by 24 (50%) respondents and "Continuous assessment preparation" mentioned by 28 (58%) respondents.

- How and where do students access social media for academic purposes?

A majority, 46 (96%) of the respondents stated that the most used method or "tool" to access social media for academic purpose was smart phones and this was followed by 42 (88%) respondents who used laptop computers. Personal computers (PCs) and tablets were the least used method mentioned by 19 (40%) and 12 (25%%) respondents respectively.

The majority 41 (85%) of the respondents averred that they access social media for academic purposes from their home. The least used access points were public libraries mentioned by 5

(10%) respondents and Internet cafes, 4 (8%) respondents. An interesting finding was the 11 (23%) respondents who mentioned no specific place but rather accessed social media "on the go".

- What are the challenges (including cost implications) experienced by students when using social media for academic purposes?

The most mentioned challenges identified by the respondents were the "High cost of subscriptions to Internet data bundles" and "Poor internet connectivity" mentioned by 25 (49%) respondents each and the "High cost of social media enabled phones (smartphones)" mentioned by 16 (31%) respondents. Thus, two of the three challenges were finance-related ones. When totalling the number of respondents who identified the three challenges as constraints (either a significant constraint or a constraint), the total percentage of respondents total well over 50% that is, 78%, 77% and 69% for the three challenges respectively.

5.5 Limitation of the study

A challenge encountered during the process of data collection was that some of the students skipped some questions while completing the online survey. In these instances, respondents were captured as a "No response" (as shown in Tables 5 to 10 and Figures 6 to 10) in the use of such social media. However, it was a minority of respondents who did this and the majority of students completed all questions. The researcher believes that findings were not compromised to any extent (and if one accepts the assumption that a "No response" is equivalent to a "Do not use", then the findings were not impacted at all).

5.6 Conclusions

Social media have created a platform of communication that has changed the mode of social interaction significantly. The opportunity to engage in instant messaging, photo sharing, video sharing and document transfer has allowed millions of users to utilise this platform for various purposes. Social media, by virtue of their reach, present a medium that can impact not only the social life of postgraduate information studies students on the PMB campus of the UKZN but also on their academic activities. Social media can provide platforms where students can share ideas, post documents, provide links to educative websites and interact with their lecturers to enhance their learning. Given this and in light of the main findings listed above, the following specific conclusions can be made:

- Respondents were generally aware of the various social media available to them.

- The vast majority of respondents were making use of one or more of the social media for academic purposes.

- The most popular social media used by respondents for academic purposes were WhatsApp, Zoom and YouTube while the least were Pinterest, Instagram, Twitter and Blogs. As noted, it could be argued that the popularity of WhatsApp could be attributed, amongst other reasons, to its being data "friendly".

- The social media most frequently used by respondents, that is, on a daily basis were WhatsApp, Google+, YouTube and Facebook, findings which underscore the popularity of WhatsApp.

- The two academic activities for which social media were most used by the vast majority of the respondents were "Learning" and "Personal research/development".

- The most used method or "tool" to access social media for academic purposes by a significant majority of the respondents was the smartphone. This was arguably due to its relative affordability (as opposed to laptop computers and PCs).

- The vast majority of respondents accessed social media for academic purposes from the comfort of their homes. It could also be argued that this was due to students not being allowed on campus in terms of COVID-19 restrictions.

- Finally, two of the most mentioned challenges to the use of social media for academic purposes were finance-related, namely, the "High cost of subscriptions to Internet data bundles" and "High cost of social media enabled phones (smartphones)". Poor Internet connectivity was also a factor in social media use.

5.7 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions above and, in particular, those relating to the challenges or constraints identified in using social media for academic purposes, the following two recommendations are made:

- In collaboration with the institutions of higher learning, the government should investigate mechanisms to fund the increased provision and distribution of laptop computers and Internet data bundles to the students as well as the issue of Internet connectivity. The former would need to be done based on the financial need of the

students. The necessity for this has been highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the need, on the part of the universities, to adopt a distance learning and teaching approach. Consideration could also be given to including social media enabled phones (smartphones) in this process although it could be argued that laptops are more suited to the teaching and learning experience. It is evident that the government is aware of the need for students to have access to an increased amount of mobile data (Students must get more mobile data, 2021).

Addressing poor Internet connectivity is a more complex issue, but government together with the various Internet service providers and the cellular phone companies should work toward innovative mechanisms to address the issue. The focus needs to be on those areas with poor network coverage and these tend to be rural and semi-rural areas. Addressing the above issues will not only facilitate better quality teaching and learning but also, ultimately, the use of social media for academic purposes.

- It is evident that social media are being used for academic purposes by students in higher education and this use is likely to increase. In the light of this, and as mentioned in Chapter four, there is room for training and awareness-raising regarding ICT literacy and the use of social media for academic purposes not only among students but also among members of the academic staff. This is an intervention which could be spearheaded by the UKZN library staff in particular as part of their user education services. If both students and staff are armed with the knowledge and skills relating to ICT literacy (including social media literacy) and the benefits associated with the use of social media for academic purposes, this will lead to more informed and effective use of social media for academic purposes.

5.8 Suggestions for further research

This study is the first of its kind conducted at UKZN and as such, there is plenty of scope for further research not only in this institution but in other contexts as well.

- Further studies could focus on other programmes in UKZN particularly those that fall outside of the social sciences in terms of the use of social media for academic

purposes. These studies could also take into consideration undergraduate students as well.

- The role and perspectives of academic staff in the use/non-use of social media for academic purposes needs to be considered as it can be argued that they would play an important part in students' use of such media.

- Finally, while this study identified what academic activities students use social media for, further investigation is needed on how and what social media are used for those activities. This would allow the use of social media to be optimised and what training, if any, might be needed.

5.9 Chapter summary

In this, the final chapter, the research aim, questions and theoretical framework were revisited. This was followed by a summary of the study by chapter. The main findings relating to the respondents' demographic characteristics and each of the research questions posed were then presented. A limitation of the study was provided followed by the conclusions drawn and recommendations made. The chapter ended with suggestions for further research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Ethical clearance

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL ™
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

15 December 2020

Mrs Idowu Febishola Kutu (218086202)
School Of Social Sciences
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Mrs Kutu,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00002226/2020
Project title: The Use of Social Media for Academic Purposes by Postgraduate Information Studies Students, UKZN, Pietermaritzburg Campus
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 23 November 2020 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL** on the following condition:

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 15 December 2021.
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,
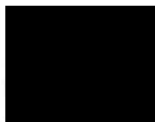
‑‑
Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

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Appendix 2: Gatekeeper's letter

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL ™
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

4 September 2020

Mrs Kutu Idowu Febishola (SN 218086202)
School of Social Sciences
College of Humanities
Pietermaritzburg Campus
UKZN
Email: 218086202@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Dear Mrs Febishola

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

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

"Use of social media for academic purposes by Postgraduate Information Studies students, Pietermaritzburg campus, UKZN"

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample as follows:
- With a request for responses on the website. The questionnaire must be placed on the notice system http://notices.ukzn.ac.za. A copy of this letter (Gatekeeper's approval) must be simultaneously sent to (govenderlog@ukzn.ac.za) or (ramkissoonb@ukzn.ac.za).

Please ensure that the following appears on your questionnaire/attached to your notice:
- Ethical clearance approval letter;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

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

Yours sincerely

DR KE CLELAND: REGISTRAR (ACTING)

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix 3: Informed consent document

Dear Participant,

My name is Kutu Idowu Febishola. I am a Masters (Information Studies) candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus Campus. The title of my research is: **"The Use of Social Media for Academic Purposes by Postgraduate Information Studies Students, Pietermaritzburg Campus, UKZN".** The aim of the study is to investigate the use of social media for educational purpose among postgraduate information studies students on the PMB Campus of the UKZN. I would be grateful if you could complete the questionnaire in order to share your experiences and observations on the subject matter.

Please note that:

- The information that you provide will be used for scholarly research only.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have a choice to participate, not to participate or stop participating in the research at any time. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- Your views in this study will be presented anonymously. Neither your name nor identity will be disclosed in any form in the study.
- Completing the questionnaire should take approximately 10 to 15 minutes.
- The questionnaire as well as other items associated with the study will be held in a password-protected file accessible only to myself and my supervisor. After a period of 5 years, in line with the rules of the university, they will be disposed of by deletion and, in the case of hardcopy, by shredding.
- The online survey questionnaire will be used in administering the questionnaire. If you agree to participate please sign the declaration attached to this statement.

I can be contacted at: School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus, Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg. Email: 218086202@stu.ukzn.ac.za Phone number: 0844334430.

My supervisor is Athol Leach who is located at the School of Social Sciences, Pietermaritzburg Campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Contact details: email atholleach@gmail.com Phone number: 0846667799.

The College of Humanities Research Ethics Officer is HSSREC Research Office, who is located at Humanities Research Ethics Office, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Contact details: email: Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Phone number 031 260 8350/4557/3587.

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

Appendix 4: Declaration form

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

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so
desire. I understand the intention of the research. I hereby agree to participate.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT   DATE

…………………………………………………………………………………………

Appendix 5: Questionnaire

The Use of Social Media for Academic Purposes by Postgraduate Information Studies Students, UKZN, Pietermaritzburg Campus

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please tick (√) where appropriate

1. Programme: Masters ( ) Honours ( ) PGDIS ( )

2. Sex: Male ( ) Female ( ) Prefer not to answer ( )

3. Age: 18-20 ( ) 21-25 ( ) 26-30 ( ) 31-35 ( ) 36-40 ( ) Above 40 ( )

SECTION B: AWARENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA AVAILABLE

4. Below is a list of some of the social media that are available. Please indicate which you are aware of.

Social media	Aware	Not aware
Facebook		
Instagram		
LinkedIn		
Zoom		
Twitter		
Skype		
YouTube		
WhatsApp		
Google+		
Blogs		
ResearchGate		
Pinterest		
MS Teams		
Other (Please specify)		

SECTION C: USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

5. Do you use social media for academic purpose?

Yes ( ) Please go to question 6.

No   ( ) Please answer question 5.1 below

5.1 Please give the reason/s why you do not use social media for academic purposes.

_____

_____

Please skip the following questions and go to question 11 (SECTION D)

6. Please indicate what social media you use for academic purposes.

Social Media	Use	Do not use
Facebook		
Instagram		

	Yes	No
LinkedIn		
Zoom		
Twitter		
Skype		
YouTube		
WhatsApp		
Google+		
Blogs		
ResearchGate		
Pinterest		
MS Teams		
Other (please specify)		

6.1 If you use more than one social media please specify which you tend to use the most.

_____

7. How do you access the social media that you use for academic purposes?

Access method	Yes	No
Smart phone		
Laptop		
Personal Computer (PC)		
Tablet		

7.1 If you ticked more than one access method please specify which one you tend to use the most.

_____

8. Where do you access social media for academic purposes?

Access point	Yes	No
Home		
Internet café		
University Library		
University LAN		
No specific place/"On the go"		
Other (Please specify)		

8.1 If you ticked more than one access point, please specify where you tend to access the most.

_____

9. What are the academic activities that you use social media for?

Academic activities	Always	Sometimes	Never
Learning			
Personal research/development			
Assignments			
Exam preparation			
Group discussions			
Continuous assessment preparation			
Personal growth			
Other (Please specify)			

10. How often do you use the social media for academic purposes?

Social media	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Less than once a month	Never
Facebook					
Instagram					
LinkedIn					
Zoom					
Twitter					
Skype					
YouTube					
WhatsApp					
Google+					
Blogs					
ResearchGate					
Pinterest					
MS Teams					
Other (Please indicate)					

SECTION D: CHALLENGES TO THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES.

11. Below are the possible constraints that could limit your use of social media for academic purposes. Please indicate how much of a constraint they are to your use of social media.

Challenges	Significant constraint	Constraint	Minor constraint	Not a constraint
High cost of subscription to internet data bundles				
High cost of social media enabled phones (smartphones)				
Poor internet connectivity				
Low ICT literacy				
Low awareness of the social media for academic purposes				
Apathy of friend to communicate academic issues				
Poor knowledge of social media application software and sites				
Other (Please specify)				

12. If you have any further comments relating to the use of social media for academic purposes, please specify them below.

_____

_____

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.