

**STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE
INFLUENCES OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON STUDENTS'
ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AT A TERTIARY
INSTITUTION: A CASE STUDY ON THE USE OF
FACEBOOK AND TWITTER AT RHODES
UNIVERSITY**

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by

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STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE INFLUENCES OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AT A TERTIARY INSTITUTION: A CASE STUDY ON THE USE OF FACEBOOK AND TWITTER AT RHODES UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The use of social media has become an integral part of student's academic lives and has had an impact on students' academic engagement in tertiary institutions. Subsequently, researchers have shown an interest in investigating the impact of social media on students' academic engagement. Despite the fact that researcher have shown interest, there still remains a limited number of studies that have discussed the effects of social media on students' academic engagement, particularly within a South African context. Also, studies that have been carried have revealed limited and mixed findings. This study then aims to further investigate whether the exposure of students to social media has an effect on their academic engagement and how tertiary institutions together with students can use social media to improve students' academic engagement. A qualitative research method using an interpretive (inductive) approach is carried out to find out students' perceptions towards the use of social media and its influence on students' academic engagement. The study then reveals recommendations from students' perceptions on the effective ways of using social media to benefit students' academic engagement in tertiary institutions.

KEYWORDS: Social Media; Social Network Sites; Student Academic Engagement.

Declaration

I declare that the Dissertation/Thesis entitled, Students' Perceptions Towards the Influences of Social Media On Students' Academic Engagement at A Tertiary Institution: A Case Study On the Use of Facebook and Twitter at Rhodes University, which I hereby submit for the degree, Master of Commerce at Rhodes University, is my own work. I also declare that this thesis/dissertation has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Harry Moongela

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Chapter 1

Introduction and project overview

1.1 Research Context

Social media has become a growing phenomenon over the past few years (Davis III, et al., 2012; Mbodila, Ndebele and Muhanji, 2014). Recent research on social media shows that there are many social media platforms (Davis III, et al., 2012), not to mention the number of social network sites available. Social media websites have caught the attention of various academics in different academic fields, leading to the study of this phenomenon and its' applications in various academic fields (Junco, Heiberger and Loken, 2011; Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014). Chen and Bryer (2012) highlight Information Systems (IS) as one of the main fields where social media, as a research topic, has been gaining popularity and has infiltrated into the educational arena. In addition, thereto, social media interaction and engagement have become prominent among tertiary students who have made social media technology a major part of their everyday lives (Rutherford, 2010; Bynum, 2011; Davis III, et al., 2012). According to Connolly (2011), research shows that the majority of tertiary students visit a social network site (SNS) every day. Furthermore, academic institutions are now increasingly using social networking sites to connect with students and deliver instructional content (Paul, Baker and Cochran, 2012). As a result there has been increasing interest by researchers to determine the impact of social media on students' academic engagement in tertiary institutions (Junco, Heiberger and Loken, 2011; Power, 2012; Mbodila, Ndebele and Muhanji, 2014); thus making it worthy of careful examination and further investigation. For the purpose of this study, social media is defined as a group of internet-based applications or sites that allow people to create, share or exchange information and interact with other members (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Obee, 2012).

The use of social media in tertiary institutions has been discussed at length regarding its impact on students' academic performance, academic engagement and pedagogic experience (Junco, Elavsky and Heiberger, 2013; Fagioli, Rios-Aguilar and Deil-Amen, 2014; Junco, 2015). Formal definitions may be needed in order to clarify the ambiguity surrounding the following aspects regarding social media: academic performance refers to the apparent demonstration of understanding, concepts, skills, ideas and knowledge of a person (Tuckman, 1975); academic engagement refers to the time and energy or effort that students devote to educational activities (Kuh, 2009) while pedagogy refers to the methods or practises of teaching and learning (Glowatz and Brien 2014). This study will focus on how the use of social media impacts on students' academic engagement from students' perceptions and experiences; and will provide propositions for embracing the use of social media for pedagogical purposes in tertiary institutions. This study will not be looking into measuring students' academic performance which would involve comparing students' GPA (Grade Average Point) scores and time dedicated to social media usage (Paul, Baker and Cochran, 2012; Alwagait, Shahzad and Alim, 2014). One of the reasons is that there exists more than sufficient literature discussing the impact of social media on students' academic performance

which flags redundancy in terms of needlessly repeating previously conducted studies (Rouis, Limayem and Salehi-Sangari, 2011; Asemah, Okpanachi and Edegoh, 2013; Junco, 2015). Furthermore, the same previously conducted studies have yielded ambivalent or unreliable findings as researchers are unsure whether the measuring methods used to evaluate the use of social media and grades were appropriate to disclose valid conclusions (Power, 2012; Alwagait, Shahzad and Alim, 2014; Junco 2015). Researchers point out the possibility of studies being limited due to their sampling designs and that the measuring of social media usage against time or grades in different ways, such as through self-report, may have affected the reliability of the results (Kirschner and Karpinski, 2010; Power, 2012; Junco, 2012; cited in Junco, 2015). Additionally, past literature states that an increase in students' academic engagement as a result of using social media, inevitably enhances students' academic performance (Rutherford, 2010; Martínez Alemán, Rowan-Kenyon and Savitz-Romer, 2012; Çolak, 2014). This highlights the importance and the need to look at students' academic engagement and validates the preference of focusing on academic engagement over performance for this study.

Despite the fact that interest in the analyses of social media usage at tertiary level appears to be evident, Fagioli, Rios-Aguilar and Deil-Amen (2014) state that there is not a significant number of studies that have discussed the effects of using social media in tertiary institutions with regard to students' academic engagement. Madge, et al., (2009) also point out that there is still a lack of empirical studies exploring how online social networks could be used in tertiary education and acknowledge the shortage of research emphasizing the impact of SNS on students' academic engagement. This is surprising considering that researchers have found a correlation between students' academic engagement and the use of social media (Junco, 2012; Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014). This finding has led to compelling enquiries that aim to establish whether the exposure of students to social media has an effect on their academic engagement (Badge, Saunders and Cann, 2012; Junco, Elavsky and Heiberger, 2013; Mbodila, Ndebele and Muhanji, 2014). Furthermore, there is a growing interest in the approach that tertiary institutions, together with students, can adopt to incorporate the use of social media in academia (Bosch, 2009; Bynum, 2011). In the light of this context, this study focuses on investigating how social media affects students' academic engagement in a South African context and how it can be used to improve students' academic engagement.

1.2 Research Background

According to Connolly (2011), social media is here to stay and it is vital for educators and students to have purposeful discussions about social media in educational settings. It makes sense that scholars have been interested in investigating the implications of the use of social media in Universities (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). As a consequence, some frameworks have been developed to help explore students' engagement with social media in tertiary institutions (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014; Martínez Alemán, Rowan-Kenyon and Savitz-Romer, 2012). For example, Alhazmi and Rahman (2014) proposed a framework that could be used as a useful tool for tertiary institutions, educators and IS researchers for further studies regarding the use of social media in academia. The motivation for the study was to identify the factors that may encourage students to dedicate more time and energy for academic work on SNSs.

Martínez Alemán, Rowan-Kenyon and Savitz-Romer (2012) also suggested a conceptual framework that involves the use of social networking technology to promote academic success and critical engagement among tertiary students. The framework offered valuable insight on how university scholars of higher education and administrators might consider the role of social media to promote student engagement. Other studies that have documented the use of social media in educational settings include Fagioli, Rios-Aguilar and Deil-Amen's (2014) research on the use of social media and its relationship to academic success in higher education. The purpose of the study was to carefully examine the affiliation between the use of social media and academic outcomes; results show that there is indeed a relationship. Madge, et al., (2009) also probed on how social media can be used by university support services and academic departments to enhance academic integration of students. The focus of the study was to determine how social media influences the students' experience; particularly how it influences students' social and academic integration at tertiary level. Evidently, scholarship concerning the use of social media in tertiary institutions is growing (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Junco, 2012; Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014) and therefore it has become a relevant research area of study.

Students' use of social media in universities has spurred discussion among scholars from different universities (Paul, Baker and Cochran, 2012; Junco, 2012). A previous study from the Memorial University of Newfoundland in Canada, reviewed the relationship and the influence that online social networking sites has on student's academic engagement and achievement (Power, 2012). The findings proved to be inconclusive and therefore suggested that any aspect of social media which engages students, should be fully explored. A study carried out at universities in America examined the causal link between educationally relevant social media use and student engagement (Junco, Heiberget & Loken, 2011). The study also looked at the relation between the use of social media and its impact on students' academic performance. Results inferred that social media has an effect on students' academic success. Elsewhere, a paper from the City University of Science and Information Technology (CUSIT) in Pakistan, explored the impact of social networking websites on students (Khan, 2012). The purpose of the study was to determine the impact of using social networking websites on student academic life and learning experience. In the UK, Wright, et al., (2013) investigated how students use and respond to social networking sites for academic purposes. The study found that there were substantial variations between students' use of social media and the participants who possessed "Visitor" and "Resident" characteristics. Judging from the body of literature, there seems to be an ample number of studies discussing the use of social media in tertiary institutions conducted from various continents, namely North America, Asia and Europe.

In Africa, social networking sites are becoming more widely spread than ever before (Folorunso, et al., 2009). However, there seem to be a less significant number of studies that look at the impact of social media in academic institutions carried out in Africa. One of the few studies conducted in Africa includes an analysis by Asemah, Okpanachi and Edegoh (2013) who examined the influence of social media on the academic performance of students at a Nigerian University. The reason behind the study was to determine whether students' interaction with social media has an effect on their academic performance. Another research study carried out in Nigeria by Eke, Omekwu and Odoh (2012), investigated the use of social

networking sites among university students. The objective of the study was to determine the benefits and dangers of using social networking sites among students at tertiary level. Findings from the study recommended that university authorities should enlighten students on both the positive and the negative aspects of social networking sites.

A recent survey carried out by the statistics portal ranks South Africa (SA) as the top country with the highest average daily usage (3.2 hours per day) of social media in Africa (Statista, 2014). Additionally, a recent survey on the tech habits of SA's students revealed that the majority of the students use Facebook and Twitter in South African tertiary education institutions (Techcentral, 2015). As a result, academics in South Africa have publicised their interest in researching the use of social media in academia (Bosch, 2009; Rambe, 2011). A study carried out at one South African university investigated the impact of the use of social media on student learning (Mbodila, Ndebele and Muhanji, 2014). The aim of the research was to measure the level of engagement and collaborations between students and academic staff while using social media in a tertiary institution. Results revealed that the use of social media significantly increased the impact on student's collaboration and engagement. Another scholarship researched at a South African university by Ivala and Gachago (2012), explored the use of social media to enhance students' levels of engagement in learning. Results show that social media can be utilised in higher education to promote student interaction and greater engagement with learning materials. Despite the fact that there is a reasonable number of literature on the impact of social media on students' academic engagement, Chen and Bryer (2012) recommend that much more scholarly research needs to be conducted. Mbodila, Ndebele and Muhanji (2014) echoed the same sentiments, suggesting that studies researching the impact of various social media on student learning should be carried out. Consequently, this study plans on exploring the influence that social media has on students' academic engagement at a South African University.

1.3 Problem Statement

Social media sites have been gaining popularity among university students who are found to use social media at higher rates than the general population (Junco, 2012; Martínez, 2014). The reason is that students are more likely to have access to digital devices and the internet (Martínez, 2014). Students consequently spend a significant amount of time on social media which may inevitably have an effect on their academic engagement and performance (Al-Rahmi and Othman, 2013; Hottell, Martinez-Aleman and Rowan-Kenyon, 2014). Research that has directly explored the use of social media and its impact on students in tertiary institutions has revealed limited and mixed findings (Roblyer, et al., 2010; Davis III, et al., 2012), thus leaving a window of opportunity to further investigate the impact that social media has on students' academic engagement. In short, literature suggests that social media sites are increasingly being used in tertiary institutions but their effect on students' academic engagement is not clearly understood as it has yielded inconclusive results. Therefore, by investigating this, this study could come up with more effective ways of using social media in tertiary institutions in a way that can improve students' academic engagement.

Research suggests that social media is quite prominent at tertiary level and has become an integral part of student life, but, even so, there are few research papers that have documented

the effects of using social media in tertiary institutions, (Davis III, et al., 2012; Fagioli, Rios-Aguilar and Deil-Amen, 2014). This can be credited to the fact that social media is a relatively new research area that needs to be explored and addressed (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Even though existing literature has considered the use of social media in academia at South African Universities (Rambe, 2011; Mbodila, Ndebele and Muhandji, 2014), few studies have looked at the impact that social media has on students' academic engagement and have limited their research by focusing only on Facebook as a social media tool (Ivala, Gachago, 2012; Mbodila, Ndebele and Muhandji, 2014). This supports the notion that there are limited informative sources that consider the impact that social media has on students in tertiary institutions (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014), particularly within the South African context (Bosch, 2009; Rambe, 2011) and further shows that there is a gap in terms of literature that discusses social media's impact on students' academic engagement and this study will assist in filling that gap.

Furthermore, the author has noted that literature that has documented the use of social media at tertiary level in South Africa has mainly targeted green and blue cluster tertiary institutions. Green cluster tertiary institutions refer to former research-intensive institutions whose performances regarding research output, success rates, postgraduates and staff qualifications have declined after merging with 'historically disadvantaged' tertiary institutions, while blue cluster tertiary institutions refer to institutions with low levels of performance regarding research outputs, income, postgraduate success and qualified staff (MacGregor, 2010; Summit and Education, 2010; Van Der Schyff and Krauss, 2014). Taking the aforementioned observation into consideration, the author plans on focusing on Rhodes University as one of the red cluster tertiary institutions. According to a CHET report, red cluster tertiary institutions are defined as research-intensive universities that produce a great number of postgraduates and future academics; these institutions also have high student success and graduation rates, research outputs, high proportions of academic staff with PhDs, high income and low staff-student ratios (MacGregor, 2010; Summit and Education, 2010; Van Der Schyff and Krauss, 2014). Carrying out this research at Rhodes University, will allow the data collected from this study to potentially advise other red cluster tertiary institutions in South Africa, on how they can go about using social media to enhance students' academic engagement.

The focus on Rhodes University can be justified by the fact that Rhodes accommodates students from diverse social, economic and national backgrounds (Badat, 2013), which guarantees distinctive perspectives from students, in contrast with findings from other South African Universities. In addition, Rhodes University stands out as a well-managed research intensive university (Centre for Higher Education Transformation, 2010; Van Der Schyff and Krauss, 2014; cited in Krauss, 2015) in the Eastern Cape Province; one of the poorest provinces in South Africa (Makiwane and Chimere-Dan, 2010). It is also worth mentioning that Rhodes University has high-speed wired and wireless network infrastructure and connection to the internet (Ru.ac.za, 2015). Additionally, all Rhodes students are provided with access to computing facilities, including network and internet access (Remenyi, 2008), signaling that students' access to the internet is not an issue. Therefore, we can safely assume

that students are likely to have experience in using online social media sites; making them ideal subjects for the case study at hand.

The above-mentioned validations, plus Rhodes University's element of diversity, can be used to attest that Rhodes is an institution that promises to offer valuable information regarding the use of social media at tertiary level in South Africa. Findings from this investigation could also be compared to similar studies that may be replicated in blue and green cluster tertiary institutions in the Eastern Cape Province (South Africa) who may not have the same facilities and challenges as Rhodes University.

1.4 Goals of the Research

The final goal of this study is to identify the effective ways of using (embracing, integrating and employing) social media to benefit students' academic engagement in tertiary institutions. Data collected from this study will be used to provide recommendations that can be used to assist tertiary institutions in identifying ways in which social media can be used to improve students' academic engagement. Furthermore, this study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge of research that investigates the impact of social media on students' academic engagement at tertiary level in South Africa, and to simultaneously act as an informative tool for further in-depth research that may be carried out in the near future. In an attempt to separate the study at hand from the rest, the study will look at the use of Facebook and Twitter since they have been identified as the two most prominent and preferred social media interfaces used in higher education institutions (Davis III, et al., 2012), particularly in South Africa (Techcentral, 2015).

1.5 Objectives of the study

The main objective is to develop recommendations that suggest how social media could be used to enhance students' academic engagement in tertiary institutions, based on students' perceptions.

The sub objectives that will help inform the main research objectives are:

- To discover how students, make use of social media at Rhodes University.

To discover the perceptions of students on how the use of social media influences students' academic engagement at Rhodes University.
- To propose effective ways of embracing the use of social media at Rhodes University to benefit students' academic engagement from a students' perspective. Effective ways in this case refer to ways that promote or enhance students' academic engagement. Academic engagement in this case would be the effort that students devote to their academic work.

1.6 Research Questions

Main research question: *How could social media be used effectively to enhance students' academic engagement in tertiary institutions?*

The sub questions which will help inform and answer the main research question are:

- **How do students make use of social media at Rhodes University?** *The purpose of this question is to determine and to obtain a clear understanding on how students employ social media at tertiary level. Data gathered will allow the researcher to gain a better understanding of the empirical situation on the ground of how students make of use social media at a South African University and to have a basis from which further assessment can be done.*
- **How does the use of social media influence students' academic engagement at Rhodes University, from a students' perspective?** *The purpose of this question is to investigate the perspectives of students on how the use of social media affects students' academic engagement at tertiary level. Data gathered will assist the researcher in understanding the impact of social media on students' academic engagement at a South African University.*
- **What are the effective ways of using social media to benefit students' academic engagement at Rhodes University, from a student's perspective?** *The purpose of this question is to identify students' perceptions on the ways in which social media can be effectively used to benefit students' academic engagement at tertiary level. The researcher will be able to provide recommendations that students, lecturers, faculties and institutions can consider to embrace the use of social media to benefit students' academic engagement.*

1.7 Definitions of Key Terms

Academic Achievement - refers to a specified level of attainable competence or performance designed by tests, assignments and examinations scores (Shamashuddin, 2007).

Academic Performance – refers to the apparent demonstration of understanding, concepts, skills, ideas and knowledge of a person (Tuckman, 1975).

Social Media - refers to a group of internet-based applications or sites that allow people to create, share or exchange information and interact with other members (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Obee, 2012).

Social Network Sites (SNS) – are defined as internet services that allow people to create public or semi-public profiles, create a list of other users with whom they wish to be in contact with, and view the connections made by others (Boyd and Ellison, 2007).

Student Engagement - is defined as the time and energy or effort that students devote to educational activities (Kuh, 2009).

1.8 Research Methodology

In order to obtain diverse information on the effects of social media on university students and to understand students' belief systems, perspectives and experiences, Alhazmi and Rahman (2014) suggest that a qualitative research methodology would be ideal to use. Literature presents us with various explanations for qualitative research. According to Fitzpatrick & Boulton (1996), qualitative research is a more informal subjective and uses an inductive approach to problem solving. Key (1997) states that qualitative research provides information about relationships, comparisons and predictions, and also uncovers the reasons for behaviors, attitudes and motivations. Bricki and Green (2007) further assert that qualitative research aims to understand some aspect of social life and its methods, which generates words as data to be analyzed and verified to provide an in-depth description. Alhazmi and Rahman (2014) suggest that a qualitative approach seems necessary in this case, in order to interpret data and to discover meaningful patterns describing the students' engagement with social media in an academic setting. Therefore, this study aims to disclose Rhodes University students' views on the impact that social media might have on academic engagement, which will be derived from the data collected.

Using qualitative research, the study will take an interpretative research approach which involves understanding the phenomenon subjectively and encourages researchers to be more interpretive and inductive (Johari, 2006). According to Klein and Myers (1999), interpretivists claim that the relationships between people, organizations, and technology are constantly changing. Accordingly, the relationship between students' usage of social media and their academic engagement may change over a period of time and thus interpretivism may be the appropriate research method to employ. This is applicable to the study at hand as it seeks to understand the relationship and the correlation that exists between students' usage of social media and their academic engagement at tertiary level from students' perspectives.

1.9 Research Design

There are four case study designs that Yin (2009) describes: holistic (single unit of analysis) single case designs, embedded (multiple unit of analysis) single case designs, holistic multiple-case designs, and embedded multiple-case designs. This study aims to use a single case study design which enables the researcher to investigate important topics not easily covered by other methods and to devote careful attention to the case being studied (Yin, 2004). The important topic to be investigated in this case is the impact that social media has on students' academic engagement at Rhodes University.

According to Yin (2004), the case study method is best applied when research addresses explanatory questions and aims to produce a first-hand understanding of people and events; thus it makes sense to use explanatory research. Explanatory research aims to explain the nature of certain relationships (Bryman, 2005). Therefore, the research at hand will take an

explanatory approach as a method to explain the behavior and to understand the relationship that exists between students' usage of social media and their academic engagement at a tertiary institution. Once the researcher has developed a better understanding of the empirical situation at hand, the next step is to recommend better ways of using social media to improve students' academic engagement in academia and to hopefully develop propositions by using data collected from participants.

1.10 Data Sources and Collection Techniques

The qualitative approach plans on answering, exploring and understanding the research questions by collecting information through observations, interviews or focus groups (Bricki and Green, 2007). Walsham (1995) argues that interviews are the primary data source of evidence for case studies, thus semi-structured interviews will be used as a research instrument and a source of relevant data. Semi-structured interviews are mainly used in explanatory research to understand the relationships between variables (Bryman, 2005); are conducted using a topic guide and are made up of open-ended questions defining the area to be explored (Bricki and Green, 2007). Furthermore, interviews are mostly used for interpretive studies as a key way of accessing the interpretations of informants in the field (Walsham, 2006) and revealing the participants' perspectives (Agee, 2009), views and aspirations (Walsham, 1995).

The interview questions will be directed towards the participants' perceptions regarding the impact that social media usage has on students' academic engagement. Walsham (2006) further suggests that interviews should be supplemented by other forms of field data in an interpretive study and adds that surveys can be a useful complement to other data sources. Therefore, the study will use questionnaire-based surveys to complement the interviews. The study intends to use interviews as a collection technique to compare and verify findings from questionnaires. At the same time, literature review gathered from published research articles will provide the secondary source of data which will be used to compare with the findings from this research study (Khan, 2012).

Firstly, an online questionnaire/survey will be sent out to the respondents to get an overarching view of students' perceptions on the use of social media and its impact on students' academic engagement. Secondly, the data collected and results will be used to inform and help provide questions and a relevant interview guide for interviews which will collect primary data. Both the online questionnaire/survey and the semi structure in-depth interviews will be piloted to ensure that the questions are capable of attaining relevant information.

1.11 Population and Sampling Techniques

Bricki and Green (2007) suggest an option of recruiting participants by asking for volunteers from the population of interest. This study focuses on Rhodes University students as our population of interest from which participants will be chosen from on a voluntary basis.

Adapting from Alhazmi and Rahman's (2014) study on student engagement in SNSs, participants for interviews will be chosen based on specific conditions in order to ensure that they have a decent level of interaction and experience with social media (Facebook or Twitter). A condition to consider include looking at the participant's period of registration on social media. Alhazmi and Rahman (2014) suggest that a participant should preferably have experience of a period of at least two years. Furthermore, the participant should have some experience in the use of social media with peers or lecturers and should be at least a full-time student. As stated earlier, the author has chosen Facebook and Twitter as the main social media tools, since they are currently the two most prominent interfaces used through computer and mobile devices (Davis III. et al., 2012).

Samples in qualitative research are usually purposive, whereby participants are chosen on the basis of who is likely to provide useful data needed (Bricki and Green, 2007). To ensure that the sample is credible and that it covers the main groups that the study is interested in, Bricki and Green (2007) suggest using maximum variation sampling as a sampling method. This type of sampling involves picking out key demographic variables that are likely to have an impact on participants' view on the subject (Coyne, 1997; Bricki and Green, 2007). Bricki and Green (2007); and Davis III, et al. (2012), recommend (although not mandatory) that we ensure, when choosing the respondents, that there is a variety in gender (male/female), faculty/departments and study level (undergraduate/postgraduate). This is to ensure that the sample group is as diverse as possible and to augment the opportunity of sharing good practices and experiences (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014).

Invitations will be sent out to potential participants through Facebook and Twitter messages (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014). It is important to keep in mind that sample sizes are usually small in qualitative work (Bricki and Green, 2007), thus the researcher will choose at least ten key informants for interviews. At least sixty participants for online questionnaires will be needed, hopefully ensuring that all faculties (Commerce, Education, Humanities, Law, Pharmacy, Science) are represented and that the sample is diverse in terms of age, gender, study level, etc.). Out of the sixty-six participants obtained through questionnaire-based surveys, the researcher will conduct ten interviews with students from various faculties.

1.12 Reliability and Validity

Yin (1994) claims that the goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study and this is achieved by demonstrating that the operations of a study (i.e. data collection procedures) can be repeated and still yield the same results (Yin, 1994). To ensure data reliability and credibility, the researcher will need to keep records of all the interviews, document the process of analysis in detail (Bricki and Green, 2007) and document the procedures followed (Yin, 1994). The researcher may need to provide detailed proof in the form of written notes to provide evidence of every participant that took part in the data collection.

To test for validity, the researcher must identify the correct operational measures and the key themes of the concept being studied (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) further adds that a study is considered valid if multiple studies share common or agree on the same key concepts across various researches conducted. This will be realised by comparing the key concepts found in this study with key concepts identified in previous literature, similar to the study at hand. The increase in the validity of the findings from the study is achieved through triangulation, which involves purposely looking for evidence from a wide range of sources (interviews and questionnaires) and comparing findings to those other different sources (Bricki and Green, 2007). In this case, the study will use semi-structured interviews as a primary source, questionnaire-based surveys as a secondary source and previous literature as a tertiary source of relevant data in an attempt to maximize triangulation. Any study that is based on several different sources of information is likely to yield much more convincing and accurate findings or conclusions (Yin, 2013).

1.13 Ethical Considerations

Throughout conducting research, researchers are obligated and have a responsibility to consider ethical principles (Bricki and Green, 2007). Beauchamp and Jim Childress (1983) suggest four principles to follow:

- Autonomy; respect the rights of the individual
- Beneficence; doing good
- Non-maleficence; not doing harm
- Justice; particularly equity

Yin (2009); Bricki and Green (2007) both acknowledge that before actually collecting the data, the researcher will need a formal ethical review (ethical clearance) for the intended project. In this case, ethical clearance approval will be attained from Rhodes ethical clearance committee. Alhazmi and Rahman (2014) recommend that the researcher should create an interview guide with interview questions, and send it in advance to the participants. This is to prepare participants on what they should expect and to know what they will be getting themselves into beforehand. Walsham (2006) echoes the same sentiment that while interviewing, it is crucial to try to reassure the interviewee at the start about the purpose of the study and about confidentiality.

Agee (2009) suggests that the researcher should also consider how the research questions will affect participants' lives and how the questions will position the researcher in relation to participants. Other ethical issues that might arise when carrying out this research may include students feeling that they are being pressured to provide information that they may consider confidential (Bricki and Green, 2007; Yin, 2009). Walsham (2006) further adds that the issues of anonymity and confidentiality are bound to come up and that participants may prefer to be anonymous and not to expose their identity. Yin (2009) also urges the researcher to protect the participants from any harm, including avoiding the use of any deception. Another ethical issue to keep in mind is consent; it is important to obtain consent from

participants and to inform them fully on what participation entails and to assure them that not taking part will have no negative consequences (Bricki and Green, 2007; Yin, 2009).

1.14 Dissertation Structure

The author provides the structure of the remainder of the dissertation:

- **Chapter Two**
The author provides a review of literature that is relevant to the topic of interest. In this particular chapter, the author discusses definitions for both social media and student engagement. Furthermore, the author presents different types of social media platforms and then presents which types of social media platforms this study will be focusing on.
- **Chapter Three**
The author discusses the first research question while referring to existing literature. The author basically provides a review of literature on how students from all over the world use social media in higher education institutions.
- **Chapter Four**
The author discusses the second research question in accordance with relevant studies that have been previously conducted. The author basically provides a review of literature on the perspectives of students on how the use of social media impacts students' academic engagement at tertiary level.
- **Chapter Five**
The author discusses the third research question in relation with previously conducted studies. The author basically provides a review of literature on the ways in which social media can be used effectively to benefit students' academic engagement in tertiary institutions.
- **Chapter Six**
The author discusses the research method. The author addresses the research approach, the research design to be implemented, the methodology to be applied, ethical procedures to be considered and the limitations of the study.
- **Chapter Seven**
The author discusses the findings, analysis and interpretation of data from the study. The author addresses the data collection tools and how they were used to help answer the research questions.
- **Chapter Eight**
The author provides a summary of the research. The author discusses how the study answered the research questions, contributions of the study, recommendations from the study and the limitations of the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Social Media and Student Engagement Definitions

2.1 Social Media

2.1.1 Introduction

The overall aim and objective of this section is to define the term social media from various sources of literature. The author later selects an appropriate definition that suits the context of this study. Furthermore, the author presents different types of social media platforms and later presents which types of social media platforms this study will be focusing on, as well as their distinctive names. Moreover, the author clearly defines the two social media platforms that this study has chosen to focus on and provides detailed descriptions of the differences between the respective social media platforms. Lastly, the author provides justifications as to why this study has chosen to focus on the two distinctive social media sites. The outcome of researching through literature reveals that there are varied definitions of social media that are quite similar. Furthermore, literature also discloses that there are different types of social media platforms and clearly explains which types of social media platforms the author has chosen.

2.1.2 Social Media Definitions

Social media is a new field and the concept has grown abruptly over the few years since its inception, with various platforms and definitions from different authors. Generally, social media can be defined as media used to enable social interaction and networking (Davis III, et al., 2012). A more detailed definition describes social media as a group of applications that utilises the internet and was built on the idea and technology of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of content generated by users (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; cited in Mbodila, Ndebele and Muhanji, 2014). Ezeah, Asogwa and Obiorah (2013) define social media as modern interactive communication channels through which users connect to one another and share information of common interest, experiences, ideas, pictures and messages. All the above definitions are correct to some extent, but for the purpose and context of this study, social media is comprehensively defined as a group of internet-based and mobile applications or sites that allows users to create, engage and share new user-generated or existing content on a digital platform through multi-way communication (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Obee, 2012; Davis III, et al., 2012).

2.1.3 Social Media Platforms

It is important to note that there are various types of platforms within social media, ranging from social networking sites e.g. Facebook; bookmarking sites e.g. del.icio; micro blogging sites e.g. Twitter; media sharing sites e.g. YouTube; social news sites e.g. Reddit, and blogs and forums e.g. Wordpress (Alwagait, Shahzad and Alim, 2014). It is also worth stating that

this study will only be focusing on the use of a social networking site and a micro blogging site, namely Facebook and Twitter respectively, and it is essential to know the difference in order to clear obscurities related to these two platforms. Social networking sites (SNS) are described as web-based services in which users set up public or semi-public personal profiles in order to connect with friends or other users, usually those who have similar interests or backgrounds (Boyd and Ellison, 2008, p. 211; cited in Kirschner and Karpinskim, 2010; Alwagait, Shahzad and Alim, 2014).

Micro blogging sites, on the other hand, are defined as services which combine SNS and blogging but, in this case, the posts and messages exchanged are limited in terms of size; 140-character updates to be exact (Junco, Heiberger and Loken, 2011; Junco, Elavsky and Heiberger, 2013; Alwagait, Shahzad and Alim, 2014). Both Facebook and Twitter have been identified as the two most prominent and preferred social media interfaces used by students in higher education institutions through computer and mobile devices (Bynum, 2011; Davis III, et al., 2012), particularly in South Africa (Techcentral.co.za, 2015). This justifies the focus on the two social media platforms and it also serves as an attempt to separate the current study from the rest, as most of the research conducted on social media has been limited to Facebook (Junco 2012; Davis III, et al., 2012).

2.1.4 Conclusion

In general, there are various definitions that describe social media, but, for the purpose of this study, the author chose only the one that appropriately intertwines with this study. Taking literature into consideration, all social media definitions can be simplified to describe social media as a social space that allows users to communicate and interact with each other. The author also presents different types of social media platforms and clearly defines and distinguishes them with information extracted from literature. In conclusion, the author later provides justifications for choosing certain social media platforms with appropriate backing from literature.

2.2 Student Engagement

2.2.1 Introduction

In this section, the author defines the term student engagement. The author presents a brief history of work done on student engagement and reveals the names of scholars that have carried out the research. The author also describes the different and varied facets that student engagement has and the entities involved therein. The author later singles out an appropriate definition of student engagement that suits the context of this study. Furthermore, the author later discusses what literature has to say about the relationship between student engagement and academic achievement and why it is important to do research on student engagement and academic achievement. Literature explored a number of explanations that define the term student engagement since scholars have begun researching on the topic. Literature also reveals that student engagement can be divided into two facets to have a better understanding of what aspect of student engagement a researcher may select as focus point.

2.2.2 Student Engagement Definitions

The term student engagement, led by Prof George Kuh since 1998, has emerged as a field in the higher education knowledge domain with varied definitions (Kuh, 2009) and has shown to be a difficult concept to describe with clarity (Wise, Skues and Williams, 2011; Mbodila, Ndebele and Muhanji, 2014). According to Ivala et al. (2013), student engagement is the extent to which students devote their energy to educationally related activities. Kuh (2009) and Strydom and Mentz (2010) further explain that student engagement consists of two main components. The first one is the amount of time and effort students devote to academic activities and other activities that lead to the practices and outcomes that result in students' academic achievement. The second one is the manner in which institutions assign and organise resources, learning opportunities and services effectively to encourage students to participate in and to benefit from such activities. For the purpose of this study, the author will use Kuh's (2009) definition that describes student engagement as the time and energy or effort that students devote to educationally purposive activities. In the context of this study, these activities take into account interacting and collaborating with faculties, departments and peers; contributing to assigned tasks and learning activities; providing feedback and sharing resources and experience (Kuh, 2001; Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014).

Literature states that much of Kuh's scholarly is in line with and may have been adapted from Astin's (1984) theory on student involvement and development. The latter similarly describes student engagement as the amount of physical and psychological energy that students invest in educational activities and experience (Junco, 2011; 2012; Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014). Smith, Haden and Mann (2012) also add that student engagement includes the degree to which students feel connected and involved in their studies as well as to their academic department. Wise, Skues and Williams (2011) adapted a varied description of student engagement from Nystrand and Gamoran (1992) by asserting that student engagement involves how dedicated the students are to both their academic (learning activities) and social (extracurricular activities) engagement, as well as their commitment and attitude towards their institutions. This supports the notion made by Kuh (2009) that engagement is made up of two magnitudes or aspects, namely social engagement and academic engagement (Coates, 2007; Krause & Coates, 2008; cited in Wise, Skues and Williams, 2011; Junco, 2011; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; cited in Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014). It becomes clear that student engagement comprises of varied definitions that may be difficult to reduce to a single definition.

2.2.3 Student Engagement and Academic Achievement Correlation

Many researches that have been carried out on student engagement have concluded that student engagement is positively related and is critical to student success or academic achievement (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Kuh, 2009; Junco, Elavsky and Heiberger, 2013; Fagioli, Rios-Aguilar and Deil-amen, 2014). Additionally, Alhazmi and Rahman (2014) suggest that students' achievement and learning is directly proportional to the energy and time students dedicate to their educational activities. They further argue that the more the students engage in educational activities, the more they can improve their learning. Bulger et al. (2008) also reached the same conclusion, namely that there is a casual relationship between the level of student engagement and academic achievement. They further suggest that educators or instructors need to pursue ways to create the conditions that foster, establish

and maintain student engagement. Wise, Skues and Williams (2011) also add that student engagement is vital for student outcomes and retention (Parcell, 2013), and there seems to be sufficient and good evidence to prove that students who are more academically engaged with their studies, tend to be successful students. Power (2012) further asserts that one of the main objectives of the education system is to enhance students' academic engagement and achievement. It thus only seems logical to examine how academic engagement can be improved to benefit students. This highlights how important and vital student engagement is to academic achievement.

2.2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion: literature conducted on student engagement seems adequate to provide for a wide range of definitions. Literature reveals that student engagement can further be divided into different aspects and may be difficult to define as one facet. Moreover, the author looked at what literature says about the correlation between student engagement and academic achievement. The majority of the scholarship reveals that there is a positive correlation between the two; it seems that when student engagement is increased, academic achievement seems to follow suite.

Chapter 3

How students make use of social media.

3.1 Introduction

In this section the author will be addressing the first research question and examine what literature reveals about the manner in which students from all over the world use social media in higher education institutions. The author begins by giving a brief history of the use and the creation of the two social media platforms that this study will be focusing on. In addition, the author has divided the use of social media into four aspects, namely: academic aspect, social aspect, tertiary institutions' aspect and lecturers' aspect. Under the sub heading 'academic aspect', the author discusses how students use social media for academic purposes. Under the sub heading 'social aspect' the author discusses how students use social media for social purposes. Under the sub heading 'tertiary institutions' aspect' the author discusses how tertiary institutions make use of social media with relation to students and, lastly, the author discusses how lecturers make use of social media - again with relation to students under the sub heading 'lecturer's aspect'.

Literature explains to us what these two social media platforms were used for when they were first introduced and how Facebook and Twitter came to be. Literature also reveals to us that there are plenty and various uses of social media by students from an academic aspects' standpoint, from a social aspects' standpoint, from a tertiary institution and from a lecturer's aspects' standpoint, respectively.

3.2 Original use of Facebook and Twitter

The use of social media, focusing on social network and micro-blogging sites, namely Facebook and Twitter respectively specifically, has gradually increased, particularly among students in higher education institutions (HEI) who were found to use social media at a higher rate (Martínez-Alemán, 2014; Davis III, et al., 2012). Martínez-Alemán (2014) and Buzzetto-More (2012) identified students or "digital natives" (both undergraduates and graduates) as one of the main groups that use and are quite accustomed to social media. Technically students of this age are the first generation cohort to grow up with computers and have made technology a part of their social experience (Martínez-Alemán, 2014; Rutherford, 2010; Bynum, 2011; Davis III, et al., 2012). This crop of students considers engaging on social networks as an accepted cultural and behavioural standard (Martínez-Alemán, 2014). Students seem to make social media an important entity of their everyday lives and it may be a comfort zone for most of them. This leads us to the most imperative question, how do students make use of social media?

The use of Facebook (created by Mark Zuckerberg, in February 2004) started off with the purpose of initially allowing Harvard University students to look for, interact and keep in touch with students in other residence halls (Roblyer et al. 2010; Kirschner & Karpinski 2010; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Needless to say, Facebook, at the time, was intended to propel users' social and communicative skills (Ivala and Gachago, 2012; Singh and Laxmi, 2015). Commenting on fellow user's content, posting status updates, posting and tagging of

photos, watching videos, chatting, observing what others are doing (lurking) and sharing links or posts are just some of the activities students engage in when using Facebook (Junco, 2012; 2015). On the other hand, Twitter, as a social network based on a micro blogging platform (created in March 2006), was initially intended for users to post and read short messages from other users. In addition, celebrities have predominantly used Twitter as a self-promotional tool for fans and for the media to keep tabs on them (Singh and Laxmi, 2015). Abdulahi, Samadi and Gharleghi (2014) point out that social media generally enables social interaction, discussions and collaboration among users. It was only after some time that students began to engage in creative, expressive and informal learning, including sharing and sending course related information and encouraging discussions between lecturers and students (Roblyer et al. 2010; Ivala and Gachago, 2012; Power, 2012).

Presumably the main idea behind the creation of these two social networks, namely Facebook and Twitter, was primarily to foster and maintain social relationships between people, which may have later ventured into other avenues such as entertainment, education and learning, marketing and business networking as well as political engagement, to just mention a few thereof.

3.3 Academic Aspect

When considering scholarship of the past regarding the use of social media by students, there is evidence to suggest that social media has been and could continue to be used as a platform to build academic networks, collaboration and cooperation in higher education institutions (Rutherford, 2010; Chen and Bryer, 2012; Junco, 2015). There are a number of uses of social media for educational purposes that have emerged from literature. For example, Junco's (2015) paper on the educational use of Facebook discloses that Manca and Ranieri (2013) acknowledge that Facebook supports and promotes class discussions, assists students with participation in collaborative learning, allows students to develop their own material or content; shares academic resources, provides content to expose students to extra-curricular resources and supports self-managed learning. Buzzetto-More (2012) agrees by stating that students use social media to establish and fortify a suitable or appropriate learning atmosphere or community that helps to improve students' learning development and engagement. Tiryakioglu and Erzurum (2011) reveal how social media facilitates and maintains communication and class discussions between classmates; some students complete their educational activities through social network sites.

Students from Manca and Ranieri's (2016) study revealed that they used social media to communicate with other students, to build collaborative groups, and to download academic related material and schedule lectures and exams. Schmitt, Sims-Giddens and Booth's (2012) paper on social media use in education exposes how students use social media to develop their innovative thinking, social collaboration abilities and proposes a range of educational methods or opportunities. Rutherford (2010) and Wright, et al., (2013) explain that students use social media to select and share the educational material that is appropriate to and fits in with their learning style and interests. Material shared includes images and video content specifically utilized to supplement their learning (Rutherford, 2010; Wright, et al., 2013). Buzzelli, Bissell and Holdan (2014) describe how students use the aid of charts or imageries on social media as an assessment instrument to support students with their education.

Rutherford (2010) further asserts that collaboration among students through contributions and feedback from other students assist to foster an ideal and beneficial learning environment.

Martínez-Alemán (2014) and both Chen and Bryer (2012) identified social media as a learning tool which provides engaging networks between students and lecturers and encourages collaboration and sharing of knowledge among students on assignments or coursework. Tiryakioglu and Erzurum (2011) further affirm that social media usage by students includes the transfer of information, referencing of journals and books and working on group projects and course meetings outside the classroom environment. Students also multitask by using social networks sites together with their course material to study (Mehmood and Taswir, 2013). Bynum (2011) identifies social media as a comfortable environment for students to work and collaborate in groups. Tarantino and McDonough (2013) complement that social media enables students to link what they learn during courses with what they learn from peer interactions, usually outside the classroom, which in the long run supports their learning inside the classroom.

Bumgardner and Knetis (2011) with Singh and Laxmi (2015) also highlighted how students use social media as a platform to brainstorm new ideas and exchange information. Martínez Alemán, Rowan-Kenyon and Savitz-Romer (2012) further add that social media provides students with a space to carry out practices such as guiding, teaching and providing academic support. More importantly, social media allows students to connect outside the confines of the traditional classroom setting and has the potential to link up students with future prospects of job contacts (Chen and Bryer, 2012; Embi, Penedidikan and Hassan, 2012; Rashmi and Neetu, 2014). This can be used as testimony that social media is a great source for accessing and sharing educational materials that may have a positive effect on students' academic engagement.

Other academic activities that students were found to perform using social media, include the gathering of information from peers and sharing links of educational material and information, such as blogs and website articles (Martínez-Alemán, 2014; Ahn, 2011; Junco, 2012). Buzzetto-More's (2012) research on social networking in undergraduate education reveals that students used a Facebook page to share links to academic publications, audio-visual aids and upcoming events. In the same light, Embi, Penedidikan and Hassan, (2012) revealed how students use social media to interrelate with their peers and instructors about subjects discussed in class.

Kirschner and Karpinski's (2010) study discovered that a number of students revealed how they use social media to promote communication among their peers and as an interacting means to forge study groups. Junco's (2015) study further discloses that students have used Facebook as a replacement for learning management systems (LMS) and some have actually opted to create and use Facebook groups instead of the LMS. For example, Buzzetto-More's (2012) findings disclose that students preferred having coursework discussions and material posted on social media. as opposed to learning management systems. Buzzetto-More (2012) further surveyed on how students created a Facebook group and used it to engage in dialogues related to their academic course activities, including group assignments, projects and examinations.

Moreover, some students were found to use social networks as an e-learning tool due to its effectivity in time saving (Mehmood and Taswir, 2013). Tiryakioglu and Erzurum (2011)

explain that since social media is an easy to use and flexible platform, it is an ideal proxy of a learning management system. Kumar (2014) further revealed that students use social networks to work on their assignments, download and share educational videos, take part in quizzes and communicate with the lecturers. Martínez Alemán, Rowan-Kenyon and Savitz-Romer (2012) further added that social media provides students with a space to communicate with their friends (usually in group discussions) and faculties. Oye, Helou, and Rahim (2012) support the aforementioned statement by stating that, apart from students using social network sites to communicate with their peers on academic purposeful matters, students also use social network sites to communicate with the university authorities and faculties. The author can therefore infer that social media has the potential to be more effective and to take over from current learning management systems in the near future.

Ahn (2011) also describes social media as a way of connecting students to the wider community that may assist them in obtaining and practicing skills in a specific domain of knowledge. This is evident in findings from Akbari, Eghtesad and Simons' (2009) study on students' attitudes towards the use of social networks, who reported on the ways in which students used social media to improve their language education abilities and produce progressive linguistic results. Students obtained guidance and information linked to their subjects that they found helpful and beneficial to their academic work in the long run (Mehmood and Taswir, 2013). This suggest that students are more comfortable using social media for educational purposes as they are more used to it and have made it part of their everyday lives. If used successfully, it may have the potential to be beneficial to students' academic engagement.

3.4 Social Aspect

The use of social media for social purposes has been discussed throughout literature and has been the main reason why students engage in social media (Roblyer, et al., 2010). Generally, young people were found to use social network sites as a space for social communication; mainly to intermingle with others and develop social capital, interactions and intimate relationships (Hargittai, 2007; Embi, Pendidikan and Hassan, 2012; Wright, et al., 2014). Tiryakioglu and Erzurum (2011) affirm by stating that social network sites provide a perfect atmosphere to create and sustain social networks plus foster collaboration, relations and communication among entities. Students were found to use Facebook to search for their long lost friends, remain in contact with old school friends, check out and follow up on acquaintances they met socially, learn more about colleagues and people who reside near them, and, additionally, to arrange team meetings or get-together's (Hargittai, 2007; Schlenkrich and Sewry, 2012). Lim and Richardson's (2015) study reveals that the majority of students used social media for connecting with friends and career networking.

Junco (2015) states that new students arriving at university are usually inclined to build new networks of friends and social support. Bumgardner and Knetis (2011); and Tiryakioglu and Erzurum (2011) affirm and explain how students use social media to search for new friends, share and follow up on recent events, daily news, people or groups. Ha and Hu (2013) further suggest that students use social networking sites to extend or to preserve their existing social connections. Ahn (2011) revealed how students use social media to post supportive wall messages on their fellow colleague's walls in order to build social capital. Student societies

were reported to use social network sites to communicate with their members in terms of sharing and distributing resource materials (videos, pictures, files, links) and information about anything that goes on within a particular society (Oye, Helou, and Rahim, 2012). It seems that social media is a facilitator that allows users to communicate and share information comfortably and effortlessly.

In addition, Magee, et al. (2013) with Martínez Alemán, Rowan-Kenyon and Savitz-Romer (2012) assert that students are more comfortable spending time with friends and building new relationships via social media. Buzzetto-More (2012) and Junco, Heiberger and Loken, (2011) report that students use social media to establish and fortify interpersonal relationships across diverse groups of people. Roblyer's, et al. (2010) study on students' uses and perceptions of social networking sites affirms that students use social media to be in contact with friends and to connect with people that they have not talked to in a while. Singh and Laxmi (2015) singled out postgraduate students in their study as the main perpetrators in using social media to be in contact with their friends. In contrast thereto Oye, Helou, and Rahim's (2012) study on students' perceptions on social networking sites reported that it was mainly the undergraduates that use social network sites for making friends and communicating with friends by the sending and receiving of messages. They further concluded that undergraduate students use social network sites (to chat and make friends) more often than their postgraduate counterparts (Oye, Helou, and Rahim, 2012).

Asemah, Okpanachi and Edegoh (2013) also disclose how undergraduate students used social media for social activities like chatting and making new friends. Cuisia and Yacap (2013) assert that social media connects people from different cultures, upbringings and living locations despite the distance that exists between them. Social media also encourages intercultural relations, the expression of varied cultures, people to meet and find their spouses and form stronger ties (Embi, Pendidikan and Hassan; 2012, Cuisia and Yacap, 2013). In contrast, Ahn (2011) reports that some students use social media to overcome their shyness, which is believed to lead to communicating with strangers. In Ezeah, Asogwa and Obiorah's (2013) study, titled "Social Media Use among Students of Universities in South-East Nigeria", students were found to dedicate time using social media for chatting during classes and to get together with their online friends at the expense of their studies. It appears that students seamlessly integrate with social media when it comes to building social capital.

Another aspect that students have ventured into is the use of social media for entertainment purposes. Students at the University of New Hampshire, reported in Kumar's (2014) paper, were described to use social media for both amusement and social connections. Kumar (2014) further discloses that the activities students engaged in include the posting and downloading of music or videos, the posting of photos and chatting. Kirschner and Karpinski's (2010) study shows that the majority of students engaged in activities such as uploading photos and poking other users or friends on social media. Cuisia and Yacap (2013) point out that students use social media to illustrate their notions and emotions. Students also use social media to create and RSVP to events, play games, check what their peers are up to and to keep up with them (Junco, 2012; Oye, Helou, and Rahim, 2012; Cuisia and Yacap, 2013). In Embi, Pendidikan and Hassan's (2012) research findings, they bring to light how students also use social networking sites (SNS) to watch movies online. Students thus find solace in social media when faced by boredom and academic stress; usually because social media can act as a diversion from academic challenges (Wise, Skues and Williams; 2011).

This clearly creates the impression that social media provides a suitable amusement space for students.

Other researchers reveal that students use social media (particularly Facebook) to make up their personalities, identities, opinions and attitudes towards various matters such as education, economy, politics and religion (Konetes and McKeague, 2011; cited in Embi, Pendidikan and Hassan, 2012; Davis III, et al., 2012; Junco, 2015). In a similar vein, Mehmood and Taswir (2013) describe how students use social media to develop their individualities and social identities. Ezeah, Asogwa and Obiorah's (2013) study showed that students use social media as a platform to converse about national affairs or matters like politics, economy and religion. This attests that social media provides students with the space to obtain, necessary information (Embi, Pendidikan and Hassan, 2012; Ezeah, Asogwa and Obiorah, 2013).

Ezeah, Asogwa and Obiorah (2013) further discovered another dimension to social media usage as they learned that students also engaged in cyber-crimes when using social media. This is mainly related to with students posting or uploading copyright protected videos. Another activity observed that students take part in is cyberbullying. This is viewed as a harmful experience which has become a major concern (Ahn, 2011; Cuisia and Yacap, 2013). The author can conclude that students feel comfortable and content with expressing their personalities and showing their identities through social media. Additionally, students feel safe sharing these personas with friends in a social networking space.

3.5 Tertiary Institutions' Aspect

Roblyer et al. (2010) report that there is a rise in terms of tertiary institutions' usage of social media and the numbers keep increasing. Martínez-Alemán (2014) identified Facebook and Twitter as two of the preferred social media tools used by tertiary institutions to enhance information and communication delivery. Notable branches of tertiary institutions that have been found to use social media include libraries, faculties, departments and administration offices. These branches have mainly focused on notifying students of events and activities that take place on campus (Roblyer et al., 2010; Davis III's et al., 2012). Martínez-Alemán (2014) stresses how students' familiarisations with social media has also extended to faculties and is a developing trend, even though faculties only discovered social media in recent times. Junco (2015) asserts that social media is quite popular with students and their faculties and it is imperative to understand the relationship and the prospective of social media to support teaching and learning.

In Junco's (2012) study on Facebook use, he reveals that tertiary institutions in educational courses use Facebook to publicise campus events or services, which provide the tertiary lecturers with an opportunity to encourage positive uses and discourage negative uses in an attempt to improve student engagement and grades. Tertiary institutions also use social media to develop and maintain the institution's academic and athletic brand, deal with crises that may arise, keep in touch with alumni and former students, recruit new students, connect with overseas study groups and connect with current students and faculty within and outside campus (Martínez-Alemán, 2009; Roblyer, et al., 2010). Employing social media in higher education institutions involves practises such as assessing students' take or thoughts on learning the uses of social media, handing out assignments to students, enlightening students

regarding the safekeeping of their private data online and employing institutional guidelines on the appropriate use of social media in an educational space (Chen and Bryer's, 2012).

A national poll carried out at several tertiary institutions in USA revealed that most institutions reportedly use social media (specifically Facebook and Twitter) mainly as a unidirectional platform to communicate. This includes activities such as posting announcements, notices and cut-off dates for imminent sport events, competitions, weather forecast warnings and tragedies that may occur (Davis III's et al., 2012). This is supported by Buzzetto-More's (2012) findings that state that social media acts as a platform for posting notices about student events subsidised by the university and posting advertisements of students' social events that are not subsidised by the university. Social media was also a platform for students to pass on birthday wishes to their classmates, discussions unrelated to coursework, queries and general information about university procedures and grievances about the university (Buzzetto-More, 2012).

Tertiary institutions were also reported to use social media for academic purposes, employing staff and student volunteers, advertising and managing their brand image to the public, responding to students' queries and connecting with graduates and sponsors (Davis III's et al., 2012). Overall, this essentially provides the notion that the use of social media has also extended to tertiary institutions as an organisation apart from students and has become a vital communication tool for tertiary institutions.

Table 3.1 shows a comprehensive number of descriptions of the uses of social media at tertiary institutions in USA:

LEARNING/ACADEMIC	STUDENT SUPPORT	COMMUNITY BUILDING	EXPANDING CONNECTIONS
Faculty communicates with and engages students in their courses	Provides student support	Builds and strengthens campus community	Connects students with alumni
Constructs links between Facebook and Blackboard so students can check class assignments and receive course announcements	Offers workshops on financial aid	Increases sense of belonging for students taking online courses	Conducts outreach to community
Creates stronger learning communities	Resolves issues and allow students and the community to provide feedback to the college	Actively encourages and facilitates student involvement and participation in activities	
Posts portions of lectures for downloading	Offers orientation	Invites participation in campus-wide blogs (i.e., student blogs, president's blog, blog focused on innovation in instruction).	

Facilitates class discussion and group project work	Provides mentoring to students		
Facilitates study groups and other in-class collaboration	Helps to navigate the registration process		
Boast about students' academic accomplishments	Aids in improving student retention		
Recruits students into specific academic programs			

Table 3.1: Uses of Social Media by tertiary Institutions in USA (Davis III's et al., 2012)

3.6 Lecturer's Aspect

Scholars have also realized the importance and the potential of educational faculties to support the educational interactions between faculties and students (Embi, Penedikan and Hassan, 2012). Buzzetto-More (2012) adds that lecturers, together with students, use social media to support their social learning, to construct pedagogy practices, to provide reliable instructions, as well as to improve learning focused on students and to provide access to education on request. In the same vein, Tiryakioglu and Erzurum (2011) further state that the social media space encourages the improvement of learning, discussion, critical thinking, research, teamwork and problem resolving skills. Tiryakioglu (2011) identified Facebook as a podium for lecturers to send educational resources, addresses of web sites, videos regarding coursework, presentations, assignments, articles and links to important documents to students. Bynum (2011) similarly confirms that lecturers use social media to post educational slides, exercises and class events.

Khoza (2012) describes how facilitators use Facebook to chat, discuss and reflect on topics learned in a particular module with postgraduate students. Thus, lecturers have been found to use social network sites to complement existing traditional pedagogical methods (Buzzetto-More, 2007 cited in Buzzetto-More, 2012). In brief, lecturers seem to have found plenty of useful ways to incorporate the use of social media in the delivery of academic work and to assist with overall academic improvement in tertiary institutions.

Faculty members were also found to use social media for both personal and professional use. This includes faculty members communicating with fellow co-workers and students (Martínez-Alemán, 2009). Tiryakioglu and Erzurum's (2011) findings affirm that some instructors use social media as a means to communicate and exchange information, exchange sources informally or for personal interests with students, friends and other instructors. The author can infer that social media serves as a platform for lecturers to also build social capital or relationships with their students.

3.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, there are a number of assumptions that can be deduced from the discussions in this study and from assessing the literature on students' current use of social media. Firstly, literature acknowledges how students use social media at a higher rate compared to the general population. The author can therefore conclude that students are the main actors when

it comes to social media usage. Secondly, judging from the inception of Facebook and Twitter and looking at how and why they were created, it is safe to conclude that both social media platforms were originally intended to allow people to communicate, network and build relationships. As time went on, new initiatives were formed towards the use of social media, including educational, entertainment, political and business or marketing uses.

Thirdly, since this study has discussed the use of social media for academic purposes, it gives the author an idea of the vital role played by social media in the education and learning of students, particularly in tertiary institutions. The author can also conclude that, when social media is used for educational purposes to promote learning activities, it has the potential to enhance students learning, academic engagement and achievement. Additionally, with backing from literature, the author presumes that social media can be beneficial to students and the academic space at large as it can be used to learn, acquire and practice new educational skills.

Fourthly, as discussed from literature that focuses on the use of social media for social purposes, the author can deduce that students feel more comfortable engaging in social activities on social media and view it as an ideal space for communicating and fostering relationships, engaging in social interactions and building social capital. The author can also infer that students' interaction with social media for social purposes gradually has an influence on students' commitment to their academic work. Another presumption that the author can make from literature, is that students who use social media as an escape from their everyday lives view social media as an entertainment or amusement park to relieve stress. An additional dimension that can be deduced from the use of social media by students, is that students feel comfortable conveying their identities or personas on social media and that this may in some way have psychological effects on students, which may also provide another aspect that will tempt researchers to look into.

Fifthly, the use of social media by tertiary institutions that is discussed in literature, indicates that social media use is not limited to students but can be extended to tertiary institutions (i.e. administration offices, faculties and departments) whilst still involving students in one way or another. This also shows that tertiary institutions have an important role to play in the introduction, implementation and adoption of the use of social media in the academic arena. Presumably, once tertiary institutions have accepted the use of social media for either teaching or learning or for informative purposes, students are likely to follow suit since they are naturally expected to accept initiatives implemented and backed up by authority. If faculties knew how to integrate social networking sites into their academic courses or curriculum effectively; social networking sites could be viewed as a valuable technology for pedagogical reasons. It is also expected to open doors to a new way of handling higher education institutional matters.

Finally, yet importantly, the discussion on the use of social media among lecturers and activities involving students allows the author to conclude that lecturers also have a vital role to play to allow and embrace a seamless adoption and integration of social media at tertiary institutions. Students presumably look at lecturers as natural leaders and look for guidance regarding tertiary institutions affairs. If lecturers are thus to encourage the use of social media to students, the latter are likely to react in a positive and accommodating manner as lecturers

would be going out of their way to connect with their students in a space that students are already comfortable in.

Literature discloses that lecturers use social media for personal purposes and academic reasons with their students, but only a few studies have reported the use of social media between lecturers and students. This implies that lecturers have not yet fully accepted the use of social media with students and they are still getting used to the idea of interacting with students on the social network podium. Overall, there is an immense potential that the use of social media has to offer in terms of improving academic and social affairs for students, lecturers and tertiary institutions at large.

Chapter 4

How the use of social media influences students' academic engagement in a tertiary institution, from a student's perspective.

4.1 Introduction

In this section the author addresses the second research question and reviews the literature that discusses the perspectives of students on how the use of social media (discussed in the previous section) impacts on students' academic engagement at tertiary level. This mainly focuses on taking students' point of view on social media's influence on their academic engagement and achievement into consideration. Literature also explains why it is vital to take students' perceptions on the use of social media in higher education institutions into consideration.

The author further explains the influence of social media on students' academic engagement and achievement that is divided into three different sub headings, namely: positive influence, negative influence and neutral influence. Under the sub heading 'positive influence', the author discusses literature that explains how social media positively affects students' academic engagement and achievement. Under the sub heading 'negative influence', the author discusses literature explaining how social media negatively affects students' academic engagement and achievement. Lastly, the author discusses literature explaining how social media has a neutral impact on students' academic engagement and achievement under the sub heading 'neutral influence'.

The author thereafter discusses his analysis of the reviewed literature and reaches a conclusion in respect of every aspect discussed in literature. The outcome of reviewing literature shows that social media has positive, negative and neutral impacts on students' academic engagement and achievement and it is difficult to decide which influence has a greater impact on students' academic engagement and achievement.

4.2 Students' Perceptions

The popularity of social media or social networking sites has become prominent among higher education students (Paul, Baker and Cochran, 2012) and it has encouraged scholars to carry out research on the perceptions of students towards the use of social media and how it influences their academic engagement (Martínez Alemán, Rowan-Kenyon and Savitz-Romer, 2012; Karimi and Khodabandelou, 2013). Martínez Alemán, Rowan-Kenyon and Savitz-Romer (2012) also disclose that engagement that occurs in tertiary institutions because of using social networking sites develops social capital and usually has the sole objective of enhancing student achievement. Results from Karimi and Khodabandelou's (2013) study on students' perspectives on the academic use of social networking sites, show that students make use of social media daily and have made social media a part of their lives. This can be seen as a habit and we can assume that every habit practised by students in this case may have an impact on their academic or social student engagement; be it positive, negative or neutral.

Martínez Alemán, Rowan-Kenyon and Savitz-Romer (2012) further highlighted the need of bearing in mind students' lived experiences and points of view, as they are the main independent actors in the use of social media in higher education institutions. The author concludes that students have become aware of how important social media use is in tertiary institutions and recognizes the vitality of students' perceptions towards the use of social media.

4.3 Positive Influence

The way students use social media or social networking sites can affect student engagement positively, as seen from research evidence gathered by means of independent research or self-reporting (Power, 2012). Power (2012) also discloses that there is evidence that supports the claim that social networking sites can improve student engagement; later improving student achievement. Alhazmi and Rahman (2014) agree by stating that social networking sites provide a variety of teaching and learning opportunities to improve students' academic engagement.

This is evident in Karimi and Khodabandelou's (2013) findings that report that most students feel that using social media is significant. since it supports students to achieve their academic goals. Karimi and Khodabandelou (2013) further suggest that students feel that social media has a positive influence on higher education and on activities carried out in tertiary institutions. Students from Lim and Richardson's (2015) study felt that the use of social media for academic purposes enhances students learning and collaboration and helps students to network; finding the whole experience beneficial to their academic work. Additionally, students also feel that social media plays an important role towards the academic success of students and most of them agree that the incorporation of social media in tertiary institutions should be implemented in the near future (Karimi and Khodabandelou, 2013).

A study carried out by Casey and Evans (2011) about students using a social network in a classroom environment, reveals that student engagement improved immensely after introducing and using social media in class. Students reflected on being able to indulge in activities that encouraged them to support their colleagues when solving problems, helped them self-reflect, and allowed them to provide both peer-assessment and self-assessment (Casey and Evans, 2011). As a result, students became self-organised, which became beneficial towards their academic engagement (Casey and Evans, 2011). Fagioli, Rios-Aguilar and Deil-amen's (2014) study on students' engagement while using social media (Facebook) to increase students' persistency and success, discloses that the most active users online were more academically engaged, recorded the highest grade point averages and had a better chance of continuing to the next semester when compared to non-members and users who were inactive online. In short, students who were more involved or engaged online were found to be more persistent in their academic work when compared to students who were less involved or engaged online (Fagioli, Rios-Aguilar and Deil-amen's, 2014).

It becomes clear that the introduction of the use of social media in tertiary institutions has led to positive outcomes that benefited students' academic engagement and achievement. Bosch's (2009) study on using online social networking sites for teaching and learning, reveals that students benefited from using social media for their academic work as they were able to access educational materials, such as study notes, and to work on their assignments.

Students also reveal that they were able to reach their lecturers and tutors through social media regarding topics related to their academic work (Bosch, 2009). Students felt that lecturers were more welcoming as they could communicate through social media, which fostered a positive attitude towards their coursework (Bosch, 2009).

Findings from Imlawi, Gregg and Karimi's (2015) study reveal that students' academic achievement and engagement improved when lecturers were interacting with students by posting humorous academic material on social media. Students from Junco, Heiberger and Loken's (2011) study on the effect of Twitter on college student engagement and grades, expressed how using social media (Twitter) allowed or motivated them to have fruitful academic discussions and engage with other students and faculty members. The results of the study reveal that using social media for academic purposes had a desirable effect on students' academic engagement and achievement (Junco, Heiberger and Loken, 2011). This highlights that, whenever social media is used for academic activities, it inevitably enhances students' academic involvement, academic experience, academic outcomes and relationships with lecturers.

In another study, the use of social media that involved students commenting on content and creating or RSVP'ing to events was found to have a positive effect on student engagement (Junco, 2011). In a similar study, activities carried out by students such as checking up on their friends, posting pictures, creating events or happenings, RSVP'ing to events and sending confidential messages were found to have a positive impact on their academic outcomes (Junco, 2015). According to results from Junco, Elavsky and Heiberger's (2013) study titled "Putting twitter to the test: Assessing outcomes for student collaboration, engagement and success", students' academic engagement and achievement immensely improved throughout the semester because of the use of social media in class. There was an improvement in student learning which motivated students as well as an increase in academic collaboration among students and between students and faculty (Junco, Elavsky and Heiberger, 2013).

A study carried out by Mbodila, Ndebele and Muhandji (2014) at a South African University on the effect of social media on student's engagement and collaboration, discloses how the majority of students used social media for learning and thought that the information they obtained while using social media, was helpful. Students were more engaged, were able to communicate and get responses from their lecturers and other students, which inevitably increased their academic collaboration and engagement (Mbodila, Ndebele and Muhandji, 2014). Additionally, students felt that it was beneficial and advantageous to use social media for their academic work and for social media to be used in other modules in their courses (Mbodila, Ndebele and Muhandji, 2014). This reveals how activities carried out by students that are not necessarily based on academic work can affect students' educational engagement positively and lead to improved academic outcomes.

Students from Badge, Saunders and Cann's (2012) study reveal how they found the use of a social network site in class useful and how it facilitated communication between students and between students and lecturers, which assisted particularly in discussing topics related to class assignments. Some students revealed how it was easy to ask questions and get feedback on social media regarding their studies and courses, which was beneficial towards their academic work (Badge, Saunders and Cann, 2012). Other students continued to use social media to discuss topics concerning academic matters throughout their holidays and beyond

the required period, which shows that social media left an impact on students (Badge, Saunders and Cann, 2012).

Reports from Alhazmi and Rahman's (2014) study reveal how students felt that using social media with their fellow colleagues allowed them to discuss, share information and get feedback from other students, which led to an increase in peer interaction and engagement in academic activities. Additionally, students were more motivated to use social media for academic purposes whenever they were encouraged by their lecturers to do so (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014). A student revealed that, whenever students joined academic groups on social media, their use for academic work increased, which inevitably increased their academic engagement (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014).

Findings from Akbari, Eghtesad and Simons' (2009) study reveal that students had a positive attitude towards the use of social networks in educational activities. This assisted in motivating students and improved students' linguistic skills and learning satisfaction. Students who were found to use social media for educational purposes, such as working on class projects, understanding the main themes of the lecture and communicating with lecturers, responded that they benefited from social networking sites when it came to their academic work. Their academic achievement also improved (Rashmi and Neetu, 2014). Students further reported that the information and knowledge attainment increased because of them incorporating social media with their academic studies (Rashmi and Neetu, 2014). This confirms that the more the students used social media for academic related work, the more their communication in class improved and the more they gained new skills and knowledge that was beneficial to their academic experience.

Findings from Al-rahmi and Othman's (2013) research unveil that social media encourages the act of collaborative learning and improves the education experience among students. The interaction or networking among students through social media was found to influence students' academic outcomes positively since social media allowed students to discuss and review topics and questions with their peers (Al-rahmi and Othman, 2013). Students who engaged in social media felt more confident in class and improved overall in terms of their academic achievement (Al-rahmi and Othman, 2013). Data collected by Wang, Chen and Liang (2011) in their study titled: "The Effects of Social Media on College Students"; unveils that students who used social media to work on their homework, improved in terms of their grades and efficiency in academic work. Rouis, Limayem and Salehi-Sangari's (2011) results reveal that students who are more self-disciplined were more effective and had more control over their usage of social media. Rouis, Limayem and Salehi-Sangari's (2011) results also show that the moderate use of and interest in social media enhance students' satisfaction or gratification with life, as it allows them to contact their friends, find old friends, and get updates from friends and family. This suggests that when social media is used moderately, it positively affects students' academic collaboration, learning and success.

Rutherford's (2010) results report that the majority of students who used social media with their peers to work on class projects experienced a positive impact on their student engagement. Students also described the quality of the incorporation of social media with the academic course as a good academic experience (Rutherford, 2010). The majority of students from Oye, Helou, and Rahim's (2012) study on students' perceptions on the influence of social networking sites, felt that the use of social media for communicating with fellow students about educational activities through group discussions; the sharing of educational

material and videos and communicating with staff members and organizing activities with staff members, had a positive impact on students' academic achievement.

Students who reportedly used social media to work on and complete their coursework, reveal that social media had a positive impact on their academic work since social media provided guidance and useful information for their academic work (Kumar, 2014). Students also revealed that social media was an effective e-learning tool that was beneficial to their academic work since it saved time and helped to build educational networks (Kumar, 2014). Ranaweera's, et al., (2015) study also discloses how the majority of students who used social media as an e-learning tool, described it as a cheap and effective method of teaching and learning; thus influencing their education in a positive way. A significant number of students from Jabr's (2011) study also reported that social media was important to their academic work as it allowed them to converse and share information and ideas. It seems that the use of social media in academia enhanced students' academic discussions and social media thus became a source of academic material for students.

One of the students interviewed in Glowatz and Brien's (2014) study expressed that social media increased his/her academic engagement with topics discussed in class and that he/she found it difficult to cope without social media. Findings from Khoza's (2012) study reveal that online discussions that were held on social media by students were seen as a great platform for exchanging documents and information that helps and promotes learning and engagement among students. A student from Alhazmi and Rahman's (2014) study on student engagement in social networks disclosed that the use of social media in one of his/her subjects was very useful towards his/her academic work as he/she received active support from his/her lecturer.

Results from Wise, Skues and Williams' (2011) study concluded that students, who were found to be highly committed to their academic and social engagement, were also found to be greatly engaged with their studies. Moreover, students who were found to be highly committed to their academic engagement but less committed to their social engagement, possessed a more self-governing study type approach towards their studies (Wise, Skues and Williams, 2011). Students who were found to be less committed to their academic engagement, but highly committed to their social engagement, possessed a more collaborative approach to their studies (Wise, Skues and Williams, 2011). This is explained in Figure 4.1:

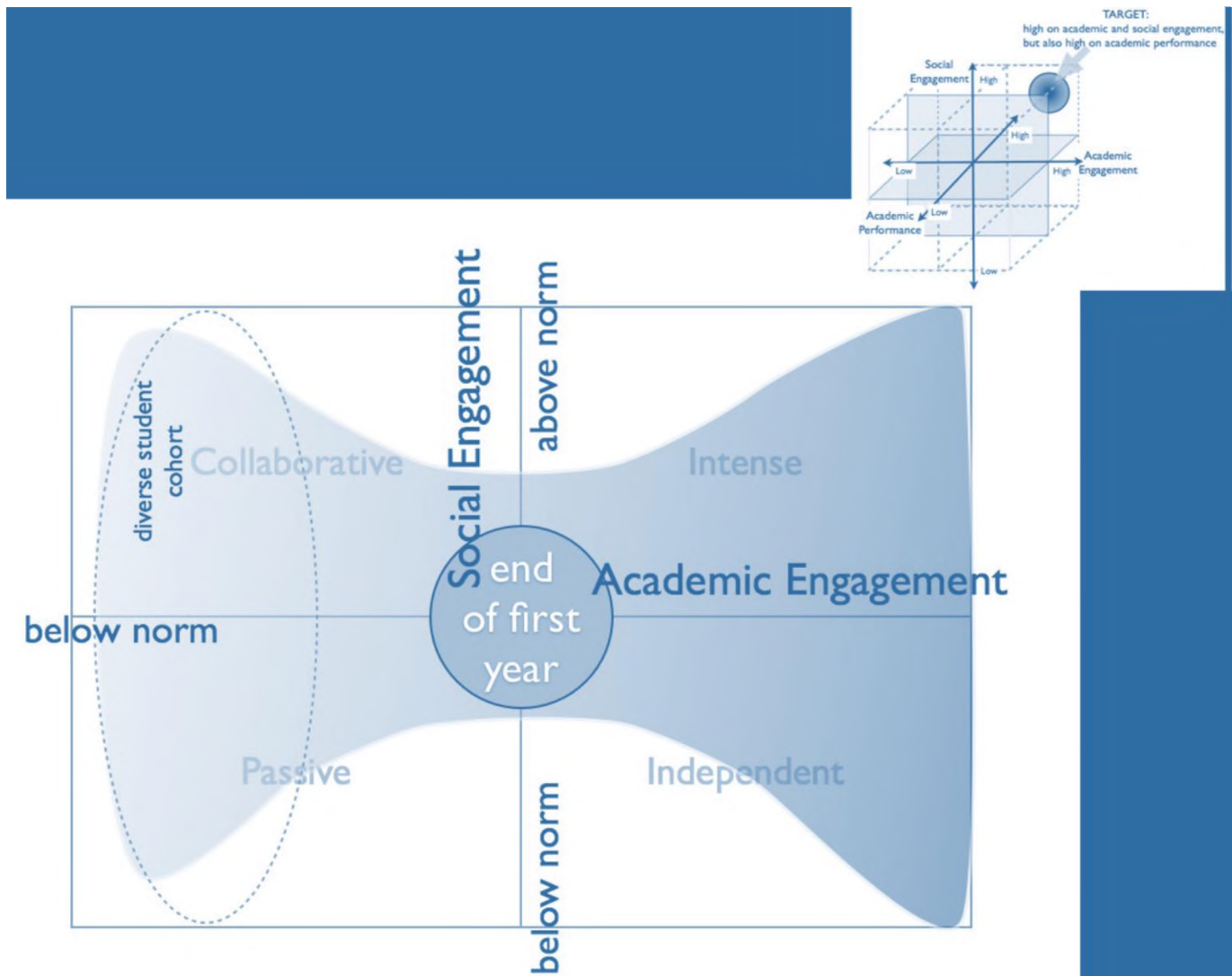


Figure 4.1: Classification of student engagement (Coates, 2007; in Wise, Skues and Williams, 2011)

According to Madge’s et al. (2009) findings, the use of social media was important for informal learning purposes. This included the interactions among students related to academic work. Some students felt that it was helpful to their academic work (Madge, et al., 2009). The majority of students felt that the use of Facebook could positively affect their academic work if used for formal pedagogical purposes by students in collaboration with lectures and departments (Madge, et al., 2009). It appears that students started becoming dependent on social media for their academic work. Students also felt that using social media for formal and informal teaching and learning practices improved their social and academic engagement.

Students from Ivala and Gachago’s (2012) study “Social media for enhancing student engagement” revealed that social media provided them with accessibility to academic and moral support that they received from their lecturers and peers, which enhanced the quality of their assignments with the help of feedback from lecturers and other students. One of the students expressed how using social media in an academic space helped to forge a beneficial

academic relationship with his/her lecturers, which improved his/her academic engagement (Ivala and Gachago, 2012). Another student expressed how social media in class improved communication among students through discussing, helping and giving advice to each other. This resulted in students knowing each other better, gaining confidence in fellow students and, most importantly, there was an improvement in the partaking of introverted or shy students when it came to participating in academic activities (Ivala and Gachago, 2012).

Buzzetto-More's (2012) study "Social Networking in Undergraduate Education" reveals how the majority of students who used social media to discuss academic coursework, share educational links and events, later agreed that social media helps to foster a learning environment; improve students' pedagogy progression and class discussions and to enhance students' academic engagement. Students from Singh and Laxmi's (2015) study disclosed how the use of social networking sites created a positive impact on their work output and educational studies. Some students from Kirschner and Karpinski's (2010) study reveal how social media had a positive impact towards their academic work since they could communicate with their peers in study groups; highlighting the usefulness of social media.

Additionally, some students felt that the relationship between lecturers and tutors (staff) with students, developed by using social networking sites, fosters the best communication and teaching or educating methods (Madge, et al., 2009). Bynum's (2011) study titled "Utilizing Social Media to Increase Student Engagement", agrees by stating that the integration of social media in an educational space allowed lecturers and students to connect, which improved student engagement. This clearly creates the impression that the use of social media enhances academic relationships between students and their peers, and between students and lecturers, thereby improving the teaching and learning experience in tertiary institutions.

In Mehmood and Taswir's (2013) study, the majority of students agreed that they used social media while completing classroom assignments. Mehmood and Taswir (2013) further added that students found this helpful since social media provided guidance and important material and information related to their academic topics. Ezeah, Asogwa and Obiorah (2013) report that students agreed that they could get study materials and ideas on social media and that this benefited their academic studies. Students from Eke, Omekwu and Odoh's (2014) study on the use of social networking sites among the undergraduate students, reveal that using social media in academia helped to enhance students' reading and writing, web skills, academic research and learning.

In Wright's, et. al. (2013) study on students' attitudes towards the academic use of social networks, students felt that using a social network in academia where students could share information and help each other with class projects, was academically beneficial to their education and increased student engagement. The author can therefore conclude that the assimilation of social media in a classroom space is beneficial towards students' educational studies and overall pedagogical experience. This also suggests that social media platforms (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) should be considered as potential tools for increasing student engagement, rather than tools of disruption.

4.4 Negative Influence

Results from literature have also shown negative effects or impacts on students, both generally and specifically on their academic work at tertiary level. Outcomes from Karimi and Khodabandelou's (2013) suggest that a sense of addiction may affect students adversely when engaged in social media. This was asserted by findings from Singh and Laxmi's (2015) study, which reveals that the majority of students felt that social networking sites were a type of addiction. Results from Paul, Baker and Cochran's (2012) research reveal that the time spent on social networking sites has an undesirable impact on students' academic achievement.

Responses from students in Eke, Omekwu and Odoh's (2014) study reveal that social media had a negative impact on students' academic work as it led to an internet addiction and promoted procrastination. Findings from Abdulahi, Samadi and Gharleghi's (2014) research also shows that the use of social media in academia led to students experiencing confidentiality and safety issues. Health threats, concerning addictions, led to poor academic achievement. Rouis, Limayem and Salehi-Sangari's (2011) results also agree that the overuse of social media leads to poor academic achievement. This essentially gives out the notion that addiction is a significant issue that may arise when using social media and care should be taken when it comes to the usage of social media in academia.

Additionally, Al-rahmi and Othman's (2013) study reveals that the use of social media without proper management and control, negatively affects students' academic outcome. Most of the students also disagreed when asked whether social networking sites help them to be productive when studying. They felt that social media cannot be used effectively as a good educational tool and could not effectively help them manage their study time (Paul, Baker and Cochran, 2012). Rouis, Limayem and Salehi-Sangari's (2011) study reports that there is a substantial decline in students' satisfaction with life when they are unduly occupied with social media.

Students from Kirschner and Karpinski's (2010) study also revealed that social media had a negative influence on their academic work. Students stated that social media was the source of disruption and procrastination towards their academic work. Students found it difficult to manage their time and started spending fewer hours per week on their studies. Additionally, Okafor and Achokwu's (2014) study reveals how the use of social media negatively influenced the study culture of students at a University in Nigeria. Similarly, the majority of students from Alwagait, Shahzad and Alim's (2014) study reported that the excessive use of social media had an undesirable effect on students' academic achievement.

According to Madge's et al. (2009) research results, some students felt that the time they spent on social media (for social purposes) often had a detrimental effect on their academic work as it limited the time that students dedicated to their educational studies. Likewise, Wang, Chen and Liang's (2011) results show that students had a negative attitude towards using social media while working on their homework. Students felt that the many hours spent on social networking sites served as a disruption and had a destructive effect on their academic work (Wang, Chen and Liang, 2011). Additionally, students from Ivala and Gachago's study expressed how social media was a source of distraction that affected their academic activities.

Alhazmi and Rahman (2014) disclose that whenever students spent time on non-academic or social activities, it usually affected the available time students had for their academic activities negatively and consequently also had a negative effect on the students' academic engagement. The time spent on social media and the multitasking activities (such as posting status updates, tagging pictures, watching videos and chatting) that were carried out by students, meant that students dedicated less time towards their academic engagement and it thus also had a negative impact towards students' academic outcomes (Junco, 2015). Junco (2015) discovered and further concluded that there is a negative correlation between the use of social media and students' academic work.

Ezeah, Asogwa and Obiorah (2013) reported that the use of social media by students for entertainment purposes, engaging in cyber-crimes, conversing about national matters and watching pornography, had a negative effect on students' academic studies as they dedicated less time on their academic work. Asemah, Okpanachi and Edegoh's (2013) study also reports that undergraduate students who used social media for social activities like chatting and making new friends, led to them spending excessive time on social media, which had an undesirable impact on their academic work. A study carried out by Badge, Saunders and Cann (2012), discloses how some students described using a social network site in class as an "annoying intrusion or a distraction" to their academic work and how students felt that they could rather have spent their time on other beneficial work.

Reports from Wise, Skues and Williams' (2011) study unveil that when students used social media for social activities, it served as a cause of disruption from academic engagement. It appears students actually used social media as a getaway from overly demanding academic work, which led to academic disengagement (Wise, Skues and Williams, 2011). In short, findings from Wise, Skues and Williams' (2011) study discovered that social media had a less influential role in promoting students' academic engagement at higher education institutions. The author can then deduce that the use of social media, especially on non-academic activities, affects students' time management and acts as a disturbance towards students' academic studies, and may need to be monitored in order for it to not yield undesirable outcomes.

According to results from Khoza's (2012) study, students' online chatting that occurred through social media, was revealed to have a less desirable effect in motivating students to work on their academic work or course. Students also found it difficult to focus in class and were also found to turn their attention towards matters unrelated to their educational course or work. Paul, Baker and Cochran (2012) established that using social media has a negative effect on students' attention span on their academic work. Results from Junco's (2011) study show that the time spent on checking and using social media for playing games and chatting or connecting with friends had a negative effect on student engagement, as students were distracted from their academic work.

Students from Alhazmi and Rahman's (2014) study revealed that they did not get a desirable effect from using social media with their lecturers for their academic activities. Their lecturers were inactive, unresponsive or failed to provide feedback to students. This led to low level student academic engagement. Another factor that students regarded as the cause of student academic disengagement is the lack of proper teaching and learning features on social media suitable for academic work (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014). Students also revealed that security and privacy issues when using social media to carry out academic activities might result in students being less disengaged with their academic work (Alhazmi and Rahman,

2014). In brief, research shows that as students engage in social activities that are unrelated to their educational studies on social media, their concentration span was negatively affected and they were academically disengaged.

4.5 Neutral Influence

While some scholars have found that the impact of social media on student engagement can be either positive or negative, other scholars have found that the impact can be neutral. For example, the majority of students in Karimi and Khodabandelou's (2013) study reveals that they were unsure as to whether it is beneficial to them when they used social media as a communication tool with their lecturers (Karimi and Khodabandelou, 2013). Results from Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) disclose that the majority of students felt that social media had no impact on their academic achievement. They indicated that they rarely used social media and that concentrating on their academic work was the number one priority. An analysis between the use of social media and students' academic studies revealed that social media had no impact on students' academic achievement (Kirschner and Karpinski, 2010).

Responses from Oye, Helou, and Rahim's (2012) study reveal how a significant number of students were unsure whether the impact of social media had on their academic achievement was positive or negative and the results were thus inconclusive. Results from Cuisai and Yacap's (2013) study also showed that social media had a neutral impact on students' academic achievement, since the effect was not substantial to influence students' academic achievement. The author can then infer that social media does not necessarily always have an influence on students' academic engagement and achievement.

4.6 Conclusion

The author can draw certain conclusions after reviewing the literature that discusses the influence of social media on students' academic engagement. Literature began by explaining how researchers have shown interest in investigating the perceptions of students towards the use of social media and how it influences their academic engagement and achievement. This proves the relevance of the study of social media and its impact on student engagement. Literature further reports how important it is to consider students' perceptions, as they are the main participants when it comes to using social media in higher education institutions. The author deduces that considering students' points of view speaks volumes, as students are allowed to express themselves and to actually have a voice.

Considering literature referring to the positive influence of social media on students' academic engagement and achievement, researchers reveal how pedagogical uses of social media allow students to dedicate more time to their academic work. This may lead to an in-depth understanding of what they are learning and may encourage students' academic engagement and achievement. The author concludes that the use of social media can have an immensely positive outcome if used correctly for educational purposes. The author further deduces that social media's use in tertiary institutions has the potential of improving students' academic engagement, academic achievement, learning, and interactions between students and lecturers. Social media seems to provide a comfortable and suitable environment for

students to share and discuss educational matters with their peers, as well as with university staff members.

Literature also reveals the downside of using social media in tertiary institutions, and its negative impact on student engagement and achievement. The author concludes that the overuse of social media by students in tertiary institutions leads to effects such as an addiction to social media, procrastination towards academic work, poor time management in respect of academic work and poor concentration span in academic studies; leading to a negative impact on students' academic engagement and achievement. Literature further suggests that students felt indifferent about the use of social media and its influence on academic engagement and achievement. Some studies could not find a correlation between social media and academic engagement. Results from student's responses were thus found to be inconclusive. From these findings, the author can conclude that there may sometimes be no connection between students' use of social media and their academic engagement and that sometimes the impact may be neutral.

Students have met social media's use in tertiary institutions with mixed feelings. Some students believe that social media has either a positive or negative impact on their academic engagement. Sometimes the effect is found to be neutral. As evidence from literature has shown however, the impact that social media can have on student engagement and achievement is all dependent on the ways in which students use social media. If students at tertiary level use social media for educational purposes effectively and in a well-controlled environment, the outcome is inevitably positive towards their academic studies. In contrast to the aforementioned, when students use social media for social purposes unrelated to academic work, the outcome is likely to be negative towards their academic studies. Even though studies have shown that students who are socially engaged through social media at tertiary level were found to be optimistic about university life, few studies could actually link this to students' academic engagement.

It is also worth noting that faculties and tertiary institutions as a whole have an important part to play when it comes to the use of social media in academia. Lecturers or instructors can actually monitor the social media space and put restrictions in place to ensure that students use the social media in an efficient manner that will benefit their academic engagement and achievement. This will be discussed more in detail in the next section.

Chapter 5

The effective ways of using social media to benefit students' academic engagement in tertiary institutions, from a student's perspective.

5.1 Introduction

In this section, the author addresses the third research question and reviews literature that discusses the ways in which social media can be used effectively to benefit students' academic engagement in tertiary institutions. The focus is mainly on the perceptions put forward by students and suggestions derived from results obtained through research by academic scholars.

The author divided the recommendations into four sub headings, namely: recommendations for students, recommendations for lecturers and faculties, recommendations for tertiary institutions and, finally, recommendations for social media sites developers. Under the sub heading 'recommendations for students', the author discusses literature that provides suggestions to students (as the main users of social media in tertiary institutions) on how they can effectively use social media to benefit their academic engagement. Under the sub heading 'recommendations for lecturers and faculties', the author discusses literature that proposes factors that lecturers and faculties may need to consider when using social media in a manner intended to have a positive impact towards students' academic engagement. Under the sub heading 'recommendations for tertiary institutions', the author discusses literature that offers propositions that tertiary institutions can use to successfully embrace the use of social media as a tool to enhance students' academic engagement.

The author also provides a framework, derived from literature, of factors that faculties and tertiary institutions may need to use in order to implement the use of social media in tertiary institutions successfully to benefit students' academic engagement. Lastly, the author discusses literature that reveals recommendations that social media sites developers will need to take into consideration in order to make social media sites a pedagogical conducive space in which academic engagement and achievement can thrive. In closing the author discusses his investigation into the reviewed literature and provides conclusions regarding every aspect discussed in literature. The overall outcome of reviewing literature suggests that the main participants (students, lecturers, faculties, tertiary institutions) in using social media in higher education institutions, will have to effectively carry out their individual roles; come together and work together in order to ensure that social media is used efficiently in a manner that will benefit students' academic engagement.

5.2 Recommendations for students

5.2.1 Students' attitude and obligations

Students from Alhazmi and Rahman's (2014) study indicated that students would have to change their attitudes towards using social media for academic purposes, as opposed to using

social media for social purposes. Students revealed that they are more comfortable using social media to engage in social activities but a change in their mind sets would need to be fostered in order to use social media for educational purposes and to increase their academic engagement and achievement (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014). Students further suggested that it is the obligation of every student to be active, to comment on and join in on educational discussions, to share educational material and to give feedback to other students in order to create an environment conducive for learning and to improve their academic engagement (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014). Additionally, results from Smith, Haden and Mann's (2012) study express that it is also the students' responsibility to monitor the posts and material shared on social media sites to ensure that only academic information is exchanged to benefit students' academic engagement.

Junco, Elavsky and Heiberger's (2013) advise students to propose self-directed and cooperative learning practices by means of social media with the intention of improving students' academic engagement effectively. Ranaweera, et. al, (2015) agree by suggesting that students should use social media for sharing ideas, educational information and engage in educational discussions in order to enhance their academic experiences. Results from Junco, Heiberger and Loken (2011) indicated that students should create study groups through social media in order to enhance collaboration when engaging in educational activities. Students further suggested that student groups and forums should be formed in order to allow students to discuss academic experiences, converse about group projects and exchange information (Kumar, 2014). Responses from Kirschner and Karpinski's (2010) study also encourage students to use social media to form study groups in order to enhance communication among students regarding academic work. It becomes clear that students may need to play a dynamic role in the use of social media in academia and to adapt an ideal mind set towards the use of social media for academic activities.

5.2.2 Regulation and safety

Schlenkrich and Sewry (2012) urge students to consider security and privacy measures for their profiles and to keep in mind who might view their profiles so that they can take the necessary steps to protect their information. Asemah, Okpanachi and Edegoh (2013) suggest that students should regulate their engagement with social media and should rather concentrate on their academic studies; especially students that are aiming to enhance their academic achievement. Al-rahmi and Othman (2013) advise students to manage and regulate their time when it comes to using social media for academic work in order to improve their academic experience. Eke, Omekwu and Odoh (2014) agree by suggesting that students who use social media in excess, should moderate their usage to prevent online addiction and strive to find a balance. Okafor and Achokwu (2014) encourage parents to also oversee and regulate their children's use of social media and to make sure that they do not over engage in social media for non-academic purposes. This indicates that students may need to take into account monitoring and security measures in order to guard against the negative impacts of social media.

The author concludes that students will need to put in an effort from their side in order to ensure that social media is used in a way that will benefit their academic engagement.

5.3 Recommendations for lecturers and faculties

5.3.1 Finding effective ways and involving students

Wang, Chen and Liang (2011) suggest that lecturers should find better ways of using social media in academia and to do so in a manner that will positively affect students' academic engagement and achievement. Junco (2011) urges instructors to look out for ways to enhance students' academic engagement and learning. Junco (2011) also advises lecturers to establish which social media activities can help improve student learning and to identify ways that social media can positively affect students' academic engagement and achievement. Students from Alhazmi and Rahman's (2014) study reveal that the role of the faculties is to encourage student engagement by social media for academic purposes. Oye, Helou, and Rahim (2012) suggest faculties should look for and try out applications (i.e. blogs) on social media sites that are intended for academic purposes and to encourage students to make use of them.

Balakrishnan and Gan (2016) recommend lecturers to design learning activities that will improve students' learning and academic experience. Ranaweera, et. al, (2015) advise lecturers to encourage educational activities on social media, since social media is easily accessible to students through smartphones, personal computers or notebooks. Ivala and Gachago (2012) advise lecturers to involve and consider students' point of view from the beginning before they decide on the appropriate social media site to use, as well as the manner in which it should be used. This is because students from different academic disciplines may have different preferences in respect of what type of social media site to use in class. Students are expected to be more engaged when they are involved in making key decisions in respect of their academic experience (Ivala and Gachago, 2012). This highlights how important it is for lecturers to uncover effective ways of using social media and to involve students in choosing the appropriate social media site to use in academia.

5.3.2 Educating students and lecturers

Junco (2013) recommends that lecturers should educate students regarding the use of social media. They should also be taught what to expect when implementing the use of social media in an academic space. Mbodila, Ndebele and Muhandji (2014) also suggest that students should receive some kind of training in order to acquaint themselves with social media technology before it is introduced in teaching and learning. Lecturers should also make sure that they engage all the students in social media discussions and that they educate the students in respect of the rules, regulations and behaviours relevant to the use of social media for academic purposes (Junco, 2013). Jabr (2011) agrees by stating that students need to be formally educated on the aims, objectives and benefits of using social media in an academic space.

Ranaweera, et. al, (2015) also agree by stating that students and lecturers should be trained how to use social media efficiently to contribute positively towards students' educational studies. Ivala and Gachago (2012) suggest that lecturers who are successful with incorporating and using social media in academia should provide training and share their experience with other lecturers. This will motivate their fellow colleagues to adopt the use of social media in their courses. Ivala and Gachago (2012) also urge lecturers to initiate workshops and conferences on adopting social media in an academic space and to provide

constant support and training to fellow lecturers in order to influence students' academic engagement positively.

Junco (2015) advises educators to come up with strategies that will help teach students the significance of regulating the use of social media in academia. Okafor and Achokwu (2014) recommend that students should be taught the undesirable social and mental effects of social media when used in an inappropriate manner. Okafor and Achokwu (2014) reveal that students' exposure to social media should be monitored to ensure that social media does not have a negative impact on students' academic engagement. Mehmood and Taswir (2013) agree by stating that social media needs to be used in a disciplined manner in order to prevent students from being disrupted from their academic work. Lecturers and faculties are thus expected to educate students and other lecturers on how to use social media in academia to influence academic engagement and achievement positively.

5.3.3 Lecturers' knowledge of social media

Students from Glowatz and Brien's (2014) study suggest that lecturers need to have an idea and familiarize themselves with students' knowledge level of social networks and pedagogic practices. This enables the lecturers to connect on an academic level with students on social media, which gradually improves students' educational experience (Glowatz and Brien, 2014). Ivala and Gachago (2012) also suggest that lecturers at tertiary institutions need to acquaint themselves with social media in order for them to be able to effectively teach and educate students. Junco (2011) also recommends that it is vital for staff members in tertiary institutions to get used to using social media and for them to come up with initiatives that help to benefit students' academic engagement.

Students revealed that the more positively engaged the lecturer was with using social media for academic work, the more credibility the lecturers had and the more interested and academically engaged the students were (Glowatz and Brien, 2014). Results from Imlawi, Gregg and Karimi's (2015) study indicate that the educator's credibility had a positive influence on students' academic engagement, because students were motivated to be more academically engaged. Students were found to be more hesitant to engage on social media for academic purposes when lecturers' knowledge of social networks was not in harmony with students' knowledge of social networks (Glowatz and Brien, 2014). This was also the case when students could see that lecturers were struggling with using social media and when lecturers were not using social media efficiently for academic work, which negatively affected students learning (Glowatz and Brien, 2014). This suggests that the more the lecturers are oriented with social media, the better it reflects with students and the more likely it is to improve student academic engagement.

5.3.4 Faculty and lecturers support

Alhazmi and Rahman (2014) acknowledged that students' academic engagement by means of social media for educational purposes, is also dependent on the support and encouragement students get from faculties to use social media in academia. Responses from focus groups of students infer that lecturers should adopt a welcoming, considerate and helpful attitude towards students (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014). This was identified as the key factor to

improve students' interaction with lecturers while using social media for academic work (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014).

Junco, Elavsky and Heiberger (2013) state the importance of active faculty engagement with students in the use of social media for academic purposes, as this is likely to affect students' academic achievement positively. Junco, Elavsky and Heiberger (2013) also reveal that providing incentives to students for using social media for academic purposes, inevitably motivates students to be more academically engaged and improves their academic engagement. Additionally, Alhazmi and Rahman (2014) state that it is up to the lecturers and faculties to initiate, organize and facilitate educational activities. According to students, lecturers should motivate students to work together academically on social media and should encourage them to join academic social media groups, which inevitably increases students' academic engagement and achievement (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014).

Ivala and Gachago (2012) advise that it is important for lecturers to take up the back seat when engaging with students on social media. Lecturers should let students dominate and take ownership of the discussions and activities carried out on social media, as this is likely to increase student engagement (Ivala and Gachago, 2012). Ivala and Gachago (2012) further recommend that lecturers should reply to students' enquiries and provide feedback on time in order to ensure that students do not lose interest in engaging in academic work. According to results from Junco, Elavsky and Heiberger's (2013) study, faculties that use social media to engage with students through academic discussions, providing feedback and educational support, are more likely to see a positive impact on students' academic engagement and achievement. Results from Junco, Heiberger and Loken (2011) show that students' engagement and grades have improved after being encouraged to use social media for academic purposes.

Students from Glowatz and Brien's (2014) study additionally emphasized the need for lecturers to demonstrate theory based topics in a practical manner when using social media for explaining. Schlenkrich and Sewry (2012) suggest that social media should be used by students and lecturers extensively throughout weekdays and weekends. They should both post and retrieve information. Doing so will ensure a positive attitude and will affect academic engagement positively. Ranaweera, et. al, (2015) encourages lectures to engage students on social media in the evenings when students presumably have time to spare. This gives out the notion that lecturers and faculties are supposed to provide support and motivation to students, and should allow students to be in charge when it comes to using social media in tertiary institutions to increase students' academic engagement.

5.3.5 Creating social media groups and accounts

Mbodila, Ndebele and Muhandji (2014) recommend that lecturers should meet students half way or in a space that students are comfortable in, by using social media for pedagogical activities. Some students suggested that lecturers could use a Facebook group to discuss and share course work materials with students, post slides, give insights on matters discussed in class and give students feedback. As a result, students' academic engagement will improve (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014). Junco (2011) also suggests that an academic staff member can create a group for a specific course on social media, in order to discuss educational work and share academic information and material beneficial to students. Ranaweera, et. al, (2015)

suggest that study groups or forums should be established to allow educational discussions and pedagogical activities to take place.

Oye, Helou, and Rahim (2012) encourage faculties and lecturers to engage students in the use of social media such as in-group dialogues carried out in class in order to prevent them from engaging in activities like chatting and playing games, which have nothing to do with academic work. Students from Kumar's (2014) study recommend instructors to create pages or accounts on social media where instructors can upload educational material that students can access while using social media. Students also indicated that academic staff members should update social media groups or pages often with relevant and updated educational information in order to encourage students to dedicate more time to their academic work (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014). Schlenkrich and Sewry (2012) recommend that updated and relevant matters related to learning should be discussed on social media in order to improve students' critical thinking skills and collaboration with their peers.

5.3.6 Building academic networks and integrating LMS's

Alhazmi and Rahman (2014) recommend that social media should be used for academic purposes, as it can be a way to create a network that encourages students' academic engagement. Badge, Saunders and Cann (2012) recommend that the academic staff at tertiary institutions need to maintain a constant network with all students in order to ensure that all students are academically involved (especially the slow learners) in order to promote student engagement and achievement. Results from Junco, Heiberger and Loken (2011) show how students' relationship with faculty improved when academic staff members monitored students' activities on social media and were involved in using social media with students for academic purposes.

Students from Buzzetto-More's (2012) study urge faculties to implement the use of social media together with learning management systems for pedagogical reasons in order to enhance academic networks, community building and student academic engagement. Mbodila, Ndebele and Muhandji (2014) suggest that that the faculties should consider integrating social media with learning management systems to increase students' collaboration and engagement. Madge et al. (2009) recommend that social media should be used together with virtual interactions and real life interactions among students and lecturers. They warn, however, against using only social media as a means of social networking in academia.

5.3.7 Awarding marks and implementing regulations

Ranaweera, et. al, (2015) also recommend that a committee should be set up to measure the improvement made by students whilst using social media for their academic work. Dyson, et al, (2014) suggest that student engagement can be increased by awarding additional marks to students for posting or commenting on academic course related material on social media. Badge, Saunders and Cann (2012) agree that assessing students for using social media for academic purposes has a positive impact towards students' academic engagement. Badge, Saunders and Cann (2012) also advise that it is important for lecturers or tutors to assess students for academic work carried out using social media, instead of students assessing each

other. This will ensure an unbiased allocation of marks for students' academic engagement and work done on social media (Badge, Saunders and Cann, 2012).

Observations from Smith, Haden and Mann's (2012) study, indicate that lecturers should implement rules to ensure that students post educational relevant information on social media in order to promote academic engagement. Ivala and Gachago (2012) support this by stating that lecturers should include students in the drawing up of the protocol for the use of social media in class. Involving students in drawing up these rules, gives students a sense of ownership and they will be more inclined to adhere to rules that they agreed to. The author concludes that, when lecturers employ regulations to monitor students and assess students when they use social media, students' academic engagement will improve.

The author deduces that lecturers and faculties will have to do more than simply implement social media in academia and leave it up to the students to find their way. Lecturers would have to be more involved and meet students in a space where students are comfortable. Lecturers would also have to have come up with clear strategies, take up certain measures and follow certain precautions before they can successfully implement the use of social media in tertiary institutions to benefit students' academic engagement. It is also up to the lecturers to make the social media space conducive and as academic friendly as possible in order to yield desirable results that would positively influence students' academic engagement.

5.4 Recommendations for tertiary institutions

5.4.1 Integrating the use of social media in academia

Results from Alhazmi and Rahman's (2014) study indicate that tertiary institutions have a vital role to play in the use of social media in academic institutions. Jabr (2011) recommends that tertiary institutions should take up a more cooperative role and build an interactive and educational space for both students and academic staff members in order to yield positive academic outcomes. A student revealed that students would be motivated to use social media for their academic work if tertiary institutions in academia (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014) introduced social media.

Madge et al. (2009) encourage tertiary institutions to create social media groups for departments and residence halls to assist students in the pre-registration and settling-in process at university life. Madge et al. (2009) further recommends that social media should be used in tertiary institutions and advises higher education institutions to recognize the significance and potential of social media. Wise, Skues and Williams' (2011) argue in their paper that it is the aim of tertiary institutions to oversee the use of social media for social and academic engagement of students and to make sure that social media is used effectively to enhance collaboration among students and to improve students' academic engagement.

Jabr (2011) advises tertiary institutions to encourage lecturers to use social media in academia in order to improve communication between them and the students; to help students to dedicate more time to their academic studies; to help students make the most of the internet and technology available, and to enhance students' learning and problem solving skills. This will ensure that students do not spend most of their time on unproductive social activities that

do not benefit their academic work in any way (Jabr, 2011). Madge et al. (2009) warn against forcefully implementing the use of social media on students and disclose that caution should be exercised when assimilating the use of social media in academia, as students' opinions may have to be taken into consideration. It appears that once social media is recognized and incorporated by tertiary institutions in academia, academic collaborations and engagement are likely to improve.

5.4.2 Policies for implementing social media use

Alhazmi and Rahman (2014) disclose that policies are essential for the use of social media in academia. Policies should be implemented in order for students, academic staff members and tertiary institutions to know what their roles are. One of the students from Alhazmi and Rahman (2014) study recommended that policies should be put in place by tertiary institutions in order to encourage students and staff members to use social media for academic purposes. Responses from Oye, Helou, and Rahim's (2012) study recommend that tertiary institutions should come up with policies that will act as guidelines for the successful adoption of the use of social media in academic activities. Manca and Ranieri (2016) recommend institutions to provide guidance to faculties and to provide pedagogical and technical support to academic staff by using a top down technique to enhance instructors' social media usage skills.

Schlenkrich and Sewry (2012) encourage tertiary institutions to consider the moral and professional responsibility of students and lecturers and the code of conduct when drawing up policies in order to ensure the successful use of social media in higher education. Schlenkrich and Sewry (2012) further urges tertiary institutions to allow only legal and acceptable activities to be carried out on social media in order for social media to have a positive impact on students' academic engagement and achievement. Okafor and Achokwu (2014) suggest that policies should consider the implementation of technology that monitors the content on social media made available to students. Schlenkrich and Sewry (2012) agree by stating that information posted on social media should be analysed to make sure that it is correct and consistent, which enhances the successful use of social media in higher education.

5.4.3 Policies for implementing workshops

Paul, Baker and Cochran's (2012) advise tertiary institutions and faculties to focus on the provision of improved policies for studying and enhancing students' ability to manage time proficiently. Respondents from Alhazmi and Rahman (2014) proposed that tertiary institutions should provide training to every person involved in the use of social media in tertiary institutions regarding the teaching and learning features that social media has to offer in order for students to know how to use these features and, hopefully, to motivate the students. Strategies, such as employing conferences and workshops to train students on how to use social media technology, can contribute to the efficient use of social media in academia (Paul, Baker and Cochran, 2012). Paul, Baker and Cochran's (2012) further suggest that the workshops should be made mandatory for all students and should act as a prerequisite to being admitted into academic courses.

Ranaweera, et. al. (2015) also recommend that tertiary institutions should organize workshops and seminars on the use of social media to improve pedagogical practices in order to enhance students' academic engagement and achievement. Eke, Omekwu and Odoh (2014) suggest that tertiary institutions should establish symposiums to teach students the dangers of using social media and to inform students how to use social media effectively. Mbodila, Ndebele and Muhandji (2014) recommend that further research should be done regarding the use of social media in academia in order to understand how to use it to improve students' academic engagement and collaboration. Information from research can be used to support tertiary institutions in the establishment and development of social media resources to be used for educational purposes (Rutherford, 2010).

5.4.4 Policies for incorporating social media in the curriculum

Students from Karimi and Khodabandelou's (2013) study reveal that social media should be incorporated fully in tertiary institutions in order for it to have a desirable influence on students' academic engagement. Alhazmi and Rahman (2014) proposed that the policies should take into consideration incorporating the use of social media for academic work in the course curriculum and that marks should be awarded to students for using social media in their course work in an attempt to encourage students to network using social media for academic activities. Student responses from Akbari, Eghtesad and Simons' (2009) study on students' attitudes towards the use of social networks, indicate and encourage the inclusion of social media in the academic syllabus in order to enhance the teaching and learning experience for both students and lecturers. Incorporating the use of social media in the academic syllabus can also improve the academic experience of learning a new foreign language (Akbari, Eghtesad and Simons, 2009).

Balakrishnan and Gan (2016) suggest that social media should be incorporated into the learning and teaching curriculum of tertiary institutions and a thorough analysis with clear guidelines should be carried out before the integration of the use of social media in academia. Junco, Elavsky and Heiberger's (2013) state that using social media in academic coursework should be mandatory to students in order to benefit students' academic achievement. Ivala and Gachago (2012) recommend that tertiary institutions and lecturers should be open to the idea of assimilating the use of social media in the syllabus of academic courses that lecturers teach and should view social media as a beneficial addition. Students will thereby improve their knowledge construction skills, as opposed to the traditional setting of receiving knowledge. Students' understanding of a particular topic discussed in an educational setting is also enhanced and it will allow students to be more academically engaged (Ivala and Gachago, 2012).

5.4.5 Using social media as a classroom extension

Ivala and Gachago (2012) endorse the point of view that the use of social media for academic purposes should be integrated as additional material to supplement existing ways of teaching and learning. Jabr (2011) expresses the need for creating an unrestricted learning platform that combines social media with traditional pedagogy practices. This will allow students to work together when working on assignments; to work on their problem solving skills; to take part in academic discussions and to look back on the progress that they have made while

engaging in academic activities (Jabr, 2011). Students from Madge's et al. (2009) express how social media could be used to manage the administrative matters of departments and to improve students' learning experience through engaging in academic activities. Mehmood and Taswir (2013) also suggest that students should be reminded that rules and regulations used in classroom interactions should equally apply when using social media.

5.4.6 Managing social media usage (pages, accounts and profiles)

Schlenkrich and Sewry (2012) disclose that there should be a distinction between social activities and academic activities on social media to ensure that academic work is completed before students engage in social activities. Abdulahi, Samadi and Gharleghi (2014) recommend that tertiary institutions should consider banning the use of social media for social purposes at times meant for academic engagement, and that it should be reserved for lunch breaks. Paul, Baker and Cochran's (2012) recommend lecturers to consider putting policies in place that restrict the use of mobile devices and computers and to allow them only when students engage in academic activities.

Ezeah, Asogwa and Obiorah (2013) recommend that tertiary institutions should put rules in place that govern the use of phones by students (who likely use their phones to access social media) during lectures and that punishment should be exercised for students that are found to break the rules. This is to ensure that students dedicate their time to their academic work while in educational lectures (Ezeah, Asogwa and Obiorah, 2013). Eke, Omekwu and Odoh (2014) suggest that tertiary institutions should sanction laws that prevent the use of phones by students to access social media during lectures and that offenders should be punished.

5.4.7 Computer and internet facilities

Students' engagement using social media was found to be dependent on the internet services provided by the tertiary institution, be it through the Wi-Fi connections, LAN connections or the availability of computers for students to use (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014). Students indicated that the faster the internet speed, the more they were motivated to use social media for academic purposes (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014). Schlenkrich and Sewry (2012) attest that a fast internet connection to a social network that is user-friendly and has a friendly graphical user interface, contributes to the successful use of social media in higher education.

Ranaweera, et. al. (2015) suggest that internet speed and network infrastructure should be improved in order for students to be encouraged to use social media increasingly for academic purposes. This will likely increase students' academic engagement and have a positive impact towards students' academic achievement (Ranaweera, et. al, 2015).

Ranaweera, et. al. (2015) further recommend tertiary institutions to create wireless internet hotspots on university grounds to allow students to easily access and use social media.

Ranaweera, et. al, (2015) also add that tertiary institutions should find a way to make laptops readily available to all their students. This will likely encourage students to be highly engaged with technology and social media. Mehmood and Taswir (2013) reveal that poor network connectivity and slow internet speeds may hinder the seamless communication of students' interaction with social media, which may have an undesirable impact on students' academic engagement.

5.4.8 Using a framework

To summarize some of the recommendations made regarding the use of social media in tertiary institutions, researchers such as Alhazmi and Rahman (2014) have proposed a framework that can be used as a useful tool to enhance students' academic engagement. Figure 5.1 shows the social media factors (content, privacy, interest) that may encourage students to dedicate more time and effort towards their academic studies. The factors are adapted from data collected by Alhazmi and Rahman's (2014) study. The diagram also shows the roles of different entities found (institutions, faculty, technology, peers) in tertiary institutions; the importance of these roles and the relationships that link the entities and factors (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014).

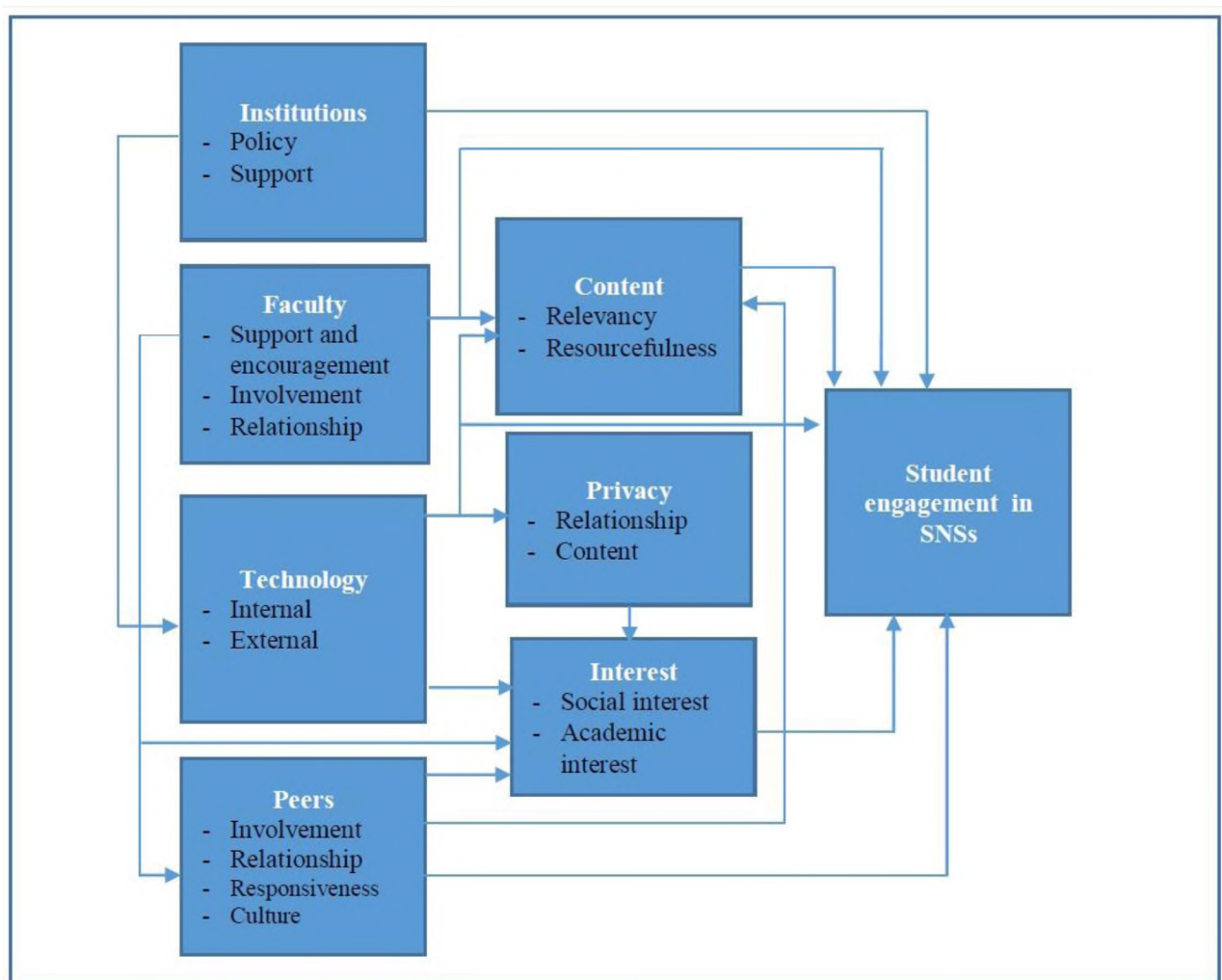


Figure 5.1: Framework of factors that may motivate student engagement in social networking sites (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014).

The author presumes that students would be more encouraged to use social media for academic purposes and will likely take the use of social media in academia more seriously

when policies are passed down by tertiary institution authorities. They must also know that tertiary institutions are actively involved in the implementation of social media in academia and that they can carry out their academic work in a safe virtual space. The author also concludes that policies may be helpful when it comes to protecting tertiary institutions against lawsuits and to ensure that the implementation of the use of social media is carried out legally.

5.5 Recommendations for social media sites developers

According to Alhazmi and Rahman (2014), some students reported that they would be encouraged to increase their use of social media for academic purposes and to enhance academic engagement if social media sites improved their features to suit teaching and learning, thereby enabling students to organize and retrieve data, look for content and enable the assessment of interactions on social media. Design aspects such as the graphical user interface, content management features, communication settings, uploading and downloading of audio and video features and privacy features are just some of the features students identified that, if improved, could encourage students' academic use of social media (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014).

Students also inferred that privacy settings on social media should be improved in order for students to engage freely on social media in educational activities (Alhazmi and Rahman, 2014). Schlenkrich and Sewry (2012) attest that privacy settings that protect information for the users of social networks contribute to the successful use of social media in tertiary institutions. Mehmood and Taswir (2013) reveal that social media has the potential and can be a valuable tool in improving academic engagement and achievement, provided that it is well designed and tailor-made to meet the educational requirements of students.

The author deduces that social media sites developers will need to make modifications and improve some features on social media sites, in order to make social media a conducive space to carry out academic work and to inevitably improve students' academic engagement.

5.6 Conclusion

The author derives conclusions from the reviewed literature on ways that can effectively be used to embrace the use of social media in tertiary institutions to benefit students' academic engagement. Literature began by providing recommendations for students. The highlight of these recommendations reveal that students also have an important role to play in using social media to benefit their academic engagement. Literature discloses that students will need to play an active role whilst using social media; they need to develop an ideal attitude towards the use of social media for academic purposes and they need to consider monitoring and security measures in order to enhance their academic engagement.

Looking at literature that provides recommendations for lecturers and faculties, researchers point out that lecturers and faculties also have a vital role to play when it comes to implementing the successful use of social media in tertiary institutions. Literature reveals that lecturers and faculties should uncover ways of effectively utilizing social media and should involve students in choosing the appropriate social media site used to improve students' academic engagement and, hopefully, their academic achievement. Literature also reveals

that lecturers ought to teach other lecturers and students how to use social media in order to enhance students' academic experience. Literature also encouraged lecturers and faculties to provide support to students through various ways (creating social media groups, incorporating LMS's) when using social media in order to motivate students. Literature further disclosed that lecturers should assess students and come up with guidelines on how to use social media effectively to enhance students' academic engagement.

Looking at literature that discusses recommendations for tertiary institutions, researchers acknowledge that tertiary institutions also have an important part to play in the successful implementation of social media in an academic space. Literature begins by recommending that tertiary institutions should encourage and supervise students and train all academic institution stakeholders on the use of social media for academic purposes. Tertiary institutions are also advised to implement policies and frameworks that assist with the successful implementation of social media in academia. Literature also recommends tertiary institutions to consider the improvement of internet facilities on campus, to make computers readily available to students and to ensure that class time is reserved only for academic work. Additional suggestions were made towards social media developers and what they will need to consider in order to make social media an ideal space for teaching and learning.

The author can conclude that a collective effort will be needed from the side of students, lecturers, faculties and tertiary institutions as a whole in order to ensure that social media is successfully implemented at tertiary level. These important entities (students, lecturers, faculties, tertiary institution) will still need to carry out their individual roles effectively regarding the use of social media in academia, in order to benefit students' academic engagement and achievement. Feedback and input from students, lecturers, faculties and tertiary institutions will also be needed and should be provided to social media developers in order to get external help to improve social media sites and to make them academically conducive for all entities to use.

Chapter 6

Research Method

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the author will discuss the research approach to be employed, the research design to be implemented, the methodology to be applied and ethical procedures to be considered and encountered. The research method chapter is divided into five sections, namely: Research approach, Research design, Methodology, Ethical procedures and Limitations.

In the research approach section, the author explains the interpretive approach that will be used in this study and explains what it entails. In the research design section, the author discusses the research techniques (namely: single case study and survey study) that will be employed in this study, the characteristics, and the strengths and weaknesses of the techniques. In the methodology section, the author discusses the research instruments (namely: interviews and questionnaires) that will be employed and the characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of the research instruments. The author also discusses what the interviewers will need to consider when using each research instrument and the author addresses, in respect of each instrument, how to generate a sample, how to collect and analyse data, and how to check for reliability and validity of the data gathered using the research instruments.

In the ethical procedures section, the author discusses the ethical measures that will need to be taken into consideration before, during and after data collection. The author explains the processes that may need to be followed for the study to be regarded ethically viable. In the limitations section, the author discusses delimitations that may affect the findings of the study and proposes recommendations that researchers may need to consider in their future work.

Throughout the research approach, design, and methodology discussed, the author explains why each technique that will be used, is suitable for this study. Using the appropriate research approach, design, and methodology will help to collect the necessary data that will assist the author to establish how students make use of social media, how the use of social media influences students' academic engagement and finding effective ways of using social media to benefit students' academic engagement.

6.2 Research approach

This study will be using an interpretive research approach. Interpretive research has become important and valid in the Information Systems (IS) field and is now a well-established part of the discipline (Klein and Myers, 1999; Walsham, 2006). Johari (2006) also states that interpretive research has been a prevalent approach of research for several IS researchers. Interpretive research approach places emphasis predominantly on respondents' interpretations and meanings (Walsham, 1995). Klein and Myers (1999) reveal that interpretive research in IS helps to understand people's opinions, in depth understanding and actions. Johari (2006) agrees by stating that interpretive research involves understanding the phenomenon of interest using a subjective approach, typically through participants' perceptions. Johari (2006)

further adds that the interpretivism approach allows researchers to be more interpretive and inductive in their studies, rather than aiming to approve or disapprove hypotheses. Since this study will be focused mainly on revealing students' perceptions on how social media affects students' academic engagement, literature suggests that an interpretive approach is the ideal research approach for this study.

6.2.1 The link between research approach, design and method

Johari (2006) also stated that an in depth research of a field study is the appropriate method for producing an interpretive understanding of a phenomenon, as it involves investigating people in their natural setting. Interpretive research commonly uses in-depth case study as a research design and uses interviews as an essential method of acquiring participants' perceptions on a particular topic of interest (Walsham, 1995; Walsham, 2006). This explains why the case study is the suitable research design and why conducting interviews is the suitable research method for this study.

Walsham (2006) further states that in an interpretive study, interviews should be supplemented by other forms of field data. Another form of data that can complement interviews and can be useful is surveys. Therefore, this justifies why surveys have been selected for this study as an appropriate research method to supplement the interviews. Both the research design and method will be discussed in depth in later sections.

6.3 Research designs

6.3.1 Research design: Case study

a) General discussion of the case study

Literature provides us with various explanations of what a case study entails. According to Myers (1997), a case study research method is suitable to carry out research in Information Systems (IS) as an academic discipline. Klein and Myers (1999) state that a case study is a form of enquiry that depends on data collected through questioning participants and through observations. Yin (1994) describes a case study as an in-depth experimental investigation that examines a particular phenomenon within its real-life setting, particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and setting are unclear. Walsham (1995) defines a case study as a research method that involves visiting a site of interest that is being examined over a period of time. Meredith (1998) reveals that a case study is an interpretivist research paradigm which can use qualitative or quantitative methodologies to help understand the phenomena of interest. Malhotra and Grover (1998) explain that a case study entails dealing with variables that are often not predefined, conducting in depth investigations of a phenomenon within its normal setting and dealing with the difficulty of generalizing findings.

The case study design is suitable for this study for a number of reasons: the topic of interest falls under the IS discipline, as stated before; the study will be using a qualitative interpretive approach; the study will be questioning participants to collect data and will be examining the

phenomenon of interest (influence of social media on students' academic engagement) in its real life setting.

b) Characteristics

There are a number of characteristics that help define a case study. Characteristics of a case study include allowing the researcher to examine important topics that are not easily covered by other research methods (Yin, 2003) and having various sources of data that are used in the triangulation process (Yin, 1994). Meredith (1998) reveals that the collection of multiple sources of data ensures that the information being gathered is actually accurate. Yin (2004) discloses that a case study method is best implemented when research plans on answering descriptive or research questions and aims to produce a first-hand understanding of people and events.

Mann (2003) discloses that a case study is feasible when a condition being studied is uncommon and when the projected outcome is rare. A case study is also used when research needs to answer a how or a why question, when the researcher has little control over the events and when the phenomenon is contemporary (Yin, 1994; 2009). In this case, the study focuses on answering how students make use of social media and how the use of social media influences students' academic engagement, which also makes the case study method appropriate to this research.

c) Strengths of a case study

There are cases where the case study design may be useful and ideal for investigating a particular phenomenon. Case studies are ideal when conducting research on contemporary events and phenomena that are not well understood and require clarity (Yin, 1994). Another advantage of case studies is the ability to deal with a variety of data from different sources such as interviews, observations and documents in comparison to other research designs (Yin, 1994). The case study design allows theories to be generated from data collected through observations and the phenomenon of interest can be examined in its natural setting (Ben Basat et al. 1987; in Meredith, 1998). Meredith (1998) discloses that case studies are suitable for testing prevailing theories in certain situations.

Another advantage is that the case study design allows the researcher to have a deep understanding of the whole phenomenon that is being studied (Benbasat et al., 1987; in Meredith, 1998). Iacono, Brown and Holtham (2011) concur by stating that the detailed and primary understanding of the phenomenon being studied in its natural setting is one of the strengths of case studies. Gable (1994) reveals that a case study provides the platform to ask in depth questions that help to understand the phenomena being studied. Gable (1994) also adds that case studies can provide significant understandings and findings which enhance discoverability and representability. Darke, Shanks and Broadbent (1998) concur by stating that the strength of the case study lies in the ability to explain the phenomena being studied based on the analysis of the data.

d) Weaknesses of a case study

There are concerns regarding the use of a case study strategy when conducting research. Yin (1994) mentions how case study design can yield biased points of view which affect the final results or conclusions. Mann (2003) concurs that biasness is the major problem with the case study control. Iacono, Brown and Holtham (2011) reveals that case studies lack the objective perspective and results tend to be subjective. This study therefore aims to collect data from a wide sample of students, using different data collection methods (online questionnaire and in depth interviews) as a way to guard against the biased views. The study will also collect data from students who are enrolled in different faculties, departments and study levels (undergraduate and postgraduate) to ensure that different perspectives are taken into consideration thus mitigating biasness.

Case studies are also not generalizable when it comes to populations; only when it comes to theoretical propositions (Yin, 1994). Iacono, Brown and Holtham (2011) also reveal that case studies are only generalizable when it comes to theoretical propositions and not to populations. Gable (1994) agrees by stating that deductions drawn from case studies may not be generalizable. Thus findings from this study will not be generalized to all universities in South Africa but data will be presented as a unique case study at Rhodes University.

Another concern is that case studies are quite lengthy, time consuming and yield a great number of unreadable documents (Yin, 1994). Meredith (1998) agrees by stating that case studies are time consuming and costly as a result of direct observation of a contemporary phenomenon. This study will use purposive sampling in order to choose a selected number of participants that are more likely to provide useful data in order to save time and for the case study to take up less time as possible.

Another downside of a case study is that it needs a number of entities, methods and tools to triangulate (Meredith, 1998). Meredith (1998) also reveals that case studies cannot be controlled and can present difficulties when it comes to context. Researchers have been found to fall short on the knowledge of case study procedures and the accuracy involved. Yin (1994) discloses that it is difficult to carry out good case studies and that it usually depends on the researcher's ability to conduct a good case study.

e) Types of case studies

Yin (1994) states that case studies can be divided into two different types, namely a single case study and multiple case studies. A single case study allows the researcher to dedicate a great deal of attention to a case being studied, while multiple cases allow the researcher to strengthen research outcomes (Yin, 2004). Yin (2009) reveals that single case studies are meant for critical, revelatory, typical, extreme or longitudinal cases, while multiple cases are meant for constructing frameworks that plan on replicating similar results from multiple cases or different results that are meant for theoretical reasons (Yin, 2009).

f) Choosing the appropriate case study: Single case study

A single case study design will be used for this study. This design is suitable for this study because the case being studied promises to be a revelatory case that plans on revealing new data in a relatively new setting and because no framework is being created (Yin, 1994; 2009). Specifically, a qualitative single case study design is the appropriate research design for this study as this study will collect qualitative data to investigate the perceptions of the influences of social media on students' academic engagement in tertiary institutions. Qualitative data reveals the point of view of participants on how they understand the phenomenon being studied (Iacono, Brown and Holtham, 2011). Generally, qualitative data is non-numerical data that is more focused on the meaning of the phenomenon than on the frequency (Yin, 2004; Iacono, Brown and Holtham, 2011).

6.3.2 Research Design: Survey Study

a) General discussion of the survey study

Another type of research design that will be used in this study is the survey study. Mathers, Fox and Hunn (2007) define a survey as a flexible research method that is used to examine various topics. Gable (1994) defines survey as a group of methods that collect data mainly through questionnaires or interviews and provides a snapshot of the phenomena at a particular point in time. Visser, Krosnick and Lavrakas (2000) describe a survey research as a method that includes the gathering of data from a sample drawn from a population. Pfleeger and Kitchenham (2001) describe survey study as a method for gathering data to define, explain or compare knowledge, behavior and attitudes of a population. Jansen (2010) attests by stating that a survey study comprises of studying and observing members of a population.

Kelley et. al. (2003) define the term survey as a strategy of choosing a sample from a population of interest, collecting data from respondents and deriving conclusions from the data. Malhotra and Grover (1998) explain that the survey involves the collection of data from a population. Bartlett, Kotrlík, and Higgins (2001) concur by stating that the collective objective of survey research is to gather information that represents a particular population. Malhotra and Grover (1998) add that the main purpose of survey research is to contribute to theory development. It is also important that aims and objectives of surveys are defined before a survey is conducted; this helps in outlining expected outcomes and acts as a guide (Pfleeger and Kitchenham, 2001).

The survey study will be suitable for this study because this study plans to collect data from a population of students. Literature also suggests that there are benefits in combining research designs. Survey studies are the most common research designs combined with case studies in information systems (Gable, 1994). The survey will thus be appropriate for this study mainly because it will be used as a complementary design to the case study.

b) Characteristics of surveys

Malhotra and Grover (1998) reveal that survey research has 3 different characteristics. The first one involves gathering data from people using various instruments (Malhotra and Grover, 1998). The second one involves using standardized data to explain and study relationships between variables (Malhotra and Grover, 1998 and Kelley et al., 2003). The third one involves collecting data from a sample of a population and using the findings from a sample to generalize back to the population (Malhotra and Grover, 1998). Surveys are particularly useful when using research designs that aim to describe reality (Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2007). Mathers, Fox and Hunn (2007) also disclose that surveys usually use questionnaires as instruments for data collection. Participants' behavior and attitudes are the main attributes that researchers look at when collecting information through a survey (Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2007).

c) Strengths of surveys

According to Mathers, Fox and Hunn (2007), surveys have a number advantages, including the facts that surveys are efficient in terms of recruiting participants and cost effective in terms of finding out about a samples' perceptions in order to draw up deductions. Wright (2005) concurs by stating that surveys save on costs. This is true particularly in respect of online surveys as the internet is used instead of paper. Surveys are also found to be flexible as they can seamlessly be used in conjunction with other research methods to yield richer data (Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2007). Surveys are also useful when it comes to recording a real life situation accurately, explaining relationships between variables and finding important outcomes (Gable, 1994). Kelley et. al. (2003) attest this by stating that one of the advantages of a survey is that it produces information based on empirical observations.

Surveys have an advantage when it comes to the geographical covering of a sample where participants are spread out, as they can still be included in the survey (Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2007). Wright (2005) concurs by reporting that surveys promote easy accessibility to people with different or common interests and in distant and different locations and makes it easy to contact participants that are otherwise difficult to reach. Kelley et. al. (2003) agree by stating that a survey is able to cover many people or events which makes it likely to yield information that provides a realistic representative of the sample chosen and allows the ability to generalize to the population to a certain extent. The survey outcomes reveal that the phenomenon being studied is usually sufficiently widespread to be ascertainable from the population, which increases the value of findings (Visser, Krosnick and Lavrakas, 2000).

The fact that data is collected in a way that saves time and effort in a survey also contributes to making data collection an easy process (Wright, 2005). Kelley et. al. (2003) agree with this by stating that surveys are able to yield a large amount of information at a fairly low cost and in a short period of time. This allows the researcher to plan the duration of the study and the required timeframe to provide the findings in advance (Kelley et al., 2003). Another advantage is that surveys can be validated both internally and externally and that the survey has an ethical advantage since participants are studied in a real world environment that they are familiar with (Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2007). Data collected by the survey research is used to generalize results taken from a sample (Bartlett, Kotrlik, and Higgins, 2001).

d) Weaknesses of surveys

According to Mathers, Fox and Hunn (2007), surveys are not so effective when it comes to answering the “why” questions, for instance why people behave in a certain way. Surveys are more focused on answering the “how” questions and thus are limited in this regard (Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2007). Kelley et al. (2003) disclose how the importance of information can be disregarded because the survey usually focuses on the population covered, rather than on the significance of the information obtained. The survey is also likely to produce information that lacks an in depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Kelley et al. 2003). This study will supplement the survey with in depth interviews in order to answer the “why” questions (why people behave a certain way). Interviews are also expected to provide an in depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied that surveys may not be able to provide.

The accuracy of the surveys is dependent on the sampling frame chosen. If there are complications with the sampling frame, the survey is likely be less accurate (Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2007). Wright (2005) reveals that surveys also have issues when it comes to choosing the size of the sample and the election of appropriate participants. Data collected in this study is expected to be accurate since this study will be using purposive sampling which involves choosing participants that are more likely to provide useful data (Bricki and Green, 2007). Another weakness is that interview surveys are only as effective as the interviewer who conducts the surveys. The biasness and errors of the interviewer are likely to affect the result of the survey (Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2007). This study will carry out a pilot study before the survey is officially sent out to the respondents to ensure that the survey is error free and the questions are clear.

Kelley et al. (2003) also revealed that it is generally difficult to control and obtain a high response rate from a survey. The survey will be sent out to departmental managers by the researcher and the departmental managers will send the survey out to the students. This is to ensure that the survey will get a high response as students are more likely to respond to a survey sent out by a person in authority that they trust. Surveys are also found to be inflexible when unforeseen discoveries are made during data collecting (Gable, 1994). This is because, once a survey is being conducted, it is difficult to reverse it because of implications that may be encountered (Gable, 1994).

e) Types of surveys

i) Exploratory and explanatory survey research

According to Malhotra and Grover (1998), there are two main types of survey research. The first one is exploratory research which involves understanding more and becoming acquainted with the phenomenon being studied. The second one is explanatory research which involves finding causal relationships between variables and provides information to test hypothesis (Malhotra and Grover, 1998 and Kelley et al. 2003). Gable (1994) reveals that a survey aims to discover common relationships in order to be able to generalize the findings

from the phenomena being studied. This study will carry out an explanatory survey research that aims to investigate and explain the relationship between social media and its impact on student's academic engagement.

ii) Cross-sectional and longitudinal survey designs

According to Mathers, Fox and Hunn (2007) there are two types of survey designs that are grouped according to the duration of conducting the survey: cross-sectional (descriptive) and longitudinal (analytical) surveys. Cross sectional surveys are conducted to determine the frequency of people who have certain behaviors or attitudes and allow the assessment of relationships between variables (Visser, Krosnick and Lavrakas, 2000). Malhotra and Grover (1998) describe cross-sectional survey as a design that involves gathering data from a sample in order to represent the population. Kelley et. al. (2003) define cross sectional survey as a type of investigation that observes a certain type of phenomenon at a single point in time. The objective is to describe certain relationships between certain events, behaviors, attitudes and knowledge of a specific population (Kelley et al., 2003).

Longitudinal surveys involve studying and collecting data on a phenomenon that changes over a period of time (Malhotra and Grover, 1998). Kelley et. al. (2003) define longitudinal study as an investigation that aims at analyzing data (collected from a single sample or multiple samples) at multiple points in time by looking at how variables affect each other. This study will be using a cross sectional survey, due to time and the phenomenon of interest and aims to explore a sample groups' attitudes or behavior at that particular time; certainly not for months or years like in longitudinal survey (Visser, Krosnick and Lavrakas, 2000; Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2007).

iii) Supervised and semi supervised survey

Pfleeger and Kitchenham (2001) disclose that surveys can also be classified as supervised or semi supervised. Supervised surveys involve the researcher directly ensuring that the respondents understand each question in the survey and provide answers thereto (Pfleeger and Kitchenham, 2001). In a semi supervised survey, the researcher explains the aim and format of the survey and allows the respondents to provide answers or information on their own (Pfleeger and Kitchenham, 2001). A combination of both will be used in this study. The supervised survey will be used for interviews where the interviewer needs to particularly ensure that every question is understood and answered, while the semi supervised survey will be used for questionnaires where the respondents will be given the freedom to provide the answers.

f) Choosing the appropriate survey study: Internet based survey

i. Internet based survey

An internet based survey may be suitable to use for this study, considering that it is likely to save time and will be cost effective. The topic of interest (social media) is an internet based

platform and it thus makes sense to carry the survey on an internet platform. A link to a website or to a web based survey containing the questionnaire will be sent to respondents by email or social media messages.

i. Strengths for an internet based survey

The advantage is that a web survey has the ability to integrate visuals (images and videos) and sounds in the data collection instrument seamlessly (Fricker Jr. and Schonlau, 2002). A web survey is easy and cheap to conduct, quick to carry out, saves distributing and follow up time, is likely to produce a higher response rate when compared to other types of surveys and provides a user-friendly interface for respondents (Fricker Jr. and Schonlau, 2002). Zhang (1998) particularly points out that internet-based surveys' advantage is that they are less prone to errors as they are carefully pre-coded and results produced are in electronic format, which also makes the data reliable.

ii. Weaknesses for an internet based survey

In contrast, researchers should keep in mind that web surveys require more pilot testing to ensure that the questions can yield the desired data and that the survey program being used, works appropriately on various hardware and software platforms (Fricker Jr. and Schonlau, 2002). Zhang (2000) discloses how internet-based surveys, in particular, are likely to select biased samples and are likely to get biased results. This can affect the generalizability of the findings of the chosen sample or population (Zhang, 2000). Respondents may find it difficult to access the internet, to use the survey software or to receive the survey; thereby affecting the accessibility to the survey itself (Zhang, 2000). Other issues that affect internet based surveys include participants being unfamiliar with internet based surveys compared to traditional surveys, self-selected participants' issues, multiple responses from the same participants, difficulty determining the sample size and researchers requiring more practical expertise to conduct internet based surveys (Zhang, 2000).

ii. Involvement of the researcher

There are two ways in which a researcher can be involved in a research study: either as an outside researcher or as an involved researcher (Walsham, 1995; Walsham, 2006). In this study the author will act as an outside researcher, this is a researcher who does not get directly involved in providing the data needed, but rather relies on conducting formal interviews and generating the relevant data from participants (Walsham, 1995; Walsham, 2006). An involved researcher is more of a participant-observer or action-researcher who is actively engaged in the generating of data (Walsham, 2006).

The advantage of the outside researcher is that, because the researcher is not heavily involved in a single study, time is saved and can be utilized to conduct more investigations (Walsham, 2006). Additionally, respondents are more likely to express themselves in an honest manner and the researcher is likely to have an objective approach to respondents' views (Walsham, 1995; Walsham, 2006). Since time and getting honest opinions from respondents are two

important aspects of this study, and considering that the sole purpose of this research is to obtain objective perceptions from students, conducting this study as an outside researcher seems justifiable.

6.4 Methodology

a) Research Instruments

In this section, the author will be discussing the two research instruments that will be used for this study namely interviews (primary data collection method) and online questionnaire/survey (secondary data collection method). The first phase of the data collection process will be to distribute an online questionnaire/survey to the respondents. The purpose will be to get an overarching view of students' perceptions on the use of social media and its impact on students' academic engagement. The data/results collected will be used as an information basis to compile a relevant interview guide for the interviews aimed at the collection of primary data. The second phase of the data collection process will involve conducting semi structured in-depth interviews with students in order to probe into interesting themes that may have resulted from the online questionnaire/survey. Both the online questionnaire/survey and the semi structure in-depth interviews will be piloted to ensure that the questions are capable of obtaining relevant information.

6.4.1 Research instrument: Interviews

DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) reveal that interviews are one of the most common methods for collecting qualitative data. Interviews can either be used to obtain perceptions and attitudes on a particular topic or can be used to gather background data on a particular topic of interest (Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2007; Harrell and Bradley, 2009). Conducting interviews is a way of finding out and revealing other people's views and understandings of the phenomenon being studied (Stake, 1995). DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) agree by stating that interviews allow the researcher to get to know the respondents better, discover respondents' point of views in order to understand, generate or test hypotheses. Walsham (1995) states that interviews allow the researcher access to participants' interpretations and perceptions regarding the activities and events which have taken place. Since this research will be collecting qualitative data in the shape of students' perceptions, views or attitudes, interviews are the ideal choice. The researcher will choose to elect at least ten key informants for interviews from various faculties.

a) Choosing the appropriate type of interviews

i. In depth interviews and group interviews

An individual in-depth interview investigates and covers deep personal and social matters, while a group interview provides a less in-depth, wider perception of a particular topic (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Researchers conducting in-depth interviews try to formulate meaning of the phenomenon being studied based on participants' point of views

and experiences (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). The aim of individual in-depth interviews is to ensure that research questions are addressed. Research questions are likely to change over a period of time as more interviews are carried out (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Questions that are found to be irrelevant and not providing sufficient information are likely to be left out and relevant questions are likely to be added (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). This study will be using individual in-depth interviews as the study aims to determine participants' points of view and have an in depth understanding of students' perceptions on how social media influences their academic engagement.

ii. Structured, Semi structured and unstructured interviews

According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) there are three different types of interviews, namely: structured, semi structured and unstructured interviews. Quantitative data usually uses structured interviews while qualitative data usually uses unstructured and semi-structured interviews (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured in-depth interviewing is the most common interviewing method used when conducting qualitative research and is usually conducted on a group of people or individuals (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Barriball and While (1994) disclose that semi-structured interviews are suited to establish participants' opinions on a particular subject and allows the enquiry and clarification of information. This study will be focusing on collecting qualitative data and determining participants' opinions. Literature suggests that semi structured interviews will be suitable for this study.

b) General discussion of semi structured interviews

i. Characteristics of semi structured interviews

Cohen and Crabtree (2006) describe three characteristics of semi structured interviews, the first one involves the interviewer and respondents engaging in an interview. The second one involves the interviewer coming up with an interview guide (with questions and topics to cover) and using it in an interview (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006; Harrell and Bradley, 2009). The third one involves the interviewer following the guide when conducting the interview and also following any theme that arises that may not necessarily follow the guide, but may be relevant to the research (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). Observation, informal and unstructured interviews are conducted before formal interviews are carried out in order for researchers to better understand the topic being studied and to assist in the development of meaningful semi structured interview questions (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006).

Semi-structured interviews consist of pre-determined open ended questions and other questions that may arise during the interview (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006; Van Teijlingen, 2014). Harrell and Bradley (2009) and Van Teijlingen (2014) reveal that the researcher gets to decide the order and wording of questions, which questions to include and which ones to exclude in a semi structured interview. Open ended questions in a semi structured interview allow the interviewer to have a new understanding and to probe deeply into the topic of interest (Van Teijlingen, 2014). In semi-structured interviews, participants

are asked similar questions within a flexible specified framework and they are encouraged to share their experiences by answering open ended questions (Dearnley, 2005; Van Teijlingen, 2014). Questions are formed in a way that allows new concepts to arise and encourages detailed data to be collected from conversations held (Dearnley, 2005; Harrell and Bradley, 2009).

ii. Strengths of semi structured interviews

One of the benefits of semi structured interviews is that respondents are allowed to express their points of view on them understand or feelings about the topic of interest (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). Van Teijlingen (2014) reveals that semi structured interviews are appropriate to determine respondents' beliefs, values, motives and attitudes. Semi structured interviews are also known to provide trustworthy and comparable qualitative data (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). Van Teijlingen (2014) agrees by stating that semi structured questions are likely to yield valid and truthful data. Respondents are also more likely to answer every question asked in semi structured interviews which is likely to increase the response rate (Van Teijlingen, 2014). Another benefit of semi structured interviews is the ability of researchers to prepare the interview questions in advance which allows researcher to be prepared and competent when conducting the interview (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006).

iii. Weaknesses of semi structured interviews

Van Teijlingen (2014) discloses that respondents are likely to have difficulties interpreting questions and the meaning thereof. Respondents that wish not to give their opinions may not be represented and semi structured interviews pose a threat of invading participants' privacy (Van Teijlingen, 2014). The interviewers' biasness has a likelihood of affecting the responses of participants (Van Teijlingen, 2014).

To mitigate against the weaknesses of the semi structured interviews, the author will ensure that interview questions are clear by using basic terms that are understandable to participants. Participants will also be allowed to ask questions if the questions are not clear or do not understand the meaning of the questions. To protect the participants' privacy, participants will need sign the consent form that vows to keep participants' opinions confidential. To guard against interviewer biasness, the interviewer will transcribe verbatim all participants' responses in order to validate the responses.

c) General discussion of conducting interviews

i. Considerations for interviews

Initial considerations

Researchers should regulate the time while conducting interviews and inform the participants about confidentiality and the purpose of the interview beforehand (Walsham, 2006). It is

advisable to carry out a pilot test of the interview questions in advance to ensure that the interviewer needs only to listen, take notes and stay in charge of the data collection process at the time of the actual interview (Stake, 1995). It is important for the researcher to have a well-planned strategy on conducting interviews and to ensure asking the right questions (Stake, 1995). Interviews conducted in a case study are supposed to yield different experiences and explanations about a certain topic and the researcher is expected to ensure that the respondents are familiar with the questions in the interview (Stake, 1995).

Training

Van Teijlingen (2014) recommends that researchers should be trained to carry out interviews and must be able to explain the data collection process. Harrell and Bradley (2009) advise that interviewers should be trained and ensure that they are well equipped with interviewing and note taking skills. Training provided to researchers allows the interviewer to develop an understanding and competence of the subject being studied and to cultivate an awareness of faults and prejudices that may be encountered in the near future (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006; Van Teijlingen, 2014).

Interview questions

Stake (1995) also advises that when conducting the interviews, the interviewer should keep in mind the most important questions and ask additional questions when in need of clarification. Researchers conducting IS studies are advised not to pressure participants into answering questions when carrying out interpretive interviews (Walsham, 2006). The interviewer is also expected to keep record of the interview and to understand what participants' reveal from their responses (Stake, 1995). Researchers should also keep in mind that they might be expected to provide feedback to the participants at the conclusion of the study (Walsham, 2006).

Building a relationship

DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) advise interviewers to develop a relationship based on trust and respect with the respondents. This allows respondents to express themselves freely and to disclose as much information required as possible. A trust relationship formed between the interviewer and interviewees enhances the quality of data collected (Dearnley, 2005; Van Teijlingen, 2014). Harrell and Bradley (2009) recommend that interviewers should deal with consent, anonymity and confidentiality with the participants before commencing the actual interview. Walsham (2006) agrees by stating that it is important for researchers to offer confidentiality and anonymity to respondents taking part in the interpretive research. Interviewers should also be alert for clues from participants' interviews, should avoid giving advice or passing judgment during interviews and allow the respondents to express themselves and ask more questions when the need for understanding new emerging themes arises (Dearnley, 2005; Van Teijlingen, 2014).

Venue and attire

Harrell and Bradley (2009) advise interviewers to take into consideration that the location of the interview is essential. Practicalities of conducting interviews include making sure that the venue in which interviews will be conducted is comfortable, quiet and relaxing for participants (Dearnley, 2005; Harrell and Bradley, 2009). Interviewers should consider the privacy, seating arrangements and the availability of refreshments at the venue (Dearnley, 2005). Another practical matter to consider is the dress code chosen by the interviewer. Dressing formally is perceived as intimidating and may affect the interaction between the interviewer and the respondents (Dearnley, 2005). Harrell and Bradley (2009) recommend that the interviewer should dress appropriately depending on the setting and the respondents that he/she will be dealing with.

Recording

Interviewers may also need to consider recording (audio or video) the interview. The advantages of recorded interviews are that factual and valid data is obtained and that the actual interview can be referred back to, as opposed to obtaining data from written notes only (Walsham, 2006). Disadvantages of recorded interviews include that interviews are time consuming and may become expensive when carrying out data analysis (transcribing and identifying themes). There is a possibility that respondents may not be truthful or hold back when being recorded. Recording may also miss important data because nonverbal data cannot be recorded (Walsham, 1995; Walsham, 2006).

Time

Usually, a semi structured in-depth interview takes anything between half an hour to several hours and is conducted only once with a group of people or an individual (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Dearnley (2005) reveals how important time is when conducting interviews and suggests that interviews should ideally last one to two hours. Nastasi (1998) suggests that interviews for at least ten people should last one to two hours. This study plans on interviewing at least ten students from different faculties at Rhodes University and may take at least half an hour to an hour to interview each student.

ii. Sampling for interviews

Harrell and Bradley (2009) recommend that when it comes to sampling, interviewers should validate and identify the important research questions to be asked, find suitable sources that are likely to provide appropriate information and work out the number of participants that may need to be interviewed. According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) researchers should keep in mind that participants being interviewed should share similar characteristics that are relevant to the research questions.

Choosing participants for in-depth interviews should be done in a purposeful manner to ensure that in depth and detailed data is collected (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Data can also be enriched by conducting more interviews, carrying out initial data analysis and

getting more respondents to answer new developing questions (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Nastasi (1998) revealed that the general rule when interviewing key respondents (as in this case) is to interview at least five people. This study has chosen to interview at least ten students from different faculties at Rhodes University.

iii. Data collection for interviews

Cohen and Crabtree (2006) recommend that researchers should follow the interview guide when collecting data for interviews. Rabionet (2011) discloses that interviews can be recorded by taking notes during and after the interview or by audio or video recording. The most practiced method of recording interviews is using a tape recorder (audio recording) It is essential to utilize high quality tape recordings to avoid encountering research issues in the future (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006; Rabionet, 2011). Researchers should ensure that permission is given by the respondents before recording the interviews and the interviewer should not assume that approval is granted by the participants (Harrell and Bradley, 2009; Van Teijlingen, 2014). The interviewer should also make sure that the participants answer every question in the interview and should probe for more information if needed (Harrell and Bradley, 2009).

Interviewers are encouraged to ensure that they have the necessary equipment available, such as tape recorders and a backup power source and to ensure that valuable data is captured (Dearnley, 2005). It is important for researchers to practice the use of a tape recorder before conducting interviews and to ensure that recorded data is safeguarded or deleted once the data analysis has been completed (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). It is also essential for interviewers to return interview records to interviewees in order for the latter to approve the data they have provided and to allow them to remove statements that they are not happy with (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).

An audio tape ensures that information is captured correctly and helps to validate the correctness and completeness of the data from interviews (Barriball and While, 1994). Cohen and Crabtree (2006) advise researchers to record interviews with a tape recorder in order to ensure that both discussions that follow the interview guide and those that deviate therefrom are captured. Tape recording is regarded as appropriate when it comes to collecting less confidential data, and predominantly so when the interview is collecting data that is hard to capture through the taking of notes only (Walsham, 1995). Cohen and Crabtree (2006) discourage researchers from taking notes during interviews as opposed to using a tape recorder, because the taking down of notes may result in an ineffective data collection process. Harrell and Bradley (2009) reveal that it is advisable for interviewers to take notes since tapes may not be able to record all the data. Walsham (1995) disclose that taking notes can be used as a substitute for recordings or can be used simultaneously with recordings; either during interviews or thereafter.

Dearnley (2005) also adds that the interview process may need to be piloted in order to reflect or give a projection of what will happen in reality and researchers should keep in mind that it may take four to five hours to transcribe an hour of interview recording. This study will use a tape recorder to conduct individual in-depth interviews and the data will then be transcribed into information that is easily understood.

iv. Data Analysis for interviews

Ways of analyzing data

There are two ways of analyzing data, namely deductive and inductive analysis (Harrell and Bradley, 2009). Deductive analysis involves the researcher confirming information by finding answers to the research questions and finding data that will help to prove or disprove previously projected hypotheses (Harrell and Bradley, 2009). Inductive analysis involves the researcher exploring the data to find relationships between certain themes that the interviewer could not foresee before conducting the interview (Harrell and Bradley, 2009). This study will be taking an inductive analysis approach as the author will have to explore the relationship between themes that emerge from the interviews about the use of social media and its influence on students' academic engagement.

General recommendations

Van Teijlingen (2014) discloses that interviews that are recorded will need to be transcribed. Dearnley (2005) encourages researchers to transcribe their own interviews. This assists researchers to exhaustively understand the data collected, to deal with confidentiality and ethical issues and it is beneficial in the long run. Professional help for transcribing should be taken into consideration when the researcher stumbles upon time and research skills related issues (Dearnley, 2005).

Data analysis should be conducted simultaneously with data collection so that the researcher can form an understanding of the information provided by respondents. The information obtained from one interview can be of assistance when it comes to choosing a sample and deciding on questions to be asked in the next interview (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Qualitative data should be analyzed thoroughly to fully understand the data collected and to provide a clear understanding of the topic of interest (Harrell and Bradley, 2009). The concurrent data collection and analysis process eventually reach a saturation point when no new themes occur and this indicates that the data collection is complete (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).

Data analysis software

Software such as Atlas.ti can be used to support data analysis and transcribing or coding digital parts of the data collected from interviews (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Atlas.ti is recognized as a software tool that is suitable for analyzing qualitative data. The author has also attended a training course on the use thereof, and it thus makes sense that Atlas.ti will be used to analyze data collected from this study.

v. Reliability and Validity of data from interviews

Barriball and While (1994) reveal that the credibility of the research process depends on both the reliability and the validity of the study. Poor responses, in particular, have the ability to affect the validity of data collected (Barriball and While, 1994). A wide selection of participants is likely to improve the representation of respondents in a sample and the validity of the results (Barriball and While, 1994). Researchers' friendly approach towards respondents can also enhance the reliability and validity of the data (Barriball and While, 1994).

6.4.2 Research instrument: Questionnaires

A questionnaire is a data collection method that provides results for a survey and forms the basis of a survey study (Krosnick and Presser, 2010). Kelley et. al. (2003) describe a questionnaire as a method that involves distributing questions to a large sample of a population, covering a vast topographical area. Mathers, Fox and Hunn (2007) disclose that questionnaires are suitable and cheaper when it comes to collecting data from a large sample that is widely spread out. Visser, Krosnick and Lavrakas (2000) agree that questionnaire surveys are usually cheaper and take up less time compared to interview surveys. Kephart and Bressler (1958) also state that the questionnaire can be acquired faster, which saves time, and they are cheaper to carry out compared to other research instruments. In a questionnaire all questions are asked in the same way for the whole sample chosen beforehand. This allows the data collected to be comparable within the same dataset (Bird, 2009).

The questionnaire will be suitable for this study considering that it falls under the survey research design. The author has considered saving time and costs, as well as the number of respondents scheduled to be questioned. The number of students scheduled to respond to questionnaires is at least sixty, ten from each faculty at Rhodes University. Findings from the questionnaires will be compared to findings from the interviews to find common themes that may arise.

a) Considerations for questionnaires

Generating questions

Krosnick and Presser (2010) recommend that researchers should evaluate questions from previous surveys conducted in similar studies before drawing up a new questionnaire. This is relevant to this study as this study will look at questionnaires from previous studies and choose questions that are appropriate to this study. By replicating the same questions, the possibility of comparing findings from previous studies with findings from a newly conducted study, is created (Krosnick and Presser, 2010). Questionnaires that have already been developed have a greater chance of being efficient as they might have been proficiently created and tested out (Krosnick and Presser, 2010). Mathers, Fox and Hunn (2007) agree by stating that the advantage of pre-existing questionnaires is that they have already been validated and tested for reliability. They may also have yielded data that can be used to compare with current results. Therefore, there is no need for researchers to come up with a

wholly new questionnaire while they can use existing material made available to them (Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2007; Krosnick and Presser, 2010).

Researchers' consideration

Researchers should consider whether the questionnaire will be completed by respondents or the interviewer; the education level of the respondents; the number of respondents and interviewers available; the estimated response rate and the subject and population of interest (Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2007). When it comes to drawing up questionnaires, Krosnick and Presser (2010) suggest that researchers should use simple and familiar words and simple grammar. Researchers should also avoid using words with vague meanings and should use words that are clear and specific (Kelley et al., 2003; Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2007; Krosnick and Presser, 2010). Kelley et al. (2003) advise researchers to avoid using two or more questions in one that may be confusing to participants. Researchers should also make questionnaire response choices as thorough and specific as possible and should avoid questions that lead respondents to the answer. Researchers should also ask one thing at a time and avoid questions with contradicting propositions (Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2007).

Ordering of questions

Aspects related to the ordering of questions in a questionnaire include starting with easy questions to understand and answer; ensuring that questions at the beginning of the questionnaire clearly address the subject matter of the survey and grouping together questions that address the same subject (Visser, Krosnick and Lavrakas, 2000, Krosnick and Presser, 2010). Questions addressing the same subject should initially enquire in general and then move on to the specifics. Questions covering a sensitive topic that might make respondents uneasy should be positioned at the end of the questionnaire. Questions should be filtered to ensure that they are relevant to respondents (Krosnick and Presser, 2010).

Pilot testing

It is advisable to carry out a pretest or a pilot test of the questionnaires before actually conducting the survey (Krosnick and Presser, 2010). Pretesting of a questionnaire allows respondents to better understand the questions and to make sure that questions included in a questionnaire are not misinterpreted (Visser, Krosnick and Lavrakas, 2000; Visser et al., 2013). Pilot testing is carried out to test the potential value of the questionnaire in yielding relevant and useful data needed for the study (Bird, 2009). Pretesting of a questionnaire also has the ability to provide estimations of the response rate, period of duration and the costs involved (Visser, Krosnick and Lavrakas, 2000; Visser et al., 2013). Pilot testing also helps to identify errors and to rectify the defects in the questionnaire (Bird, 2009). Researchers should also keep in mind that questionnaires should also not be too long and that completion thereof should not take up too much time (Bird, 2009).

b) Types of questionnaires: Structured and semi structured questionnaires

Mathers, Fox and Hunn (2007) define a structured questionnaire as a questionnaire that consist in majority of closed questions and pre-defined answers while semi structured questionnaires are questionnaires that consist in majority of open ended questions which aim to find out more details about a certain topic. The data collected in the latter case is usually difficult to analyse and compare.

c) Types of questions: Open ended and closed questions

There are a number of ways of setting up a questionnaire survey. Researchers can set up the questionnaire with either open or closed questions (Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2007; Krosnick and Presser, 2010).

Open ended questions

Open questions refer to questions that allow respondents to answer in their own words (Krosnick and Presser, 2010; Visser et. al., 2013). Kelley et. al. (2003) describe open questions as questions that allow respondents to come up with their own responses. Mathers, Fox and Hunn (2007) also define open-ended questions as questions that do not limit respondents to a set of answers and that allow the respondents to interpret the questions in their own way. Open questions yield clear and precise responses from the respondents, which then provide an in depth understanding and meaning to the topic of interest (Bird, 2009).

Closed questions

Closed questions refer to questions that request respondents to choose an answer from a set of options provided (Krosnick and Presser, 2010; Visser et. al., 2013). Mathers, Fox and Hunn (2007) describe closed questions as pre-coded questions with predefined answers which limit respondents to a set of answers. Kelley et. al. (2003) define closed questions as questions to which answers are made available as options for respondents to choose from. Bird (2009) states that closed questions yield data that can easily be summarized and can be represented clearly. Mathers, Fox and Hunn (2007) further add that questionnaires can be partially pre-coded, whereby questions are made up of both predefined answers and open-ended questions, making it flexible and providing the respondents with a variety of response options.

It will be suitable for this study to use both open ended and closed questions; taking into account the advantages that come with the of using both type of questions. It is projected that open ended questions will allow participants to interpretively express themselves and closed questions may help to answer straight forward questions that do not need excessive explanations, taking up less time. This study will be using a semi structured questionnaire since the questionnaire will consist of both closed and open ended questions.

d) Data analysis for questionnaires

Response rate

The biggest challenge is the analyzing of the data collected from questionnaires (Visser, Krosnick and Lavrakas, 2000). Bird (2009) discloses that the researcher should deal with the response rate of the questionnaires before actually analyzing the data. A low response rate can be dealt with by training interviewers effectively, distributing out more questionnaires, conducting call backs for interviewees and using interpreters (Bird, 2009).

Coding

Bird (2009) states that questionnaires can be coded in three different ways, pre-coded (coded before questionnaire is conducted), field coded (coded while questionnaire is being carried out) or office coded (coded after questionnaire has been finalized). Visser, Krosnick and Lavrakas (2000) recommend that researchers should group answers collected from open ended questions in categories and come up with coding techniques when analyzing data. It is easier to analyze data collected from questionnaires with closed questions as respondents are required to code themselves in categories set up by the researchers (Visser, Krosnick and Lavrakas, 2000). Coding when working with qualitative data helps to classify data which will assist with the retrieval of data later on (Bird, 2009).

Quality checks of data

Researchers should prepare data by carrying out continuous and cross data quality checks (Bird, 2009). It is essential for the researchers to also check for errors and typos when entering data into a computer (Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2007). After data has been checked, revised, coded and entered, data analysis can be carried out through manual or electronic means (Bird, 2009). Analyzing data will reach a stage where datasets collected from different methods will need to be compared to identify similar themes. This process is known as triangulation (Bird, 2009). For this study, data will be taken from interviews, questionnaires and literature as different sources of data. The data will then be compared to each other to carry out the triangulation technique.

e) Reliability and validity of data from questionnaires

Reliability can be tested by checking whether the same findings are obtained by repeating the same questions (Bird, 2009). The reliability and the validity of the data produced by the questionnaire also depend on the design of the questionnaire (Bird, 2009). In order to achieve both reliability and validity, the questions included in the questionnaire need to be simple, short, should relatively speak to the sample or population of interest and should not be double barreled (Bird, 2009).

6.5 Ethical procedures

The author will need to apply for ethical clearance from the Rhodes Ethics committee. The author will have to complete a formal application form and provide information required, such as consent forms and the research methodology (Ru.ac.za, 2016). The ethical clearance committee is responsible for the reviewing of the research proposals, which ensures that the research activities carried out involving human beings are carried out in a responsible manner and adheres to the ethical principles (Ru.ac.za, 2016). Since this study will be using humans, particularly students, as research subjects, the author will need to get approval from the Director of Student Affairs to be allowed to use students as participants (Ru.ac.za, 2016). Researchers should also remember that ethics approval must be obtained before any data is collected (Ru.ac.za, 2016).

The main purpose of ethics is to minimize the dangers of harming and causing discomfort to participants, because any research conducted on human beings may affect their social, intellectual and physical being (Ru.ac.za, 2016). Researchers should also keep in mind that the research must be designed in a manner that keeps the risk of potential harmful impact to a minimum. The ethics application must provide convincing reasons regarding this aspect (Ru.ac.za, 2016). The benefits of the research also have to overshadow the risks involved; otherwise the research will be ruled as unethical (Ru.ac.za, 2016). Properly designed research stands a better chance of proving that the benefits outweigh the risks; thus the importance of the methodology of the research in this case (Ru.ac.za, 2016).

6.6 Ethical issues

Harm to respondents

Researchers should take into consideration the ethical and moral issues that come with conducting research (Rabionet, 2011). Ethical issues revealed by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) that researchers have to consider, include trying to lessen the risk of unexpected harm aimed at respondents; trying to lessen the risk of manipulating respondents; notifying respondents about the nature of the study to be conducted and guarding the information collected from respondents. The researcher will have to consider the respondents' reactions to revealing personal information as it may result in unexpected harm to them (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006; Harrell and Bradley, 2009).

Anonymity

The other issue to consider is that respondents' information and identity should remain anonymous, confidential and should be guarded (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006; Harrell and Bradley, 2009). Dearnley (2005) suggests that respondents should be allowed to use aliases to protect their identities when taking part in interviews. Participants are likely to be more open and co-operative during interviews when they know that their identities are protected (Dearnley, 2005).

Informing participants

Another concern is the prerequisite of informing participants about the objectives of the study and what the study entails (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Researchers are encouraged to inform participants that they have a right to stop taking part in the study at any stage (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Harrell and Bradley (2009) suggest that researchers have a responsibility to inform the respondents that they have the choice to participate in the research or not and that they also have the choice to decide which questions to answer and which ones they want to leave out. The other factor that researchers need to consider is that respondents should not be taken advantage of for interviewers' personal gain and should be fittingly rewarded for their efforts (Harrell and Bradley, 2009).

6.7 Limitations, delimitations and future research

There are a number of limitations and delimitations that may need to be considered that are relevant to this study. One delimitation of this study is that it will be focusing on investigating only two prominent social media sites used in academic institutions, namely Facebook and Twitter. Results from this study may not apply to uses of other social media sites. Delimitations also include the focus of the study. The study will be investigating students' perceptions only (regarding the impact of social media on students' academic engagement) and will not focus on other entities' (such as lecturers and other academic staff members) perceptions. Future research may want to look at lecturers' and academic staffs' perceptions towards the use of social media in tertiary institutions in South Africa. Another delimitation is that the study will focus only on the impact of social media on students' academic engagement and not on their academic performance or social engagement. Future research may look at how social media influences students' academic performance or social engagement at tertiary institutions in South Africa.

Since this study will be using a single case study, cross case analysis will not be possible and the scope of generalizing and validating the results may be limited to a certain extent and may be an issue. Findings from this study (recommendations for the effective use of social media to enhance students' academic engagement in tertiary institutions) may turn out to be applicable to only red cluster tertiary institutions that may be similar in calibre to Rhodes University. Another limitation is that, since semi structured interviews will be used, it will not be possible to formulate a theory. The author also presumes that the exclusion of other official South African languages by presenting the internet based survey in English only, may present as another limitation.

A narrow sample of the overall student population at Rhodes University may not necessarily be a representation of blue and green cluster tertiary institutions in South Africa. Repeatability may also be an issue and future research may need to be modified in order to be able to replicate this study at blue and green cluster tertiary institutions in South Africa. Diversity of faculties may also be a limitation, since Rhodes University has few faculties from which to choose the sample of students. Future research may want to repeat the same study at a tertiary institution with more faculties to choose the sample of students from, because findings may vary.

Methodological limitations, such as difficulty in controlling the self-selection biasness of the sample of interest, may also be an issue, because participants will be volunteering for the study (Chen and Bryer, 2012; Fagioli, Rios-Aguilar and Deil-amen's, 2014). Another limitation that may arise is that it may be difficult to determine the degree of trustworthiness of the data by comparing it to other data collection methods such as observation, because all data to be collected will be self-reported data from participants (students) (Fagioli, Rios-Aguilar and Deil-amen's, 2014). The lack of using existing already tested out frameworks specific to the use of social media and its impact on students' academic engagement, may also be another limitation.

The author may need to consider placing constraints on the sample size by making it as small and convenient as possible. This is because factors, such as time to complete the study, may be an issue (Bynum 2011). Future studies with more time to be conducted may survey large groups of students, lecturers and relevant tertiary institutional staff. Future research could carry out face to face interviews and questionnaires on a larger scale to replicate or validate this study (Bynum 2011). This research will be conducted at local level (South Africa) and will be representative of a local red cluster tertiary institution and its culture, namely Rhodes University. Thus the location from which the sample will be generated and where the research will be carried out will be a limitation on its own.

6.8 Conclusion

The author concludes by reviewing what has been discussed in this chapter. The chapter began by introducing the research approach that will be used for this study, namely the interpretive approach. The interpretive approach seeks to determine people's opinions, beliefs and attitudes towards the topic of interest. This makes it a suitable approach for this study, since the author sought to establish the influences of social media on students' academic endangerment from students' perceptions.

The chapter further looked at the research design to be employed. Case studies and surveys were the two research design techniques selected and discussed. The characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of these two research design techniques were also discussed to highlight what the author will need to consider when employing the research designs. The reason why these research designs were chosen as appropriate for this study, were also discussed. The ability for the case study to seek out an in depth understanding of a particular topic and the ability of the survey to have easy access to a sample of a population in a short duration of time, make these research design techniques appropriate for this study.

The chapter also looked at the methodology to be used where research instruments were discussed, namely: interviews and questionnaires. In the case of both research instruments, considerations, strengths, weaknesses, sampling, data collection, data analysis, and reliability and validity were taken into account and have been extensively discussed. The reasons why these research methods were chosen as appropriate for this study were also discussed. The highlights of the interviews point towards collecting truthful and valid data from participants while the questionnaire offers the luxury of saving time, costs and reaching a wider population; all factors that all fit in well with this study.

The chapter further looked at the ethical procedures and considerations that the author will need to deal with and it is projected that the author will have to prove the intended benefits and planned mitigation of the potential risks to the ethics committee. Lastly, the chapter looked at the limitations and delimitations that this study may encounter. Limitations ranging from the focus of the study, type of research designs and methods to be implemented and sampling size may all be an issue when it comes to the final outcome of the research. Recommendations for future research work that other researchers may need to consider are also provided.

Overall, the method process seems as if it will be time consuming. The author will need to pay attention to detail; to ensure that the research approach, design and instruments are effectively employed and that relevant data is collected and limitations are taken into consideration in order to make sure that participants' views and opinions are truthfully represented.

Chapter 7

Analysis and Interpretation

7.1 Online Survey

a) Introduction

In this section, the author reports on the questionnaire findings and how it was conducted. The online survey section is divided into four main subsections, namely: Demographics, Students' use of social media, Social media's influence on students' academic engagement and Ways that social media can be used to improve students' academic engagement.

The author begins by explaining how the questionnaire was conducted and administered to the students. In the subsection: Demographics, the author breaks down the statistics of the sample population of students that took part in the survey. In the subsection: Students' use of social media, the author reports on how students make use of social media at Rhodes University. In the subsection: Social media's influence on students' academic engagement, the author reveals how students view the influence of social media on their academic engagement. While in the last subsection: Ways that social media can be used to improve students' academic engagement, students' perceptions on ways on how social media can be used to improve students' academic engagement is revealed.

To conclude, the author discusses how the questionnaire results relate to and differ from findings reported from previous literature. Results from the questionnaire are also explained on how they were used to form the interviews and help form interview questions relative to topics that needed in depth probing and understanding.

b) Implementation process

The researcher conducted an online survey at Rhodes University through random sampling. An online questionnaire was sent out to different departments in all six Faculties, namely Commerce, Education, Humanities, Law, Pharmacy and Science. This is a practise that literature encourages by recommending that the selection of respondents should ensure that there is a variety in terms of faculty and departments (Bricki and Green, 2007; Davis III, et al., 2012). An email was sent out to students by departmental managers through an emailing list system. A link was provided in the email through which students could access the questionnaire.

7.1.1 Demographics

A total of 215 students participated in the survey, this was a higher than the number originally anticipated as the researcher planned to get at least 54 responses. The students answered the survey questions on a voluntary basis; therefore, not all 215 students answered all the questions. Out of 215 students, 211 (98.1%) used social media while 4 (1.9%) did not use social media (see figure 7.1).

Do you use social media sites?



Figure 7.1: Use of social media demographics

Most of the participants were Female (n=126, 62.7%), then Male (n=73, 36.3%) and other (n=2, 1%) (See figure 7.2).

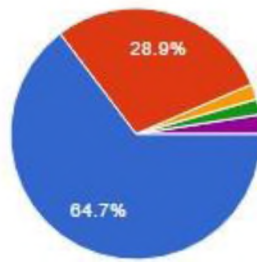
Gender:



Figure 7.2: Gender demographics

The dominant age group of participants is 18-21 (n=130, 64.7%), followed by 22-25 (n=58, 28.9%) and then 35 and above (n=5, 2.5%). The age groups 26-29 and 30-34, both had 4 (2%) students each (see figure 7.3). These results are quite similar to Wiid's et. al. (2014) study conducted at the University of South Africa and Schlenkrich and Sewry's study (2012) at Rhodes University, who found that younger students used social media more than older students.

Age:



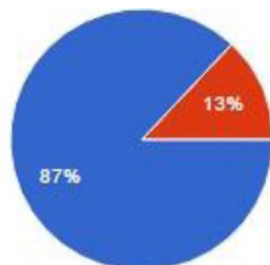
18-21	130	64.7%
22-25	58	28.9%
26-29	4	2%
30-34	4	2%
35 and above	5	2.5%

● 18-21
● 22-25
● 26-29
● 30-34
● 35 and above

Figure 7.3: Age group demographics

The majority of students were undergraduates making up 87% (n=174) of the participants while postgraduates made up 13% of the participants (see figure 7.4). These results are similar to Schlenkrich and Sewry’s study (2012) also conducted at Rhodes University which showed that undergraduates used social media more than the postgraduates.

Level of study:



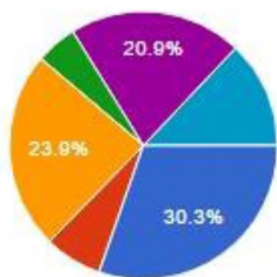
Undergraduate	174	87%
Postgraduate	26	13%

● Undergraduate
● Postgraduate

Figure 7.4: Level of study demographics

Students from all faculties at Rhodes University took part in the survey. The majority of students were from the Commerce faculty (n=61, 30.3%), followed by Humanities (48, 23.9%), Pharmacy (n=42, 20.9%), Science (n=26, 12.9%), Education (n=14, 7%) and Law (n=10, 5%) (see figure 7.5).

Faculty:



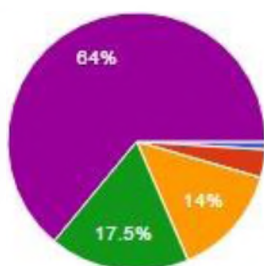
Commerce	61	30.3%
Education	14	7%
Humanities	48	23.9%
Law	10	5%
Pharmacy	42	20.9%
Science	26	12.9%

- Commerce
- Education
- Humanities
- Law
- Pharmacy
- Science

Figure 7.5: Faculty demographics

The majority of students have been using social media for more than 5 years (n=128, 64%), 35 (17.5%) students have been using social media for 4-5 years, 28 (14%) students have been using social media for 3-4 years, 7 (3.5%) students have been using social media for 1-2 years while only 2 (1%) have been using social media for less than 1 year (see figure 7.6). This affirms findings from literature that have reported that the use of social media has become prominent among tertiary students and that they have been using it for some time (Rutherford, 2010; Bynum, 2011; Davis III, et al., 2012).

How long have you been using social media?



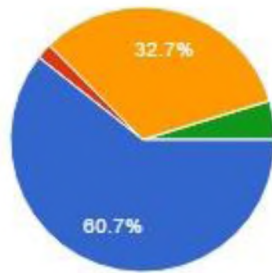
Less than 1 year	2	1%
1-2 years	7	3.5%
3-4 years	28	14%
4-5 years	35	17.5%
More than 5 years	128	64%

- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 4-5 years
- More than 5 years

Figure 7.6: Social media experience demographics

Most of the students 69 (32.7%) used both Facebook and Twitter, 128 (60.7%) students used only Facebook, 4 (1.9%) students used only Twitter, and 10 (4.7%) used neither Facebook nor Twitter (see figure 7.7). These results are in line with a survey conducted by World Wide Worx and Student Brands, which revealed that a majority of students use Facebook and Twitter in South African tertiary education institutions (Techcentral, 2015). A study conducted by Wiid's et. al. (2014) at the University of South Africa also revealed that most students used Facebook as the ideal social media platform, with Twitter coming in second.

Which social media site (s) do you currently use?



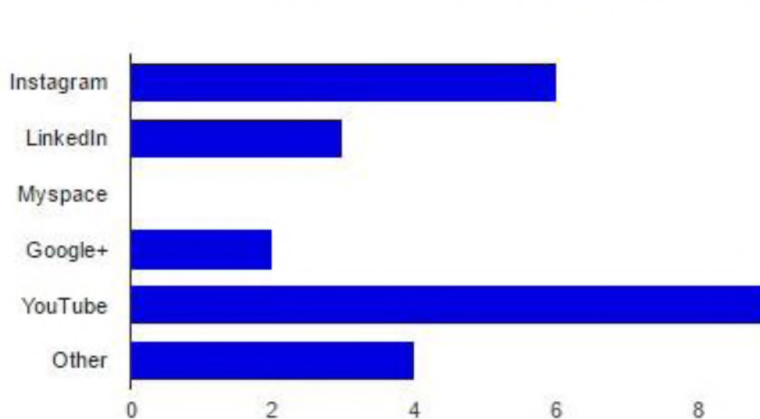
Facebook	128	60.7%
Twitter	4	1.9%
Both	69	32.7%
None of the above	10	4.7%

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Both
- None of the above

Figure 7.7: Social media site(s) used by students

Out of 24 students who do not use either Facebook or Twitter, most of them used YouTube (n= 9), this is also confirmed by the World Wide Worx survey which reported that YouTube was the 3rd most used social media site in South African tertiary education institutions (Techcentral, 2015). This was then followed by Instagram (n=6), LinkedIn (n=3) and then Google+ (n=2). 4 students used other social media sites while Myspace recorded no users among the participants (see figure 7.8)

Which other social media site (s) do you use? (Choose all that apply)



Instagram	6
LinkedIn	3
Myspace	0
Google+	2
YouTube	9
Other	4

Figure 7.8: Other social media sites used by students

The majority of students reported that they access social media through Phones (n=189, 94%), followed by Laptops (n=172, 85.6%), PC's (n=95, 47.3%), Tablet's (n=59, 29.4%) and other (n=1, 0.5%) (See figure 7.9). This is similar to a study carried out by Mungofa and Peter (2015) at a South African tertiary institution who reported that most students accessed the internet mainly using cell phones, followed by laptop, then desktop pc's.

Devices used to access social media? (Choose all that apply)

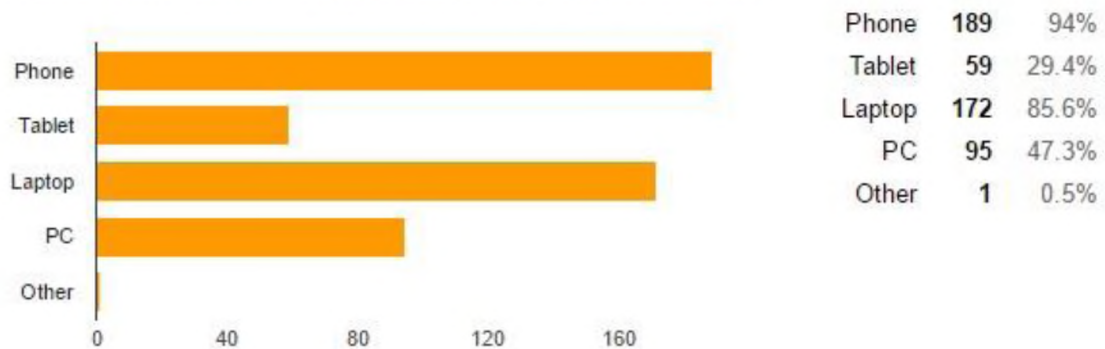


Figure 7.9: Devices used to access social media

Most students reported that they usually access or use social media from Campus (n=171, 85.1%), followed by Home (n=167, 83.1%), Residence (n=128, 63.7%) and other (n=11, 5.5%) (See figure 7.10).

Where do you usually access or use social media? (Choose all that apply)

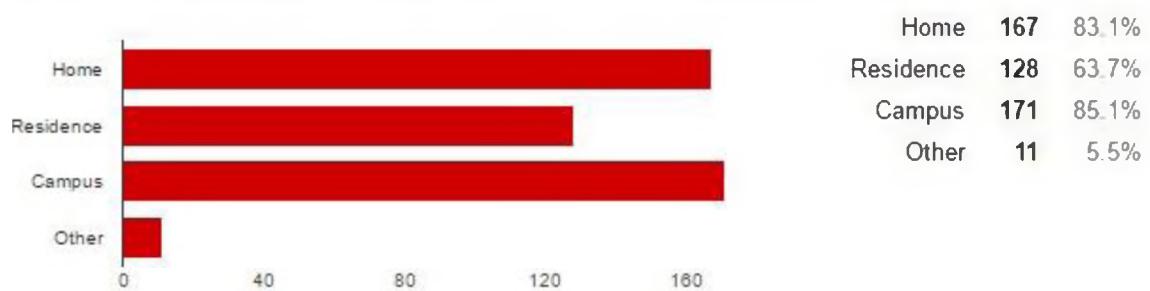


Figure 7.10: Places that students usually access social media

Students were also asked to reveal who they kept in touch with when using social media. The majority (n=186, 93%) of students indicated that they used social media to keep in touch with social friends. Johnston's et. al. (2013) study at the University of Cape Town also revealed

that students used social media more for keeping in touch with friends. Other notable entities were fellow students and family who both had 160 responses (80%) (See figure 7.11).

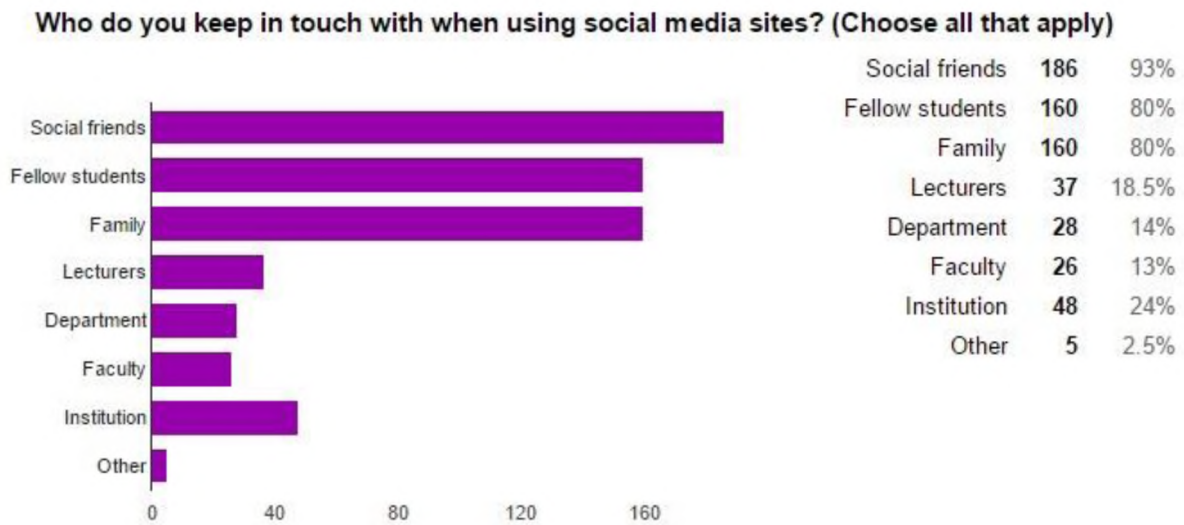


Figure 7.11: People that students keep in touch with through social media sites

Students were also asked to reveal the kind of communities/pages/groups they subscribed to on social media sites. Most students (n= 178, 88.6%) revealed that they subscribed to entertainment pages/groups, 78.6% (n=158) of the students subscribed to informational pages/groups while 74.1% (n=149) of the students subscribed to educational pages/groups (See figure 7.12).

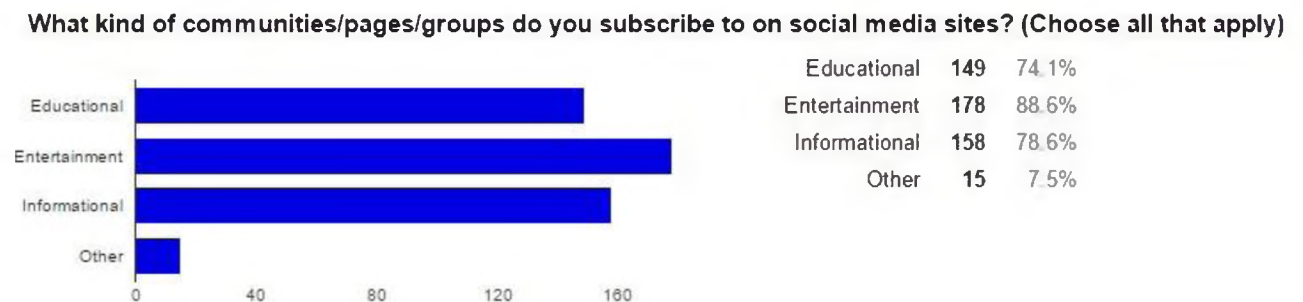


Figure 7.12: Pages/groups that students subscribed to on social media

7.1.2 Students' use of social media

To answer the first research question: ‘*How do students make use of social media at Rhodes University?*’, students were asked about what social and academic activities they engaged in when using social media. Furthermore, they were asked how many hours in a day and how many days in a week they spent on social media for social and academic activities.

a) Social Activities

A majority of students reported that they used social media for getting new information and keeping up to date. Other popular social activities that had a response of more than 60% were: receiving & sending messages/chatting with friends; keeping in touch with friends; posting, tagging, viewing photos or videos and seeing/following what others are doing respectively (See figure 7.13). Most of the students (28%) also indicated that they spend 1-2 hours in a day on social media, while 20% of the students reported that they used social media for more than 4 hours in a day, only 15.5% of the students (the lowest) reported that they used social media for less than an hour (See figure 7.14). Most of the students (70%) reported that they used social media for 6-7 days a week, which highlights Rutherford (2010) and Bynum’s (2011) statements that tertiary students have indeed made social media technology a major part of their everyday lives. Only 7% of the students reported that they use social media for 1-2 days in a week (see figure 7.15).

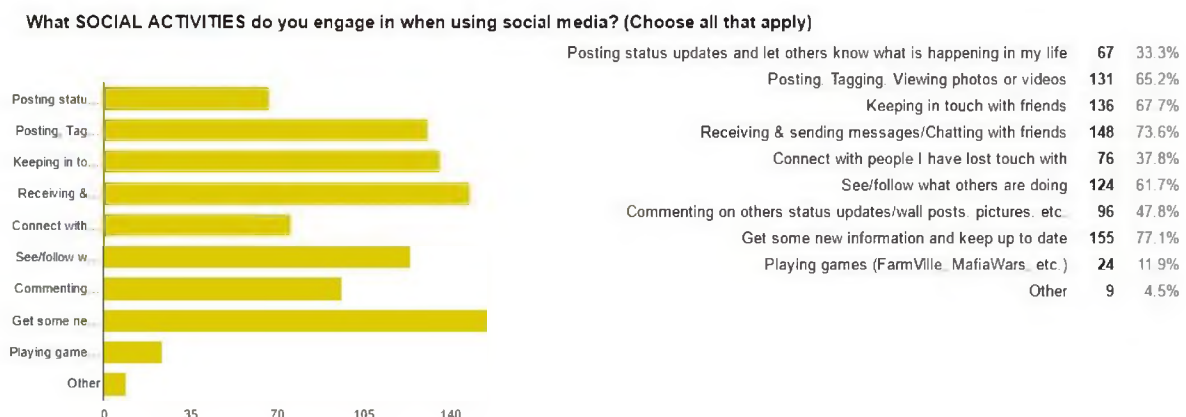
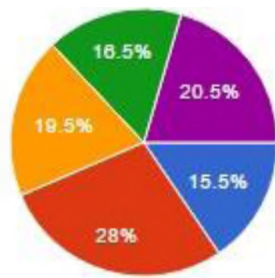


Figure: 7.13: Social activities that students engage in on social media

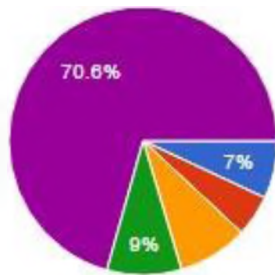
How long do you spend on social media for SOCIAL ACTIVITIES in a day?



Time Spent	Count	Percentage
Less than an hour	31	15.5%
1-2 hours	56	28%
2-3 hours	39	19.5%
3-4 hours	33	16.5%
More than 4 hours	41	20.5%

Figure: 7.14: Time spent on social media for social activities in a day

How many days in a week do you use social media for SOCIAL ACTIVITIES?



Days Spent	Count	Percentage
1-2 days	14	7%
2-3 days	10	5%
3-4 days	17	8.5%
4-5 days	18	9%
6-7 days	142	70.6%

Figure: 7.15: Days spent on social media for social activities in a week

b) Academic activities

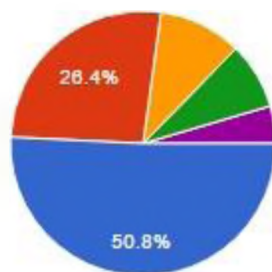
Most of the students (73.2%) reported that they communicate with friends about academic related topics. Another popular academic activity was sharing some course information or materials (e.g. slides, documents, videos, links, articles) with 69.5%. This is similar to Manca and Ranieri (2013) and Wright, et al. who reported that students used social media to share academic resources or materials. Almost half (44.7%) of the students reported that they use social media to create academic discussion groups (see figure 7.16). Only half of the students (50.8%) indicated that they used social media for less than hour in a day and only 30.2% of the students used social media for academic purposes for a period 1-2 days in a week (see figure 7.17 and 7.18).

What ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES do you engage in when using social media? (Choose all that apply)



Figure 7.16: Academic activities that students engage in on social media

How often do you use social media sites for ACADEMIC purposes in a day?

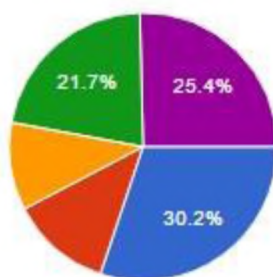


Frequency	Count	Percentage
Less than an hour	100	50.8%
1-2 hours	52	26.4%
2-3 hours	20	10.2%
3-4 hours	16	8.1%
More than 4 hours	9	4.6%

- Less than an hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2-3 hours
- 3-4 hours
- More than 4 hours

Figure 7.17: Time spent on social media for academic activities in a day

How many days in a week do you use social media for ACADEMIC purposes?



Days per Week	Count	Percentage
1-2 days	57	30.2%
2-3 days	23	12.2%
3-4 days	20	10.6%
4-5 days	41	21.7%
6-7 days	48	25.4%

- 1-2 days
- 2-3 days
- 3-4 days
- 4-5 days
- 6-7 days

Figure 7.18: Days spent on social media for academic activities in a week

7.1.3 Social media's influence on student's academic engagement

To answer the second research question: '*How does the use of social media influence students' academic engagement at Rhodes University, from a students' perspective?*', students were asked a series of questions on how they felt about social media influencing their academic engagement. A Likert scale was used to represent students' attitudes and students could choose any of the 5 options in terms of level of agreement ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

In terms of social media having a positive influence on students' academic engagement, most students (61.3%) agreed and strongly agreed that the use of social media (SM) as a learning tool enhances class discussions. More than half of the students (51.2%) agreed and strongly agreed that SM helps to create a learning environment. 64% of the students agreed and strongly agreed that SM provides useful information to students' academic work. 68.9% of the students agreed and strongly agreed that SM improves communication among students and lecturers. 64.1% of the students agreed and strongly agreed that SM improves collaboration among students and lecturers. Students also agreed and strongly agreed that all these factors led to an improvement in students' academic engagement.

In terms of social media having a negative influence on students' academic engagement, only less than half of the students (44.9%) agreed and strongly agreed that SM negatively influences students' academic work productivity. Only a few students (39.6%) agreed and strongly agreed that SM is a disruption to students' academic engagement. Contrastingly, 63.8% of the students agreed and strongly agreed that SM is addictive. A majority number of students (68.5%) agreed and strongly agreed that SM negatively affects students' concentration in class.

A significant number of students (77.2%) also agreed and strongly agreed that SM promotes procrastination instead of students working on their academic work. Interestingly, more than half of the students (53%) disagreed and strongly disagreed that the use of SM for social or academic activities has no significant influence whatsoever on students' academic engagement; indicating that students definitely felt that social media had some sort of influence on students' academic engagement.

7.1.4 Ways that social media can be used to improve students' academic engagement

To answer the third research question: '*What are the effective ways of using social media to benefit students' academic engagement at Rhodes University, from a students' perspective?*', students were asked a series of questions on how they felt about social media being used in a way that can improve their academic engagement. A Likert scale was also used to represent students' attitudes and students were allowed to choose any of the 5 options in terms of level of agreement ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

A significant number of students (83,1%) agreed and strongly agreed that using social media (SM) to create academic groups/pages among students and lecturers can help improve students' academic engagement. 78.1% of students agreed and strongly agreed that using SM to carry out discussions related to course work among students and lecturers can also help improve students' academic engagement. 85.1% of the students agreed and strongly agreed

that using SM for sharing academic work/materials among students and lecturers can help improve students' academic engagement. When students were asked if lecturers awarding marks to students for using SM for academic purposes can help improve students' academic engagement, only 35.3% agreed and strongly agreed while 36.5% disagreed and strongly disagreed. 75.3% of the students agreed and strongly agreed that lecturers or tutors offering their support to students through using SM can help improve students' academic engagement. 68.8% of the students agreed and strongly agreed that the use of SM to support/supplement the traditional way of learning can help improve students' academic engagement.

Interestingly, when students were asked if the use of SM instead of learning management systems (RU Connected) can help improve students' academic engagement, 43.3% disagreed and strongly disagreed while only 26.8% agreed and strongly agreed. While the majority of students (63.6%) agreed and strongly agreed that institutions offering workshops/seminars that teach students and lecturers how to use SM for academic purposes, can help improve students' academic engagement. More than half of the students (58.2%) agreed and strongly agreed that the introduction of SM in an academic space by tertiary institutions, faculties, departments and lectures, can help improve students' academic engagement. A mere 50.3% of the students agreed and strongly agreed that the implementation of policies to formally integrate the use of SM in the curriculum by tertiary institutions can help improve students' academic engagement.

7.1.5 Discussion

Notable findings from the demographics of the online survey include younger students using social media more than older students. These findings were found to be similar to Wiid's et. al. (2014) study carried out at the University of South Africa. Undergraduates were found to use social media more than the postgraduates, another result that is similar to Schlenkrich and Sewry's study (2012) also conducted at Rhodes University. Another notable finding from the data is that a majority of students have been using social media for more than 5 years. This is a clear indication that students have been using social media for a long time and that it has become prominent among tertiary students (Rutherford, 2010; Bynum, 2011; Davis III, et al., 2012). Furthermore, the results also revealed that most of the students used both Facebook and Twitter; a result that is similar to a survey conducted by World Wide Worx and Student Brands (Techcentral, 2015), and also similar to Wiid's et. al. (2014) study conducted at the University of South Africa.

Students were also found to access social media more through phones which is similar to Mungofa and Peter's (2015) findings from a study conducted at the University of Venda. Moreover, students were found to access social media more on campus than any other place. This has led the author to believe that students use Wi-Fi on campus to access social media using mostly their phones and laptops. This highlights how students find the university as an ideal environment to access social media. Most students also reported that they usually used social media to keep in touch with social friends, a trend also picked up by Johnston's et. al. (2013) study conducted at the University of Cape Town. The author is led to believe that students viewed social media as a platform that allowed them to keep in touch with people in their social circle of friends. Another finding revealed that most students subscribed mostly to social media entertainment pages/groups rather than to educational pages/groups. The author

can safely assume that students view social media as more of an entertainment scene rather than an educational scene; a finding also reported by Kumar's (2014) study conducted at the Taj International College.

Students reported on the activities that they engaged in when using social media. For social activities, most students reported that they used social media for getting new information and keeping up to date on a daily basis; while for academic purposes, most students reported that they communicate with friends about academic related topics for mostly 1-2 days in a week. Overall, this shows that students used social media less for academic activities compared to social activities. This is in line with Wiid's et. al. (2014) study who reported that students used social media more for social purposes than academic work. The general perspective of students towards the influence of social media on students' academic engagement revealed that social media had a more positive impact than a negative impact on their academic engagement. This is similar to Johnston's et. al. (2013) study at the University of Cape Town who found that students had an overall positive attitude towards social media as they used social media to engage in educational activities.

For the ways that social media can be used to improve students' academic engagement, most students agreed and strongly agreed to the ways stated in the online survey. The only interesting response, was when students disagreed and strongly disagreed to the proposition that the use social media instead of learning management systems (RU Connected) can help improve students' academic engagement. This was somewhat different from findings from literature. Literature revealed that students preferred to use social media more for online discussions and peer support than learning management systems (Deng and Tavares, 2013). Students also reported that learning management systems had an unfriendly user interface compared to Facebooks' user interface (Deng and Tavares, 2013). Another study also reported that a majority of students felt that they had more successful interactions with their instructor for courses that used social media compared to courses that used learning management systems (Albayrak and Yildirim, 2015).

7.1.6 Conclusion

The author provides a summary on what has been discussed in the online survey section. The section began explaining the process of how the online survey was conducted. In the demographic section, the author discussed the statistics and characteristics of the sample population.

The author further looked at how students made use of social media by revealing the most popular activities that students engaged in, providing for both social and academic activities. The author also discussed how students felt about the influence of social media on their academic engagement by revealing the positive and negative impact that social media has on students' academic engagement. The author then concluded by revealing students' perspectives on the ways that social media can be used to improve students' academic engagement. Finally, the author provided a discussion of the findings in which results from the online survey was compared to previous literature as similarities and differences were pointed out.

Overall, the results show that students would prefer to use social media to improve their academic engagement in an academic space. Information provided by the online survey was then used to form the interviews that followed and to get an in depth perspective of how and why students felt a certain way about the use of social media at tertiary level. Furthermore, interviews were used as a way of probing deeper into interesting aspects that emerged from the online survey and needed more probing.

7.2 In-Depth Interviews

In this section the author reports on the in-depth interview responses and the manner in which they were conducted. The in-depth interviews section is divided into three subsections, namely: 'Students' use of social media', 'Social media's influence on students' academic engagement' and 'Ways that social media can be used to improve students' academic engagement'.

The author begins by discussing how the interviews were conducted and how the data analysis was carried out. The author then discusses the social and academic activities that are carried out by students under the subsection 'Students' use of social media'. Under the subsection 'Social media's influence on students' academic engagement' the author discusses both the negative and positive impact of social media on students' academic engagement. In the last subsection 'Ways that social media can be used to improve students' academic engagement', the author reports on recommendations provided by students on ways that they think social media can be used to improve students' academic engagement in academia. In conclusion the author discusses how the interview findings relate to findings from previous studies conducted by other researchers.

a) Implementation and analysis process

After conducting the online survey, the author used the online survey findings to create the open-ended interview questions in order to further probe topics of interest. The author used purposive sampling to choose students, who acted as key informants of the student population, to be interviewed. The author ensured that all six faculties at Rhodes University were represented and ensured that all study levels (undergraduate and postgraduate) were represented to guard against biased views. A total number of 12 students were interviewed and each interview lasted 20-30 minutes. The number of participants that took part was higher than the number originally anticipated as the researcher planned to get at least 10 key participants.

All interviews were tape recorded and all interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. A thematic analysis following the guidance of Braun and Clarke's (2012) phases was carried out using Atlas.ti. Codes were developed from which themes were derived and the themes were used as the main focal points of reporting the findings. A few excerpts were extracted from the participants' responses, depending on the relevance of their responses to a particular theme. Therefore, only a few responses from a total number of 12 students were included in the report under each theme. Other responses that have been left out revealed either similar findings which later led to redundancy or revealed nothing that

could support certain themes. The findings provided an in-depth perspective as to why the participants felt a certain way towards the use of social media in academia.

7.2.1 Students' use of social media

In the interviews, the students were asked to elaborate on what social and academic activities they engaged in to answer the first research sub question: *'How do students make use of social media at Rhodes University?'*. The main themes that emerged from the data were then divided into social and academic activities, as reported by participants.

7.2.1.1 Social activities

Students revealed that they used social media to engage in social activities. The author discusses the main social activities that emerged from the responses:

a) Seeing other's posts

Most students reported that whenever they were using social media, they were usually seeing what other users were posting by checking their news feeds. This was evident from their responses:

"On Twitter I rarely post anything but I just see what other people are posting..." - (Participant A)

"On Facebook I go through posts, I go through the SRC pages, I go through things that people are posting..." – (Participant D)

"On Facebook I engage in discussions, sometimes I go there just to look at what other people are saying. On Twitter I just follow up on what people are saying." – (Participant F)

"For Facebook its more looking at what my friends are up to, keeping up with what they are doing..." – (Participant K)

Seeing what others were up to also received a significant number of votes in the online survey. 61.7% of the students revealed that seeing/following what others were doing, was one of the main social activities they engaged in while using social media.

b) Communicating with friends/family

Another main social activity that students engaged in while using social media was communicating and/or keeping in touch with friends and/or family. Students revealed that:

"I use Facebook to communicate with my friends from back home and the ones from here..." – (Participant C)

"I also use it (Facebook) to keep in touch with friends and family overseas." – (Participant E)

"Sometimes I use it (Social Media) to communicate with friends and relatives back home." – (Participant H)

“I also use Facebook video calling to talk to family members and friends overseas.” – (Participant I)

“I usually talk to my friends, like the friends I was with from primary school and friends who are in other parts of the world who I can’t meet physically, that’s how I communicate with them and also some family members.” – (Participant J)

Comparing to the online survey results, keeping in touch with friends (67.7% of students) and chatting with friends (73.6% of students) received the most votes which affirm the findings received from the interview responses.

c) News update

An additional social activity that emerged from the interviews was keeping up to date with the news. This was evident from students’ responses:

“I use Twitter only if there is something happening on campus, I follow accounts like Activate (Rhodes University Newspaper). I usually just check news accounts, like the student media accounts, or if there is hashtag trending then I look it up. I use it for informational purposes...Facebook keeps you up to date with the news and it’s a good way to check out what’s happening especially on campus.” – (Participant B)

“On Twitter I just check the news on news media accounts and student’s political organization accounts.” – (Participant G)

“...basically getting the news, I subscribe and like the pages of news forums so I don’t have to watch TV anymore, I just get my news from Facebook and Twitter.” – (Participant H)

“I use Twitter to follow media presses on campus and I don’t follow anyone on twitter.” – (Participant K)

Comparing the interview findings to the online survey results, a significant number of students (77.1%) reported that they get new information and keep up to date when using social media. This affirms that students view social media as a source of information and keeping up to date with the latest news.

d) Sharing, commenting and liking posts

Other popular social activities that students engaged in on social media include sharing, commenting, liking posts (on Facebook) and tweeting/retweeting posts (on Twitter). This was evident from students’ responses:

“On Twitter I am a bit more vocal firstly and active because of the nature of Twitter and how fast paced it is. Obviously when you follow people, there will be people in a similar circle as you and likeminded as you so it’s much quicker for sharing ideas and opinions...” – (Participant G)

“I also read their (Friends) timeline and I like whatever they wrote on their timeline or their pictures. I also comment if necessary but I usually comment when I am tagged.” – (Participant G)

“I usually comment, like and now they have little different emoji’s that makes it exciting. I also share memes and news articles that I find interesting, but I wouldn’t say from BBC or anything but more like celebrity stuff. I also share things that are recently happening that are not covered by main stream media because I know most of my friends are not hearing about it.” – (Participant K)

“Basically all I do on Facebook is just read comments on the Rhodes page, share, like and comment.” – (Participant L)

Contrastingly, results from the online survey do not necessarily support the findings from the interviews, as less than half (47.8%) of the students reported that they used social media for social activities to comment on others’ status updates, wall posts, pictures etc.

Analysis on social activities

Social activities stood out as one of the main recurring themes from the data analysis, students made it apparent that they engaged in social activities while using social media. Some of the students reported that they rarely posted anything and simply checked up on what their friends were posting on social media. This indicates that some students took a passive approach rather than an active approach when it came to using social media. This also indicates that some students were comfortable with taking up a “visitor” approach on social media which entails seeing other users’ posts but not engaging with them. Students further reported that they used social media to communicate with friends and family who were either from overseas or lived far away from them. This confirms that students look at social media as a tool that allows them to keep in touch with people that they couldn’t meet physically. This also indicates that students relied on social media to help them feel connected and bring them closer to their loved ones who lived elsewhere.

Students also went on to state that they use social media to keep up to date with the latest news happening on campus, in the country or even around the world. This gave an indication that students no longer have to go out and search for the latest news on other media outlets but rather relied on social media to keep them up to date. This also indicates how social media is a major source of information and is responsible for the dissemination of information on a large scale in this day and age. Other students actually reported that they engaged with other users’ posts by sharing, commenting and liking their posts. This indicates that some students actually took an active approach rather than a passive approach mentioned earlier. This approach is more of a “resident” approach which entails the user feeling at home and engaging with other users’ posts. The author also deduces that students engaging with others’ posts allowed them to discuss and share ideas and opinions on topics that were interesting to them.

7.2.1.2 Academic Activities

Students revealed that they also used social media to engage in academic activities. The author discusses the main academic activities that emerged from the responses:

a) Post and share educational resources

Most of the participants reported that they shared educational resources or materials when using academic course pages or groups to engage with their modules. This was evident from participants' responses:

"I have used a Facebook class group before where we shared resources..." – (Participant B)

"On Facebook we can share articles... On Twitter we share notes and readings and that's quite cool." – (Participant D)

"We have a Facebook group for one of my courses where we help each other out with notes in class." – (Participant E)

"Sometimes we share slides, like I remember we had to share slides on presentations that we did in class." – (Participant G)

"On the groups people post like some text books or some articles which we are supposed to read for an assignment because at times it's difficult to find an article or a reading, when someone gets it they can just post." – (Participant J)

Interview findings were quite similar to the online survey result. A significant number of students (69.5%) revealed that they used social media to share course materials (discussed earlier) and sharing course information (discussed later) when engaging in academic activities.

b) Receive and share academic information updates

Students revealed that they also used academic course pages or groups to receive and share academic information updates related to their academic work. Students made this known as they shared their experiences:

"We have a course page where we share information and what assignments need to be handed in on a particular date." – (Participant G)

"I use Facebook to follow up with what's happening in classes, let's say we have a course group on Facebook and then they post what's happening in class... For my other course we have a page... if anything is posted its just to say that we don't have classes today or to ask what the lecturer's name is if we missed it." – (Participant K)

c) Communicating with peers

The majority of the participants revealed that they used social media course pages or groups to communicate with their peers or classmates. This was evident from participants' responses:

"I have used a Facebook class group before, it was a good way of communicating with everyone because you might not check your emails but you will definitely check your Facebook account." – (Participant B)

"Like for one of my courses they mostly use their Facebook page to communicate things with us, so it's quick, its fast paced... on these pages we can talk to each other, communicate with

the class rep about something quickly if we are not happy instead of emailing the class rep or if someone has a question we just communicate on the page and its quicker than email and the whole emailing the lecturer process.” – (Participant D)

“We have a Facebook group for one of my courses where we communicate meeting schedules and helping each other out...” – (Participant E)

“We also share information concerning the class, we can ask questions on the page and all members are welcome to answer, like someone who has an idea will throw in an answer and others will contribute.” – (Participant H)

Interestingly, interview findings were quite similar to the online results. The majority of students (73.2%) reported that they used social media to communicate with friends about academic related topics. This was confirmed by what students expressed in the interviews.

d) Discuss/post academic work

Another academic activity that students engaged in while using social media was discussing and posting academic work on the academic course pages or groups. This is evident from participants’ responses:

“We have a group where we discuss academic work. When we have an assignment people ask questions and post things on the group...” – (Participant A)

“The other day we had to make videos on different sections of the module and we had to post all our work onto the Facebook page. If someone wants to answer your question, they will post it there and then you will get a notification. We also get assessed on interacting on the page...” – (Participant E)

“As a class we have discussions on Facebook, sometimes it comes up in class and then we take it to Facebook. So we go to the class page and then we post it there and then we give our opinions. Mostly we have class discussions, let’s say there is a certain topic to be discussed or if there is a class poll when we want to decide on something like whether there should be a test or not, so that’s where we go and do it from.” – (Participant H)

“People can ask questions on the group then people can just help and if someone is organizing like a study group, you just post there and some people respond. We ask questions and at times there is no one else able to answer that question or it’s a query then the class rep will take it to the lecturer and then respond to everyone.” – (Participant J)

Discussing and posting academic work on the academic course pages or groups is a new theme that emerged from the interviews. These findings could thus not be triangulated with any findings from the online survey.

Analysis on academic activities

Academic activities appeared as one of the main recurring themes that emerged from the data analysis, students made it known that they also engaged in academic activities while they were using social media. One of the academic activities that students reported was that they

post and share educational resources or materials when using social media pages or groups for their courses. The author deduces that academic social media pages and groups seem to be ideal platforms for students to share educational notes, slides and readings. These platforms also make it easy for the students to easily access educational material/resources whenever they need use them. Students also reported that they used academic social media pages or pages to receive and share information that had to do with keeping up to date with their coursework. This gives an indication that academic social media pages or groups seem to be vital platforms to students, as they allow students to keep up with their academic work. As a result, students are able to keep up with their assignment due dates, test due dates, class cancelations, change of venues or any important information that may be related to a particular course.

Another academic activity that emerged was that social media allowed students to communicate with their peers and classmates. The author infers that social media seems to be an ideal communicating tool as it allows students to collaborate, share information, question and get immediate feedback from their fellow peers. The author also deduces that students preferred to communicate with other students on social media rather than using other forms of digital communication such as email which was considered to be tedious. Another academic activity that students carry out while using social media is discussing and posting academic work on academic course pages or groups. This involves students discussing academic work on social media that is actually related to topics that they discussed in class. The author infers that students seem to create an ideal space on social media to further discuss and deeply engage with their academic work. The author also deduces that students seemed to be comfortable with openly interacting, asking questions and sharing their opinions on social media related to academic work.

7.2.2 Social media's influence on students' academic engagement

The researcher further probed the students during interviews to elaborate on the positive and negative impact (revealed in the online survey) that social media had on their academic engagement. The data collected was used to answer the second research sub question: '*How does the use of social media influence students' academic engagement at Rhodes University, from a students' perspective?*' The main themes that emerged from the data were then divided into positive and negative impacts as reported by the participants.

7.2.2.1 Positive impact

Students reported that social media had a positive impact on their academic engagement. The author reveals how social media positively affects students' academic engagement from students' perspectives:

a) Peer interaction/collaboration

Most students revealed that social media positively affected their academic engagement since they used social media as a platform to interact and collaborate with their peers about academic related matters. This was evident in their responses:

“Using a group for an academic course has helped me quite a lot because there are times when I can’t find something online and I need someone to explain it further to me how I am supposed to do it or have a rough idea of how I am supposed to do it. You ask something on the group and then people respond and tell you what they think about a certain topic or they correct you and then we confirm from the lecturer, I found that quite helpful.” – (Participant A)

“We had a Facebook group for a course and its was so important because people used to share notes and exam tips, so it was a good way of communicating and we communicated with the class rep by posting on the Facebook group. If there was anything like a test coming up that everyone was unsure about then they would communicate on the group...It’s a good way of opening up conversation, communicating with people especially when you don’t want to swap numbers with someone you can contact them on Facebook.” – (Participant B)

“On these pages we can talk to each other, communicate with the class rep about something quickly if we are not happy instead of emailing the class rep or if someone has a question we just communicate on the page and its quicker than email and the whole emailing the lecturer process.” – (Participant D)

“I like it in terms of being able to interact with colleagues and friends because we are peers at the same level... so it’s nice in terms of collaborating with peers. And I think without the Facebook page I wouldn’t have known that my classmates are struggling with a particular course so that I can help. I think it’s nice because it makes you feel more like a class and we work together rather than competing against each other.” – (Participant E)

“If I want to ask someone, I can just get them through the page even though I am not physically in contact with them, I can easily access them even though I am far. Also I can ask questions related to my course at any time, at least someone will be available to respond.” – (Participant H)

“I think the positives of that it keeps me in touch with people most of the time, like I can keep in touch with people who aren’t even my friends...Like if I had a group project, and we aren’t friends on Facebook, I can find you really quickly or look you up through Facebook and then I can send you a message. It’s not like the old days where you had to get a person’s number and you had to source the person, Facebook is really nice in that sense in that if I do group work it’s really nice that I can get in contact with people.” – (Participant I)

“I suppose it’s nice having a platform where students are able to engage with one another because if you are in a lecturer hall, there is no time to really discuss the material because you are listening to the lecturer speak. So you can’t really discuss the material with your classmates whereas online you see if someone posts a question then a lot of people reply if they know and if we don’t then we also allowed to tag our lecturer. So it also helps in that sense and I think that is really good actually.” – (Participant K)

The results from the online survey also back up students’ responses from the interviews. Most students (68.9%) agreed and strongly agreed that SM improves communication among students and lectures and 64.1% of the students agreed and strongly agreed that SM improves collaboration among students and lecturers. This shows the consistency of students’ responses by using different data collection methods.

b) Accessing educational resources

Another positive aspect of using social media was that students were able to access educational resources from social media which inevitably had a positive impact on their academic engagement. This was clearly revealed from students' responses:

"The same with my other course, because the lecturer did not post the course outline on time, she posted all of the resources on the Facebook page, so you had to get all of the resources and all of the YouTube links by being part of the Facebook page. So if it wasn't for the page then I wouldn't be able to do the course pretty much.

I definitely think it gives me access to more resources... The course page pretty much uses Facebook as a source center, that's where we get all of our resources from because that's where they post all of them." – (Participant I)

"People post some academic materials which you can't at times find earlier on." – (Participant J)

"It is very useful let's say you have missed a class, then those pages are helpful when showing you what you have missed because they also upload files and course outlines if you weren't able to get one printed it's there online for you. For one of my courses some people share articles that are also relevant to our subject or to a particular subject we are learning in that term. So in that way I get to learn more than what the module is saying." – (Participant K)

"Some of the things that the lecturers post on the group, you wouldn't really go out and find yourself. Some of them are like inspirational videos or extra material on the course and it would help you with maybe like an essay or a tutorial." – (Participant L)

The researcher can safely deduce that the access to educational resources on social media helped create a learning environment for students. This is similar to results from the online survey which revealed that more than half of the students (51.2%) agreed and strongly agreed that SM helps to create a learning environment.

c) Educational information and updates

Students also reported that social media was a source of educational information and updates mostly related to their academic work (tests/assignments) and lectures. This inevitably had a positive impact on their academic engagement and was evident from students' responses:

"When we have an assignment people asks questions and post things on the group, maybe it's something that I also needed to hear, it helps when I see what other people are asking so that I know what to do and what not to do. I am always updated with what needs to be done because people constantly remind each other when there is something that needs to be handed in or what to do for certain questions." – (Participant A)

"We have a Facebook course group where people often post questions, people reply and our class keeps us up do date like test dates, venues and what to expect in the test." – (Participant E)

“Facebook is effective in terms of announcements and information on tests... People are asked to like the page and then they can ask any questions they have, like towards the test if they don’t know where the venue is and we are usually given the scope.” – (Participant F)

“Sometimes I use social media as a source of information, if I find that there is new information that I need to know I just get to it from there.” – (Participant H)

“It’s easier to keep up with a course that has a Facebook page than a course that does not have one and I think at the end of the day I am more sure what to do for a course that has a Facebook page than I am for a course that does not have one. Let’s say we are given tutorial assignments, the fact that I have a place to ask questions regarding that tutorial without having to book an appointment with my lecturer means I more eager to complete my course work (with a Facebook page) and I always do it before my course work without Facebook pages. It’s so much easier to ask questions and engage in the assignments at least.” – (Participant K)

The findings from the interviews are closely related to the findings from the online survey. 64% of the students agreed and strongly agreed that SM provides useful information to students’ academic work which had a positive impact on students’ academic engagement. This is a perspective shared by the interview participants as revealed in their responses.

d) Sharing information, ideas and opinions

Another outcome of using social media reported by students and having a positive impact on students’ academic engagement is the sharing of information, ideas and opinions. This was evident from students’ responses:

“I think social media impacts my academic career positively especially Twitter because of the ideas we spread around and the way that you can have a thread about understanding certain topics. On social media we engage on with these topics and it’s easier for me to interact, share articles, spread ideas and information.” – (Participant D)

“I like it because it’s instant and it’s easy to get a lot of people’s opinions at the same time...people can share opinions informally so you don’t have worry about writing academically correct English.” – (Participant E)

“I definitely think that in terms of my course, you are basically informed by opinions so what I like about Facebook is that it gives you exposure to lots of opinions and it can be both academic opinion or just public opinion...” – (Participant I)

“It’s a really big platform for asking questions or for getting help when you are like struggling with a question and ask for others opinions. So it’s a way of finding others people’s thoughts because in the subjects I do it’s very hard and not good to be very closed minded so I guess it opens up in that way.” – (Participant L)

The researcher can deduct from the analysis of the interview responses that the use of social media as a learning tool can enhance class discussions through the sharing of information, ideas and opinions. This is similar to the findings from the online survey where 61.3% of the students have agreed and strongly agreed that the use of social media (SM) as a learning tool enhances class discussions.

Analysis on positive impact

One of the ways that led to social media having a positive impact on students' academic engagement was peer interaction and collaboration. The author took note of how students seem to have a general good feeling towards social media allowing them to communicate and interact with other students. The author infers that social media provides a collaborative environment which allowed students to have conversations about academic work. This then meant that students were more engaged with their academic work and thus impacted their academic engagement in a positive manner. The author also deduces that the use of social media allowed students to work together towards a common goal and allowed students to help out each other which was then beneficial in a long run. Students being able to access educational resources on social media is another aspect that was reported to have a positive impact towards students' academic engagement. The author infers that because students could access academic material on social media, they were then able to get hold of resources that are relevant and provided useful in depth information towards their academic work. As a result, students were then able to learn more which then essentially impacted their academic engagement in a positive way.

Students then made it apparent that the educational information and updates they received through social media led to a positive impact. The author deduces that students counted on social media academic pages or groups to keep them up to date with the course work. Students were then able to keep up to date with tutorials, assignments, test scopes, tests and class venues. It is worth mentioning that students seemed more receptive to the course that used a social media page or group compared to a course that had no social media presence. As social media kept students updated with their coursework, this meant that students carried out their work effectively and on time. The author can safely assume that this positively impacted their academic engagement. Students further revealed that using social media in education allowed them to share information, ideas and opinions which had a positive impact on their academic engagement. The author concludes that social media allows students to exchange information and opinions, and to engage with academic topics. This then paved the way for students to be more open minded and mindful to learn from other students' way of thinking. This further allowed students to take charge of their own learning by creating and sharing their own academic content. This then meant that students were involved with their academic work and this inevitably had a positive impact on their academic engagement.

7.2.2.2 Negative Impact

Students reported that social media also had a negative impact on their academic engagement. The author reveals how social media negatively influences students' academic engagement from students' perspectives:

a) Destructive and addictive

Most of the students reported that one of the main negative influences of social media on their academic engagement is that social media was destructive and addictive. They did mention that it required self-discipline from students themselves to guard against the destructions that came with social media. This is evident from students' perspectives:

"It is very easy to get a bit sidetracked on Facebook but I think it's very much dependent on the user like I can go on social media and spend however long I want to and then stop. But know of a lot of people that get sidetracked so I guess it's more about self-control." – (Participant E)

"The disadvantage of Facebook is that you might end up doing something else like going through your timeline and see what other people are saying than what you originally came to do like accessing a course page. Facebook is actually very addictive unless you are a very disciplined person." – (Participant F)

"The negative impact might be like I go on Facebook just to check on my academic pages but then I end up distracted and doing other things which have nothing to do with academic work." – (Participant J)

The responses from the interviews are quite similar to the results from the online survey. A significant number (63.8%) of students from the online survey agreed and strongly agreed that SM is addictive. This affirms the responses from the interview participants.

b) Promotes procrastination

The promotion of procrastination by social media was another negative influence on students' academic engagement that was reported. This was evident from participants' responses:

"When I use social media for social purposes, I procrastinate a lot. Sometimes I go to the library to study and I see a message on my phone I cannot concentrate even for 5 minutes and I end up using my phone for like an hour, so I feel that it's quite destructive." – (Participants A)

"Probably I would get more work done if I didn't have Facebook open the whole time. But I also can't work if it's too quiet and I think that's why I have Facebook open to distract myself a little bit but I procrastinate a lot." – (Participant B)

"I don't think Facebook is effective for posting tutorials because like I mentioned people might end up doing something else and there is a lot of procrastination on Facebook there is a lot of things to do." – (Participant F)

"It's the procrastination station; I mean if I go on Buzz feed (Facebook page) I'm going to be there for three hours. During SWOT week I literally turn off eduroam (Campus Wi-Fi) so that I cannot be on Facebook because it really takes up time. Because for many, Facebook is a very social place and for many people it's an escape, so people are not going to worry about their academics on Facebook, they are going to worry about what their friends did in the summer. So I definitely think in terms of my procrastination level it's because of Facebook and I would probably have a lot better marks." – (Participant I)

Findings from the interviews concur with the findings from the online survey as a significant number of students (77.2%) agreed and strongly agreed that SM promotes procrastination instead of students working on their academic work.

c) Affects study time and concentration in class

Social media was also reported to negatively influence students' academic engagement as it affected students' study time and concentration in class. This was revealed in participants' responses:

"The use of social media has narrowed the way I use to study and do research on my own because now I find it hard to do an assignment as I wait until the assignment is almost due because I know I can always find it on the internet and find answers from there." – (Participant A)

"I guess if you spend too much time on social media like scrolling through a timeline and retweeting and all that stuff, you can lose focus on your books meaning you won't be spending as much time on your books than you should be." – (Participant C)

"I think minus social media a person would really actually focus on their books. So it is negatively impacting your concentration in lectures because during lectures you are on social media instead." – (Participant F)

"Sometimes social media takes up some time, like sometimes I'm like let me first check on what's happening while I am busy revising. When I hear notifications and then I check and I end up going through the newsfeed and then I realize time is up. So the time I should've used for my revision half of it would have gone to Facebook." – (Participant H)

"Social media takes up a lot of your study time, it really does because there is this tendency especially now in university whereas like in high school where they controlled you like they would say no phones in class but now in university you are allowed to have your phone on you. So for me personally I can check my Facebook before we start lectures and check it after and then in terms of when I am supposed to be working and doing my homework I will make up an excuse to check what other people are doing or saying about this answer or tutorial but obviously something else will distract me so it's just a whole mess."

"So I would say it takes up a lot of your study time and if you are not careful it's very easy to just go on for hours. Actually I remember in your questionnaire you asked how many hours do you spend on social media and I was like if I actually had to calculate that in a day alone it's probably the whole day that you are on Facebook. If you are adding up the minutes, it's honestly the whole day and actually that was a realization for me that this might not be so healthy so that's a very negative impact." – (Participant K)

A variance in the responses was observed. Although the students revealed in the interviews that social media affected their study time, a significant number of students taking part in the online survey did not necessarily agree that SM negatively influences students' academic work or productivity or that it was a disruption to students' academic engagement. However, students from the online survey (68.5%) did agree and strongly agreed that SM negatively affects students' concentration in class and this concurred with the responses from the interviews.

d) Affects social wellbeing and relationships

Another aspect that was reported to negatively influence students' academic engagement was the effect of social media on students' social wellbeing and their interpersonal relationships. This was evident in their responses:

"It's a dumping ground for a lot of anxiety and anger which I think severely impacts on your social wellbeing which will ultimately impact your academic excellence, so basically it's a repel effect. So I think Facebook is little bit negative, yes it shares things but what it shares is both negative and positive in that it can shape the way people interact with one another on it as well. Like I know for one that a lot of people like myself get off Facebook because it's emotionally very overwhelming, like you get on there and afterwards you feel so tired because of the things that people put on their pages. That really puts a hindrance on how you do in the classroom as well because you've got all of these thoughts in your head from logging on to Facebook that your concentration in the classroom is completely out of the window." – (Participant I)

"Communication is hard because you forget that whatever is being posted is an opinion of one person and then if you allow yourself to just trust that one opinion it might have not been communicated effectively. It's harder to get a point across through social media than it is face to face. I've noticed it's harder to understand people though social media. I just find that interesting because we spend all our time on social media yet I think it's having a negative impact on how we communicate as classmates as well at the same time. You also find that let's say for my classmates, I talk to a lot of them on social media or Facebook but if I see them in class we don't talk and it's like what happened? Maybe our relationship is just on Facebook. It's like as soon as you enter the lecture hall that relationship breaks and I feel like in the lecturer hall is where the relationship should be, should be built and should be in not on a Facebook group or page." – (Participant K)

This was one of the new themes that emerged from the interviews as a result of probing and asking the participants to elaborate on their responses. Therefore, no comparison could be done with the findings from the online survey.

Analysis on negative impact

Students made it known that social media can be destructive and addictive which then negatively impacts students' academic engagement. The author concludes that students felt that it was easy for them to get preoccupied with non-academic work while using social media which may have negatively impacted their academic engagement. The students further acknowledged that they need to have self-control and they need to be more disciplined when using social media. The author deduces that even though students felt that social media is a destruction and is addictive, it was up to the students themselves to bear the responsibility of curbing and controlling their use of social media. This shows that students have the ability to realise the ways of mitigating against the negative impacts that social media may have on their academic engagement. Students further acknowledged that social media promotes procrastination which then negatively impacts their academic engagement. Judging from students' responses, the author deduces that students used social media as an outlet to delay

them from engaging in academic work. Once students were using social media, they would get carried away which would then result in them putting off their academic work. The author can safely assume that social media is an escape for students from engaging with their academic work which would negatively impact students' academic engagement. The author also deduces that students would probably get a lot of academic work done if they didn't use social media to procrastinate.

Judging from students' responses, the use of social media seemed to negatively affect students' study time and concentration in class which then had a negative impact on students' academic engagement. It seemed that social media caused students to lose focus while studying and pay less attention in class. This meant that students spent less time on their academic work and this had a detrimental effect on their academic engagement. The author deduces that social media took up most of the time that students initially dedicated for academic work and social media affected students' attentiveness in class. This meant that students were then left with little time for their academic work which then negatively impacted their academic engagement. Students also reiterated that another negative aspect of social media was that it negatively affected students' wellbeing and relationships which then affected students' academic engagement. The author concludes that the use of social media wore down on students in terms of the unpleasant content that social media users would share and recreate. This then emotionally affected students and inevitably affected their focus on their academic work. Miscommunication on social media also took a toll on students and affected their real life conversations as it led to students feeling more comfortable communicating on social media than having personal conversations. This then negatively impacted students' class conversations which was not desirable towards their academic engagement.

7.2.3 Ways that social media can be used to improve students' academic engagement

At the end of the interviews, the researcher was interested to find out from the students if they had any recommendations towards the use of social media in academia in order to answer the third research sub question: '*What are the effective ways of using social media to benefit students' academic engagement at Rhodes University, from a students' perspective?*'. Themes that emerged were divided into recommendations for different entities of the university, including students, lecturers, departments, faculties and the university at large.

7.2.3.1 Recommendations

Students made recommendations on ways that they thought social media could be used to improve students' academic engagement. Recommendations were reserved for students, lecturers, departments, faculties and the tertiary institution.

a) Students using social media

Participants voiced their recommendations on how other students could use social media to improve their academic engagement. The participants advised other students to use social media pages/groups as sources of academic information to help with their academic work. This was evident in their responses:

“I think you can definitely use Facebook and Twitter as a teaching tool. Especially if you are doing Humanities based subjects, especially for Twitter which revolves or is the heartbeat of what is going on in current affairs and what people are saying about it. Especially if you are doing Media where you could see what gets reported in Newspapers and how it differs from what’s being said by people on social media.” – (Participant B)

“Students can definitely use social media to gain more knowledge especially about social issues especially for BA students. For other students I think if they could have a mark allocation to their engagement on social media that could be very good just to get them to know what’s going on socially and not to be ignorant.” – (Participant D)

“Students could create pages where people share question papers, have questions and tutoring as well. I think if students could have a course page where people could ask questions if they need help just to filter information and make it easier, because I think if something is very complicated we will just leave it and we opt for the easiest platform to use.” – (Participant F)

“If students go on Facebook and add more pages related to their academics it could be useful but it’s funny enough that most students go there to see celebrities, friends posting stuff and to play games, but I think it could be used to do some productive work.” – (Participant H)

“My advice to students is that join as many newspaper pages as you can to get to up to date with the latest news and current affairs so that when you do courses you have some basis to work from. You need that sort of exposure so that when you do academic discourse you have something to feed off from. Join your Facebook course pages and get your class rep to engage on the page as well, don’t let your class rep be this anonymous person that you never know who he is. If you are a student and you know your class rep and he’s not on the page, then get him on the page.

I would also advise students to just get Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, even if you don’t use it. What’s really nice about having Twitter is that whenever you want to look at what’s going on, you have the option of doing so and if you are on Twitter you are going to get a lot of information. So I would tell students to get on as many social media things as you can while at Rhodes and while you have the internet to do so because a lot of people don’t come from backgrounds with internet.” – (Participant I)

“I think students can have course groups and form study groups. They should interact and get others in the study groups online and avoid getting distracted, you know those notifications that just pop up and they should just avoid being distracted by those.” – (Participant J)

“I think if we could use it (social media) more to communicate with one another on a more personal level especially with your classmates because we have to understand that we are going to be with most of them for the whole year so also just like helping one another as well. Because if I compare with other subjects, a lot of people are on the group but it’s more like for them to watch what other people post and it’s like they are going to wait for someone else to post it for them. So I think if we could just use it as a platform where everyone feels free and feels safe to contribute basically to the module.

So I would advise it that everyone should participate in it especially with these class things because I have cases where its only one or two people that are posting and I mean it's just social media, you are basically anonymous and it's just a profile picture. But I think it will be really helpful if they could see it as a platform where it's more than just knowing what's happening in a course, it's like a place where you can also know your classmates personally and get to know how they are doing. Because I guess that is something that is really missing in lecturer halls because there are so many students and you can't know all of them so if we could use it like that it would be really nice.” – (Participant K)

These interview responses were quite similar to the findings of the online survey. Most of the students also agreed and strongly agreed that using social media (SM) to create academic groups/pages, to carry out discussions related to course work and for the sharing of academic work/materials among students and lecturers can help improve students' academic engagement. This concurred with the responses from the interview participants.

b) Lecturers using social media

Students had numerous recommendations for lecturers regarding the use of social media in order to enhance students' academic engagement. Students encouraged lecturers to be part of the use of social media in academia as they felt that it could positively influence students' academic engagement. This was evident in their responses:

“It's very rare for someone to book an appointment and you have to go the lecturer to ask questions. Sometimes when I'm free they are not free and when they are free I've got something else that I have to do. I feel like if lecturers use social media we can ask or get help or maybe agree on a specific time to meet if you feel like having a one to one meeting then you just ask them, go to them and then they can help you. Also, maybe if they could post reading material, it can be very helpful as well.” – (Participant A)

“I prefer the lecturers being on the groups; let's say if you have a question then you can even tag the lecturer if you follow the lecturer. So it's much easier to tag the lecturer then they can reply from there. For example, for one of our courses we ask questions and the class rep has to go and find out and come back to us, whereas if the lecturer was on the group it's a bit quicker and it's straight from the horse's mouth. I think that lecturers should not be closed off to what's going on in social media and the conversations that we have on social media because I think that would help them understand us.

Lecturers should consider getting like a Twitter account, get talking, see at least what's going on out there, and see what students are facing. Engaging on social media with lecturers to a certain extent is not that bad, some of the lecturers write articles and we don't even know so it would nice if they could share them so that we can see and engage on these topics and ideas.” – (Participant D)

“Lecturers could also use Facebook to post videos like they post on RU Connected, because although RU Connected is there and work is posted there, people usually don't know that work is there so I think if there is Facebook group they could access the videos there.” – (Participant F)

“Lecturers could post slides on social media because sometimes it’s very time consuming to go into RU connected and log in to these various pages. So for social media it’s easily accessible, like they can create a group for the course and then they can upload stuff so it will really help.” – (Participant G)

“I think lecturers could use those platforms to give us some information like if they are planning on changing classes and changing tests, like the way they send us emails they could also just put it on the page. Because if it’s a page then you just post it once and everyone will see it, which I think could be also helpful to students or could use it as a means of communication.” – (Participant H)

“I think lecturers can be asked to join the groups and they can assess people because at times there are other questions which can’t be answered by other students but the lecturer has to come and explain or someone didn’t understand anything in the lecture or at times the person who thinks they understood something maybe did not understand everything so the lecturer is needed to come and explain everything.” – (Participant J)

“If the lecturers could be more open minded with Facebook, it’s tough because they were in a different generation I suppose but it would be really nice if they could be more open minded because they have to also understand that Facebook isn’t just a platform for wasting your time it’s also somewhere where we engage, we see this new stories and we are like it’s something we learned in our course and we share it with someone. And also if lecturers can see that engagement outside the class I am sure they would also feel encouraged because there is a perception that learning ends after you finish your class but it doesn’t and if they can open their minds to allowing these lessons to also be on Facebook then they can see that as well.

Also lecturers should be open minded and if they feel like it’s not working they can also place restrictions like making it a private group because I know some lecturers are worried about their slides being shared to other universities, so they can make it a private group, like there are ways around this. It doesn’t have to be: ‘No, let’s just use RU Connected.’ I think if they were more open minded it would be great. I think it would be more effective if a lecturer made a Facebook group because it’s also a space to know your lecturer and then we would join it and then maybe post the modules and also just share their work and anything relevant to the subject.” – (Participant K)

“I guess if lecturers and departments want to come across as less scary and less formal then they could use Facebook because it’s really an intimate or friendly kind of place instead of emails where it feels very formal and impersonal. So I guess Facebook opens it up to be more personal and you feel like you are connecting on a one on one basis with your lecturer.” – (Participant L)

Findings from interviews also concurred with findings from the online survey. The majority (75.3%) of the students agreed and strongly agreed that lecturers or tutors offering their support to students through the use of SM can help improve students’ academic engagement. This was also the case with the responses from the interviews.

c) Departments using social media

Participants also made recommendations to departments on how they could use social media in academia to improve students' academic engagement. Students also encouraged departments to use social media to improve students' academic engagement and as a marketing tool for potential students. This was evident in their responses:

"It would be nice if departments had Facebook pages, also in terms of people that are considering coming to Rhodes to study it would be quite nice because especially the university department web pages are very outdated and I feel like a Facebook page would be more manageable for an admin who can post pictures and stuff. I think it would be a good advertising tool and also to communicate with everyone it would be much easier and also faculties as well should do that." – (Participant B)

"If departments used Facebook, then it could help and also for the people that want to know more about a certain department, the department could create a Facebook page and then also post the prospectus of the courses that they offer. Mainly because a lot of young people use Facebook and Twitter so it will be more appropriate for them to use social media instead of accessing the website." – (Participant G)

"I think also departments should come up with pages, because if you look at our campus we have many departments so the way they do it through the forums on RU Connected they could as well come up with pages. Then you know like every department i.e. Chemistry, Computer Science, History department would have different pages, it will be easier for them to communicate with us there since most of the students are always on social media." – (Participant H)

"I definitely think that every department should have a Facebook page and I think this idea where like the Rhodes website hasn't been updated for a while, it seriously needs to be updated and all the information should be facilitated through Facebook pages. Because as quite honestly for me as a potentially new student, like if I was a new student, I wouldn't go to the website immediately, I would go to the Facebook page first because that's how we have been taught to socialize with one another."

So I definitely think every single course and every single department needs to have a Facebook page but then they also need to be monitored. I mean I get people's argument about freedom of speech and stuff but there is a certain limit between hate speech and freedom speech, like there is a difference between hate speech and an opinion. So I think when you create a Facebook page the departments have to have a facilitator, someone who facilitates the page, which basically means they look at the posts and see if they are ready for submission. It might have issues in terms of the department might hide stuff like that always happens but I think it should be tested out, I think that's the best way to do things it's just to test it out and see." – (Participant I)

"I think it would be really nice if actually every department had a page, how if we could have that on Facebook but make it more interesting like: 'This is what we have done through the year' and it should be recent too because the Rhodes webpage is so outdated and even the societies that are up there are not present anymore so I think maybe even having like Facebook platform would allow them to keep up to date with the now, so that would be nice."

So I think at a department level just saying: 'this is what we are about', explaining what they learn for second year, third year and above, what they have been doing to engage with the community, that would be really nice...the department can just create like a general Facebook page, like they can even have a little section where you get to know your lecture, like posting little videos, it would be really nice." – (Participant K)

Findings from the online survey also concur with the responses from the interviews. More than half of the students (58.2%) agreed and strongly agreed that the introduction of SM in an academic space by departments can help improve students' academic engagement.

d) Faculties using social media

Participants also had their say regarding faculties using social media and made recommendations on how faculties could use or support the use of social media to improve students' academic engagement. Students also encouraged faculties to use social media to improve students' academic engagement. This was evident in their responses:

"I think if faculties could have a platform where we could ask questions then it will be very helpful." – (Participant A)

"I think if more faculties could get on board with using social media, I think that would be very beneficial." – (Participant D)

"Faculties could use Facebook like the student bureau is doing, I think that is very effective whereby you can ask for your transcript and they can help you. But then maybe they can offer more direct help to shorten the process because now you post there and they tell you to send an email. I think maybe if you can post there and then get immediate response."

I think Faculties and other courses could post their announcements there instead of having course outlines printed so they can also use that platform because people find it more appealing to open Facebook than RU Connected." – (Participant F)

"When departments and faculties have important information to post they can just post on social media as well. Not saying they shouldn't post to people's email because some people are not on social media, but they can send to people's emails and also on the social media pages." – (Participant J)

"I would say the one thing that faculties should do or that they can do is to support the department. If faculties could also advertise that we should check them out on Facebook like even during O week. They should just support these platforms and acknowledge that they exist, because they say you are free to create Facebook pages or groups but if it's not supported by the faculty then not a lot of people are willing to be a part of it. Like lecturers are not willing to be part of it as it's not like in their job description. So I think they should encourage lecturers to be more open-minded and also departments, but they don't need to be on social media they should just support." – (Participant K)

Responses from the interviews concurred with the findings from the online survey. More than half of the students (58.2%) agreed and strongly agreed that the introduction of SM in an academic space by faculties can help improve students' academic engagement.

e) Tertiary institution using social media

There was no exception when it came to participants recommending the use of social media by the tertiary institution (Rhodes University). Students recommended that the tertiary institution should use, recognize and at least support the use of social media in academia. This was evident in their responses:

“The institution can also use social media and it could help because if Rhodes is on Facebook then it could generate publicity.” – (Participant G)

“So I think Facebook also needs to be facilitated through the university as well where there is some sort of recognition of it because I feel the university itself does not recognize social media and it kind of sees it as ‘this toy that shouldn’t be touched, it’s just this evil toy that people use’ and they could actually use it for their own good. Tertiary institutions in South Africa need to recognize social media more; in places like the UK and America they are being recognized.” – (Participant I)

“For tertiary institutions it seems a bit informal for the institution to just depend on social media for telling students any information or news they should post some other stuff on social media but like most important stuff they should just send to people’s emails. It’s a bit better if the SRC posted on Facebook rather than when it’s posted from the vice chancellor office straight to Facebook.” – (Participant J)

“The institution already gives us Wi-Fi and I would say probably give them the same role as faculties to provide support and they should know that there are other platforms outside of RU Connected. They should just be open minded. RU Connected is a great platform but it’s also again very personal, I’m worried about the personal thing. Like if you make a platform where everyone is engaged with one another, I think the institution should just make these platforms do-able.” – (Participant K)

“Institutions could just post events on their page. I would rather let them email me things because what if you don’t check your Facebook and then you miss out these things. Institutions can create an events page, an academic page and then a sports page.” – (Participant L)

Recommendations from interviews regarding the use of social media in academia by tertiary institutions to improve students’ academic engagement all concurred with the findings from the online survey. More than half of the students (58.2%) agreed and strongly agreed that the introduction of SM in an academic space by tertiary institutions can help improve students’ academic engagement. This is a perspective that was generally shared by most of the interview participants.

Analysis on students’ recommendations

Judging from students’ recommendations towards using social media in tertiary institutions, it is clear that students feel that different entities in tertiary institutions have an important role to play to realise the effective use of social media in tertiary institutions to improve students’ academic engagement. The author deduces that participants felt strongly about how other students should take the initiative to use social media to their advantage in order to improve their academic engagement. Students are expected to create social media pages, groups or

accounts and use them as a platform for sharing academic material, discussing about academic topics and engaging in academic work. Students were also expected to not get carried away on social media and focus more on academic activities rather than on social activities. This shows that students are aware of how much responsibility and self-control would be required from them in order for them to use social media in productive manner. Students were expected to also use social media to keep up with the latest news that would help inform their academic knowledge and help improve their academic engagement. Students are also expected to all participate in using social media to freely express their opinions about academic work, carry out meaningful academic discussions and help each other out with academic work. The author deduces that students are aware of the fact that effort from all the students will be needed to partake in the use of social media to help improve students' academic engagement.

Participants' responses revealed how they thought lecturers taking the initiative to use social media in an academic space will help improve students' academic engagement. Lecturers were expected to use social media to book appointments with students, the author assumes that students view social media as an easier way to set up meetings with their lecturers compared to the traditional emailing route. Lecturers were also expected to be part of the social media groups, pages or accounts in case they were needed to answer questions that students had about a particular topic. This shows that although students could receive feedback from their peers, they still valued feedback from their lecturers as they were likely to provide accurate academic information. This also shows that students wanted lecturers to be part of their academic discussions on social media in order to support students and help improve students' academic engagement. Lecturers were also expected to post academic material (such as notes and videos) on social media even though the material was already available on RU Connected (Learning management system). This shows that students preferred lectures to post academic material more on social media than on the learning management system. The author deduces that social media could be more easily accessible to students and the idea of accessing the learning management system may be less appealing to students. Lecturers were also expected to use social media to disseminate academic information regarding classes, tests or assignments. This shows that students think that social media would be the ideal tool for lecturers to use in order keep them up to date with their coursework. The author deduces that overall, lecturers are expected by students to embrace social media and acknowledge social media as an ideal platform for engaging in academic work and improving students' academic engagement.

Participants' further recommended that departments should also use social media in order to engage with students and help improve students' academic engagement. Departments were expected to use social media as a marketing tool to attract potential students and provide the necessary departmental information. The author infers that students feel comfortable and rely on social media when they need to find out important information regarding departments at a university. Participants felt that students were more likely to access departmental social media pages, groups or accounts and were less likely to access the university website whenever they needed departmental information. The author deduces that students did not trust the information that they got from the university website and that's why they preferred departments to provide information through social media. Departments were also expected to use social media to share prospectuses of courses they offer and to communicate with

students whenever they have questions regarding the departments. The author infers that students were willing to engage with the departments on social media whenever they were in need of finding out important academic information. The author concludes that departments were basically expected to share academic information that would be valuable to students in order to actively engage with them and help them improve their academic engagement.

Participants also recommended faculties to use social media or support the use of social media in academia to improve students' academic engagement. Faculties were expected to use social media to communicate with students in case students had questions that needed an immediate response. This shows that students perceive social media as an ideal platform to carry out quick conversations with faculties. Faculties were also expected to use social media to post announcements and important academic information. The author infers that students preferred information being shared by faculties on social media as it was likely to reach a large audience. The author also got the impression that students preferred faculties to support departments, lecturers and students in the use of social media in an educational setting. This is because students felt that lecturers and students were more willing to follow suite if the use social media in education was encouraged by faculties to improve students' academic engagement. Tertiary institutions were also expected to have the same role as faculties in supporting the use of social media in academia. The author infers that the encouragement from tertiary institutions is vital in order for other entities (Faculties, departments, lecturers, students) to seriously take up the use of social media in academia. Students seemed to think that they are likely to use and successfully adopt social media in order to improve their academic engagement when social media is encouraged and supported by authoritative figures in a tertiary institution.

7.2.3.2 Considerations and suggestions

Participants had further suggestions and considerations that they voiced and that stood out from the interviews. Students felt that the use of social media in academia should certainly be encouraged and that certain aspects should be considered when the use of social media in tertiary institutions is officially implemented in future.

a) Blended learning

The researcher was interested to find out if students preferred using social media groups/pages for academic courses instead of learning management systems (e.g. RU Connected), or whether they preferred using social media groups/pages to supplement learning management systems to improve your academic engagement.

This question was met with mixed responses that were revealed in the findings from the online survey. Participants revealed that they preferred using social media to support or supplement existing ways of learning, including the use of learning management systems (LMS) and attending lectures. This concept is known as 'blended learning', which is the result of the incorporation of the using of internet based platforms and face to face learning experiences (Chan and Leung, 2016). This was evident from the interviewees' responses:

"I think we should have both (SM and LMS), I also think at times you need that face to face interaction with the lecturer, you need to see the lecturer and attend the lectures and then

they can actually tell you if they have posted reading material on RU Connected (Learning Management System), how to access it there and carry out further readings.

I think it's better because at times I tend to understand more and I tend to take in a lot more when I hear someone speaking, and when I read on my own I do understand but I only start recalling some of the things that were being said when I am reading and I start making connections to that, and it actually helps me, so I feel like we need both social media and learning management systems.” – (Participant A)

“I would rather have social media with RU Connected because the pages that we have are for sharing information quickly whereas with RU Connected you know that you can never go wrong because that is what the lecturer posted. Sometimes information shared on social media among students is not always reliable.” – (Participant D)

“I think social media groups should be used to supplement RU Connected because I think in terms of the communication, social media would be great but as a file access and sharing system I think RU connected would still be good because it categorizes things well, rather than having to scroll to the top to find something. RU connected is a nice sort of file management system but I think the best way of communication should be through social media as it's more interactive.” – (Participant E)

“I think social media should supplement RU Connected, because although we opt to use Facebook there is weakness to it that you end up doing something else instead of what you came for. So I think they could use it as a supplement just to make sure that everyone has direct access, if they do not access it on RU connected then they access it on Facebook, I think that is a safe assumption. On Twitter maybe people could post small video clips.” – (Participant F)

“I think they (SM and LMS) should be used together because if they are using both and if they can't access RU Connected then access social media, so I think they are used interchangeably. I think if social media and RU Connected are both used they can improve the efficiency of communication we are having among students, lecturers, different departments and maybe the university at large.” – (Participant H)

“I think the social media page/group can be used as a supplement of RU Connected definitely, I don't think one should replace the other because they are there for different reasons like RU Connected is more serious, that's where you can find all your courses, lecturers use that to post PowerPoints and its very like structured whereas Facebook can provide that section where you talk about what's on RU Connected.

So RU Connected is like your lecture hall and then Facebook would be time outside the lecture hall. So I think Facebook can be used to supplement RU connected and I don't think it should replace it because I actually depend on RU Connected as well for PowerPoints.

Facebook is great but it should be used reasonably because I think one of the fears for lecturers and the older generation is that it's going to overtake the lecture experience. I think that's also something that students need to understand is that Facebook shouldn't be a replacement for your lecture because you have those students who are like can someone just post the notes and then they won't go to lectures but that's a misconception that needs to die.

It shouldn't be a replacement for your lecture it should be a supplement. Facebook is great but it should be used carefully." – (Participant K)

The interview responses concurred with the online survey results. A significant number of students (68.8%) agreed and strongly agreed that the use of SM to support/supplement the traditional way of learning can help improve students' academic engagement. When students were asked if the use of SM instead of learning management systems (RU Connected) can help improve students' academic engagement, 43.3% disagreed and strongly disagreed while only 26.8% agreed and strongly agreed. Therefore, this was an indication that students preferred the use of both social media and learning management systems in academia to improve their academic engagement.

b) Social media over email

Students also suggested that tertiary institutions should bear in mind that students use social media more than they check their emails. Therefore, students felt that tertiary institution entities (lecturers, departments, faculties) should consider using social media to convey academic information. This was evident in their responses:

"Using Facebook as opposed to using email could work, if lecturers could jump on board like on the Facebook groups even if we do have separate groups it would just be so much better because sharing materials on emails and sometimes sending attachments does not work well and you have to troll through your emails and find it. Whereas when it's on Facebook it's more accessible and it's something that we all familiar with." – (Participant B)

"I think it (SM) works really well instead of emails...it's quicker than email and the whole emailing the lecturer process. I know of a lecturer who emails his students essay topics and things that are going on now but if he would share those things on social media I think that would be really beneficial. Reality is most students do not read their emails. From an academic point of view if we try to adopt the spread of ideas it could work and could not work." – (Participant D)

"I like it because its instant and it's easy to get a lot of people's opinions at the same time rather than emailing because people check their email like once every day or two or three days." – (Participant E)

"We have Facebook course groups where our class reps communicate with us; it's quite fast and easier to get information than email. So it's also used alternatively with the emails because people don't usually read their emails but they actually see the Facebook posts." – (Participant F)

"They (lecturers) could also use it (SM) for communicating because someone might take up to like 2 hours to check their emails but it's very efficient if the message is sent through Facebook because most people are always on Facebook. Very few people respond to emails." – (Participant H)

c) Social media is more interactive

Students also felt that social media should be used in tertiary students as it had the clear advantage of being more interactive than learning management systems. This was evident in the participants' responses:

"Most of us don't usually use the news forum on RU Connected to be honest, usually the lecturer just posts but nobody really goes and comment. People would rather email the lecturer directly or bring it up in class. Whereas on Facebook you can just go put out a question then someone from the class will answer you. RU Connected is just not that sociable thus the chat and commenting features are not encouraging." – (Participant D)

"RU connected is not interactive, like it's more of a one-way thing but for social media there is communication between both parties." – (Participant H)

"I think Facebook is more interactive because on RU Connected nobody is online. The thing about Facebook is that it can provide understanding of lecturers, but I think Facebook can help with that." – (Participant K)

"Facebook or social media is more interactive because everybody knows how to use Facebook but not everybody knows how to email people and message people on RU Connected that feels like a very formal platform." – (Participant L)

d) Social media training for students and lecturers

Participants felt that training of lecturers and students on how to use social media was needed in order for the use of social media in academia to benefit students' academic engagement. This was evident in their responses:

"I think in the most part there needs to be a whole technology overhaul with the lecturers. The thing is I think RU Connected (Rhodes University LMS) is great but you are more likely to go onto Facebook to look for resources that are being shared by your classmates than you are to go on RU Connected. I think we need education for the lecturers in terms of social media."

"I think that there should be some kind of lessons and etiquette on how to use it but it might stop the free flow of thoughts and questions. I think respect needs to be highlighted." – (Participant B)

"So I think the first thing the people need to do at Rhodes maybe and tertiary institutions is you need to give older lecturers a Facebook induction where they know how to use it and recognize its impact. I also think that the older generation does not realize how important Facebook is and what it has started for a lot of people. I definitely think lecturers need to get some exposure on how to use it in a way that's good."

"I would also suggest that the institution gives new students exposure on how to use this stuff. It isn't that there is an issue with it (social media) being incorporated in the system, it's that people don't know how to use it. I mean you can't expect someone who comes from a school where computers weren't a thing to suddenly engage with RU Connected or to suddenly engage with Facebook. Like your orientation weeks that you have need to be more heavily"

focused towards engagement with computers because that's unfortunately where the world is heading, you can't shy away from them because you are going to be left behind.

I think people need to be educated better on how to manage their Facebook because people think that they can say whatever they can and then it won't come back to them.” – (Participant I)

Interestingly, the interview responses concurred with the findings from the online survey. The majority of students (63.6%) also agreed and strongly agreed that institutions offering workshops/seminars that teach students and lecturers how to use SM for academic purposes can help improve students' academic engagement.

e) SM sites and LMS developers

Students had additional recommendations for social media sites and learning management systems developers. Participants suggested that it would be ideal if learning management systems incorporated social media features and vice versa. This was evident in their responses:

“A learning management system that has something similar to the Facebook feed with some academic restrictions or maybe something that encompasses the academics but has a Facebook feel would be better but then I don't know whether that would be accessible or whether people would be keen to use that.” – (Participant B)

“If they could find a way to link the news forum (on RU Connected) directly with our Facebook page would be very nice because sometimes when an email comes in, chances are I am not going to read it. I think it would be nice if they could be set up RU Connected like Facebook.” – (Participant D)

“I think RU Connected and Facebook have to merge, they need to be one joint system of things. It would be nice to have Facebook on the same network as RU Connected because at the end of the day we do get resources off Facebook as well.

I think they need to form one system and they need to be integrated, so you need to have Facebook as a part of RU Connected. RU connected needs to have an extra tab for Facebook and that Facebook tab must just be a link to the academic pages so you can connect to a course page through RU Connected. So even if you have don't necessarily have Facebook, because you are a part of RU Connected and you have a student number, you can access the Facebook page via the tab. So the tab the student goes into would have the courses on Facebook that are recognized by the university, and then you click on the one you are part of, and then you type in your student number, and then you have your page, that way you still have the choice whether or not you want to have Facebook but you can still access the material on a safe network.” – (Participant I)

Analysis on students' considerations and suggestions

In addition to students' recommendations, participants decided to offer suggestions to all entities in tertiary institutions. These entities were expected to take these suggestions into

consideration if the use of social media was to be implemented effectively in academia. Students suggested that social media should be used to supplement lectures and the use of learning management systems (LMS), a concept known as blended learning. The author infers that students still see the value in the existing ways of teaching and learning. Attending lecturers is supposed to help students receive reliable information, learning management systems are supposed to be used as file management systems that allow students to access academic materials while social media is supposed to enhance interaction and communication among students and lecturers, in order to improve students' academic engagement.

Students also revealed that they preferred using social media over emails and it would be ideal if lecturers, departments, faculties were to use social media to disseminate information. This is because students were more likely to visit social media than check their emails. The author deduces that students preferred to receive information via social media as they feel comfortable using social media and because social media is easily accessible. Students further suggested that first and foremost, entities (students, lectures, departmental and faculty staff) in tertiary institutions are supposed to receive training on how to effectively use social media to improve students' academic engagement. The author infers that students are well aware that in order for the use of social media to have a desired effect on their academic engagement, orientation on how to use social media will be necessity. Students then made it known that it would be ideal if social media sites and learning management systems developers could instil similar features in both platforms. The author infers that because students have experience in using both social media and learning management systems, they are the ideal candidates to offer user experience feedback to developers that would enhance the use of social media in tertiary institutions to improve students' academic engagement.

7.3 Discussion

There are numerous findings from the interviews that correlate with previous studies conducted by other researchers all over the world. The author reveals similar findings from literature that concur with findings from this study.

a) Social activities

Findings suggest that students carried out social activities while using social media. One of the main activities they engaged in was seeing what others were up to. This finding is consistent with Oye, Helou, and Rahim (2012) and Junco (2015) who reported that students checked up on friends whenever they used social media. Students also reported that they used social media to communicate with their friends and family. This finding concurs with Schlenkrich and Sewry (2012) and Lim and Richardson's (2015) study who found that students use social media to connect with friends. Students also reported that they used social media to be updated with the news. This finding is similar to Tiryakioglu and Erzurum's (2011) study who found that students used social media to follow up on recent events and daily news. Another social activity that students engaged in is sharing, commenting and liking other users' posts. This finding is consistent with Wright, et al., (2013) and Junco's (2015) study who reported that students commented on and shared other users' posts.

b) Academic activities

Students reported that they engaged in academic activities while using social media. One of the main activities students engaged in was the posting and sharing of educational resources. This finding was similar to Manca and Ranieri (2013) and Alhazmi and Rahman (2014) who reported that students used social media to share academic resources. Students further reported that they receive and share academic information updates. This finding is quite similar to Buzzetto-More's (2012) research who reported that students used social media to share links to academic publications and upcoming events. Social media was also used academically by students to communicate with their peers. This finding is consistent with Oye, Helou, and Rahim (2012) and Alhazmi and Rahman (2014) who revealed that students used social media to communicate with their peers on academically relevant matters. Students also revealed that they used social media to discuss and post academic work. This finding concurs with Tiryakioglu and Erzurum (2011) and Manca and Ranieri (2013) who reported that students used social media to carry out class discussions.

c) Positive impact

Students revealed their perceptions towards social media's influence on their academic engagement. They reported several ways in which social media had a positive impact on their academic engagement. One of them was that social media promoted academic peer interaction and collaboration. This finding is similar to those of Martínez-Alemán (2009) and Chen and Bryer (2012) who reported that social media encourages collaboration and sharing of knowledge among students which improves students' learning. Students also reported that access to educational resources on social media had a positive impact on their academic engagement. This is in line with Bosch's (2009) study on using online social networking sites for teaching and learning, which revealed that students benefited from using social media for their academic work as they were able to work on their assignments and to access educational materials such as study notes.

Students reported that receiving educational information from social media positively influenced their academic engagement. This finding is quite similar to Mbodila, Ndebele and Muhandji's (2014) which disclose how the majority of students who used social media for learning regarded the information obtained from social media as helpful and as having a positive effect on their academic engagement. Students also mentioned that the sharing of information, ideas and opinions positively influenced their academic engagement. This finding is consistent with Jabr's (2011) study where students also reported that social media was important to their academic work as it allowed them to converse and to share information and ideas.

d) Negative impact

Participants also revealed the negative influence that the use of social media had on their academic engagement. Students reported that social media was destructive and addictive which negatively affected their academic engagement. This is consistent with Karimi and Khodabandelou's (2013) study which revealed that a sense of addiction when using social media may affect students' academic engagement poorly. Students also reported that social media promoted procrastination which negatively influenced their academic engagement.

This finding is similar to Eke, Omekwu and Odoh's (2014) study which revealed that social media had a negative impact on students' academic work as it promoted procrastination.

Another negative aspect that influenced students' academic engagement is that the use of social media affected students' study time and concentration in class. This is similar to Al-rahmi and Othman's (2013) study which revealed that social media affected students' productivity when studying and they felt that social media could not effectively help them manage their study time. Students reported that social media also affected their social wellbeing and relationships. This finding is quite similar to Rouis, Limayem and Salehi-Sangari's (2011) study which reported that there is a substantial decline in students' satisfaction with life when they are greatly or immensely occupied with social media. This inevitably affected students' academic engagement in a negative way.

e) Recommendations for lectures, departments, faculties and the tertiary institution

Students later made recommendations on ways that social media could be used to improve students' academic engagement. Students mentioned that other students should engage in educational activities when using social media. This is similar to findings from Alhazmi and Rahman's (2014) study whereby students suggested that it is the obligation of every student to be active in educational matters when using social media in order to create an environment conducive for learning and to improve their academic engagement. Students also recommended that lecturers should use social media, which they felt would improve students' academic engagement. This was consistent with Wang, Chen and Liang (2011) who suggested that lecturers should use social media in a way that will positively influence students' academic engagement and achievement in academia.

Students also recommended that departments should use social media to help improve students' academic engagement. This is similar to recommendations made by students from Madge's et al. (2009) study who revealed that social media could be used to manage the administrative matters of departments and to improve students' learning experience through engaging in academic activities. Students further suggested that faculties should also use social media to improve students' academic engagement. This concurs with students from Alhazmi and Rahman's (2014) study who reveal that the role of the faculties is to encourage student engagement through the use of social media for academic purposes. Students further suggested that tertiary institutions should also use, recognize and at least support the use of social media to enhance students' academic engagement. This is consistent with Jabr (2011), who recommends that tertiary institutions should play a more cooperative role and should build an interactive and educational space for both students and academic staff members in order to yield positive academic outcomes.

f) Suggestions and considerations

Participants further made suggestions and considerations that they wanted to be taken into account when implementing the use of social media in academia. Students suggested that it would be ideal if social media was used together with learning management systems (LMS) in academia to improve students' academic engagement. This was a recommendation also made by Mbodila, Ndebele and Muhandji (2014) who suggested that the faculties should

consider integrating social media with learning management systems to increase students' collaboration and engagement. Another new theme that emerged from the data was the preference of students to use social media rather than email. Students suggested that tertiary institutions as a whole should consider using social media instead of or in conjunction with emails since they engaged more on social media than checking their emails. Another comment made by students was the suggestion that social media was more interactive in terms of carrying out academic discussions than learning management systems (LMS). This suggested that it would be ideal to use social media as a communication hub for academically related matters when compared to LMS's. This finding is similar to Buzzetto-More's (2012) findings which disclosed that students preferred having coursework discussions and material posted on social media as opposed to learning management systems.

Students additionally suggested that students and lecturers needed training on the use of social media in order to make the most of using social media in academia. This finding is similar to Ranaweera, et. al, (2015) who stated that students and lecturers should be trained on how to use social media efficiently in order to contribute positively towards students' educational studies. In closing students made recommendations for social media sites and LMS developers by suggesting that it would be beneficial if social media and learning management systems shared similar features that would help improve their academic engagement. This suggestion is similar to recommendations made by students from Alhazmi and Rahman's (2014) study who reported that, if social media sites improved their features to suit teaching and learning to empower students to be able to organize and retrieve data and to easily look for content and to enable the assessment of interactions on social media; then this would encourage students to use social media more for academic purposes and enhance academic engagement.

7.4 Conclusion

The author provided a summary of what has been covered in the interviews section. The author began by explaining the implementation process of the interviews and the data analysis process. The author then discussed how students use social media in academia. In this section, the author revealed the social and academic activities that students engaged in while using social media. The author further discussed the impact that social media has on students' academic engagement. The author revealed the positive and negative impact of social media on students' academic engagement. Additionally, the author discussed the ways that students thought social media could be used to improve students' academic engagement. Recommendations towards tertiary institution entities such as students, lecturers, departments, faculties and the tertiary institution were revealed. Further considerations and suggestions were discussed to conclude the section.

The findings revealed that students use social media on a daily basis and that it has become prominent in their lives. Students also reported that they used social media for both social and academic activities and that these activities had both positive and negative effects on their academic engagement. However, students suggested that social media has more of a positive impact on their academic engagement and they recommended that social media ought to be used as a teaching tool to improve students' academic engagement.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Introduction

In this chapter the author provides a summary of the research. The concluding chapter is divided into 5 sections, namely: Summary, Research questions revisited, Contribution, Recommendations and Limitations.

The author begins by giving a summarized overview of the research thesis and by explaining the outcome of the research in the section marked 'Summary'. The author then discusses how the main research question and research sub questions were answered by the findings from the research in the section marked 'Research questions revisited'. In the section marked 'Contribution', the author summarizes the contributions that the research study has made to the body of knowledge. In the section marked 'Recommendations', the author provides recommendations and suggestions adopted from the findings. In the last subsection, namely 'Limitations', the author reveals all the aspects of the study that could have limited the outcome of the study and provides recommendations for future work. The author finally concludes the chapter by summarizing the conclusions of the entire study.

8.1 Summary

The research set out to determine students' perceptions towards the use of social media and its impact on students' academic engagement in a tertiary institution (Rhodes University). A mixed method case study research, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods was conducted, focusing on the use of Facebook and Twitter specifically by students at Rhodes University. The problem statement points out that social media has become an integral part of student life but not enough research has been conducted, especially in the South African context. Thus the study aimed to fill that knowledge gap and to further investigate whether social media could be used to improve students' academic engagement.

The research firstly set out to establish how students make use of social media, Secondly, the aim was to determine how students' use of social media affects their academic engagement and thirdly to determine the ways in which students thought social media could be used to improve their academic engagement. The data was collected by using an online survey and in depth interviews to answer the research questions. After analysing the data, the objectives of the research were completed and conclusions were made from the analysis. The findings are discussed later in this chapter.

8.2 Research questions revisited

The researcher provides the main research question and the list of research sub questions that were presented in chapter one and provides the answers deduced from the data collected. The research was set out to answer the main research question: '*How could social media be used effectively to enhance students' academic engagement in tertiary institutions?*' The main research question was then subdivided into the research sub questions:

- a) The first research sub question that the study set out to answer is: ‘*How do students make use of social media at Rhodes University?*’ This question was aimed at finding out what activities students engaged in and for how long. Students reported that they used social media to engage in both social and academic activities. The social activity that students engaged in most was the using of social media to obtain new information and to keep up to date with the information daily. The academic activity that students engaged in most was the communicating with friends about academic related purposes (at least 1-2 days per week). The researcher could then deduce that students’ used social media more to engage in social activities (on a daily basis) than on academic activities. (See section 7.1.2 and 7.2.1).
- b) The second research sub question that the study intended to answer is: ‘*How does the use of social media influence students’ academic engagement at Rhodes University, from a students’ perspective?*’ Students reported that social media affected their academic engagement both positively and negatively. The outstanding positive impact on students’ academic engagement (as reported by students) was the ability for students to communicate and collaborate with their peers about academically purposeful work. The most negative impact on students’ academic engagement (as reported by students) was that social media was destructive and addictive. The overall perception of students was that social media had more of a positive than a negative impact on students’ academic engagement. (See section 7.1.3 and 7.2.2).
- c) The third research sub question that the study aimed to answer is: ‘*What are the effective ways of using social media to benefit students’ academic engagement at Rhodes University, from a students’ perspective?*’ This question formed the basis of the thesis and was intended to answer the main research question. Students gave recommendations of the ways that other students, lecturers, departments, faculties and the tertiary institution as a whole can use social media to improve students’ academic engagement. Students also revealed suggestions and considerations that different university entities should keep in mind in the event of the use of social media officially being implemented in the near future. The general perspective shared by most of the students was that it would be beneficial to use social media in tertiary institutions, which will inevitably enhance students’ academic engagement. (See Section 7.1.4 and 7.2.3).

8.3 Contribution

This study has succeeded in making a number of contributions to the body of knowledge regarding the use of social media in South African tertiary institutions. Firstly, the study set out to fill the gap that exists in terms of studies that have discussed the impact of social media on students’ academic engagement in a tertiary institution, specifically in a developing country like South Africa. It is worth noting that most of the studies conducted on social media and its relation to students’ academic engagement have been carried out in the Western world. Secondly, the study has not only focused on Facebook (the platform most social media studies have focused on) but also on Twitter, in order to get a glimpse of other popular social media sites used by students at tertiary level. Thirdly, the study has succeeded in carrying out

research in one of the red cluster tertiary institutions namely Rhodes University; the latter being one of the research-intensive universities that produces a great number of postgraduates and future academics and has high student success, graduation rates, research outputs, proportions of academic staff with PhD and income and low staff-student ratios (MacGregor, 2010; Summit and Education, 2010; Van Der Schyff and Krauss, 2014).

Other contributions made by the study include the successful exploration of the ways in which students use social media in a tertiary institution. The study found that students engaged in various activities on social media, namely: social and academic. The study also managed to uncover how social media influences students' academic engagement. The study found that the social activities (that were reported by students) were likely to have a negative impact on students' academic engagement, while academic activities were likely to have a positive impact on students' academic engagement. The study then managed to uncover ways that social media can be utilized to improve students' academic engagement. The study provided recommendations that students, lecturers, departments, faculties and the tertiary institution as a whole, can use in order for social media to benefit students' academic engagement. It is also worth mentioning that the recommendations provided are both practical and feasible in terms of employability.

Information from this study could be used by other tertiary institutions, especially in South Africa, to successfully implement the use of social media in academia in a way that could positively influence students' academic engagement. The information could also be used to minimize the negative impact of social media on students' academic engagement. Social media sites' and learning management systems' developers can also use and consider information from the study when designing and developing their respective platforms. This study can also be used as a source of information for further studies that intend to carry out in depth research regarding the impact of social media on students' academic engagement in tertiary institutions.

8.4 Recommendations

The author will submit recommendations based on the research findings and the contributions made by the study (See section 7.2.3.1 and 7.2.3.2). There are certain aspects that tertiary institutions entities should consider when using social media in academia in order to improve students' academic engagement:

a) Students

Even though students have embraced the use of social media in tertiary institutions, they should also keep in mind that there are many ways of using social media that could influence their academic engagement in various ways. Social activities on social media were likely to negatively affect their academic engagement while academic activities were likely to positively affect their academic engagement. Therefore, it is advisable that students use social media in ways that could improve their academic engagement. Some of the ways include; the following of educational pages and the joining of educational groups for their respective courses in order to keep up to date with academic information (tests/assignments); communicating with their peers,

communicating with their lecturers; accessing and sharing educational material and taking charge of their own learning by creating their own content by sharing opinions, in order to improve their academic engagement.

Students should also guard against the negative aspects of social media that influence their academic engagement, such as: being distracted and addicted to social media, procrastination, and letting social media affect their study time and concentration in class. Some of the safeguards include: keeping self-imposed tabs; having self-control and knowing when to stop when it came to engaging in social activities that are irrelevant to their academic work when using social media. Additionally, students should also try to engage in academic activities when using social media and should start viewing social media as a platform that could help improve their academic engagement.

b) Lecturers

Lecturers are advised to acknowledge that social media has become an important part of students' lives and that it can be used as an education tool, rather than to see it as a disruption to students' academic engagement. Lecturers are encouraged to use social media in the following ways when interacting with students: scheduling appointments; discussing educational topics on social media; posting and sharing educational resources and updates in respect of assignments, tests and exams. Lecturers should also keep in mind that students are more likely to use social media than check their emails; thus it would be advisable to use social media as an alternative to emails and in conjunction with learning management systems in order to ensure that students can access education information and resources from different platforms.

Lecturers are also urged to keep in mind that students reported that social media is more interactive than learning management systems; thus making social media an ideal space for interacting with students regarding academic work. Overall, lecturers should note that in order to get the best results, students preferred blended learning, which includes students attending lectures and using social media with learning management systems to improve their academic engagement.

c) Departments

Departments are encouraged to use social media in a way that could benefit students' academic engagement. It would be advisable for departments to use social media for sharing and keeping students up to date with departmental information, communicating with students and as a marketing tool for prospective students. Departments should also note that students prefer to check departmental social media pages rather than the departmental website since most students use social media and regard the departmental website as outdated.

d) Faculties

Faculties are advised to use social media to enhance students' academic engagement. Faculties are encouraged to use social media as a platform to interact with students

with any enquiries they might have, to post important announcements related to the faculty and to support the departments and lecturers in their respective faculties to use social media with their students in order to improve students' academic engagement.

e) Tertiary institutions

Tertiary institutions are encouraged to acknowledge and embrace the use of social media to benefit students' academic engagement. Tertiary institutions are also encouraged to acknowledge that social media has been prevalent among tertiary students and is here to stay. They are expected to play an important role in allowing the integration of social media in academia through using social media for publicity purposes and supporting faculties, departments, lecturers and students to use social media for academic purposes. They are also expected to at least implement social media training for both lecturers and students so that they can familiarise themselves with using social media for academic purposes.

f) SM and LMS developers

Social media and learning management systems' developers are encouraged to consider incorporating features of social media in learning management systems or incorporating learning management system features in social media when designing their respective platforms. This is intended to provide students with a complete educational and interactive experience in order to improve their academic engagement.

8.5 Limitations

The researcher points out limitations of this study that future researchers may need to consider when conducting similar research related to social media's impact on students' academic engagement and determining ways that social media could be used to enhance students' academic engagement.

a) Generalizability

One of the limitations of this study is that it was conducted using a case study approach focusing on one South African university. The findings from the study thus cannot be generalized to other universities in South Africa. Therefore, more case studies need to be carried out across several universities and further studies should ensure the representation of universities from all clusters (green, blue and red). This will enhance the validity and the generalizability of the findings.

b) Time and sample size

Time was another limitation which inevitably affected the sample size. Since the researcher had limited time to collect the data and to carry out the research, only a limited number of participants could be used for the study. A longitudinal study should be conducted in the future which would mean that a larger sample of students may be available to take part in the

study. The larger the sample, the more perceptions the researcher would be able to collect and the more accurate the findings will be.

c) Language

Another limiting factor is the use of English as the medium of instruction for the interviews. Since the researcher has interviewed students who had various home languages, future researchers should consider using the other official South African languages which could yield more accurate data from students.

8.6 Future Considerations

Future researchers should consider carrying out similar research focusing on other social media sites (such as YouTube) that may have the potential to enhance students' academic engagement. It is advisable for future researchers to focus on all the other entities (lecturers, heads of department and faculty deans) that exist in tertiary institutions and to establish their perceptions regarding the use of social media for academic engagement in academia.

8.7 Conclusion

This study has revealed how students make use of social media in a tertiary institution, particularly in a South African tertiary institution (Rhodes University) and further revealed that students engage in both social and academic activities when using social media. The study has also revealed students' perceptions on how social media influences their academic engagement. Overall, students reported that social media has a more positive than negative impact on their academic engagement. Students also revealed that using social media at tertiary level could be beneficial and could improve their academic engagement. It is worth noting that that findings from this study cannot be generalized and may not be deemed as the final word on the topic at hand, because more research related to social media will need to be carried out in order to get more conclusive outcomes, especially in a South African context.

Using the qualitative interpretivism approach has also yielded convincing results, since the main user and participant in the use of social media in a tertiary institution is a student, who, at end of the day, is a human being with perceptions that need to be considered if the use of social media in tertiary institutions is to be effectively implemented to enhance students' academic engagement in the future.

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Appendix A

Online Survey

In this section, the author presents the online survey that was used for data collection. The first part covers the questions used for the online survey and their purposes. The online survey is later presented in a way as it appeared to the respondents who took part in the survey.

#	Survey question	Purpose of question
1	Do you use social media sites?	The purpose of this question is to find out if the students actually use social media, if they do then they would be eligible to take part in the survey. If they don't then they will be required to provide a reason as to why they don't so that the researcher can get a clear picture as to why some students do not engage in social media.
2	Which social media site (s) do you currently use?	The purpose of this question is to find out the most prominent social media site (s) used by students at Rhodes University.
3	Which other social media site do you specifically use?	The purpose of this question is to find out other most prominent social media sites used by students at Rhodes University.
4	Age?	The purpose of this question is to find out the most prominent age group of students that are likely to engage in social media at Rhodes University.
5	Gender?	The purpose of this question is to find out the most prominent gender that is more likely to engage in social media at Rhodes University.
6	Faculty	The purpose of this question is to find out the representation of students from different faculties at Rhodes University.
7	Degree?	The purpose of this question is to find out the representation of students enrolled for different degrees at Rhodes University.
8	Level of study?	The purpose of this question is to find out the most prominent level of study that engage in social media at Rhodes University.
9	How long have you been using social media for?	The purpose of this question is to find out the students' experience level of using social media at Rhodes University.
10	Devices used to access social media?	The purpose of this question is to find out the most prominent device used by students at Rhodes University to access social media.

11	Where do you usually access or use social media?	The purpose of this question is to find out the most prominent place where students access social media sites at Rhodes University.
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Table A.1: Demographics

#	Survey question	Purpose of question
1	What social activities do you engage in when using social media?	The purpose of this question is to find out the most prominent type of social activities students engage in when using social media sites.
2	How long do you spend on social media for social activities in a day?	The purpose of this question is to find out the extent to which Rhodes University students use social media for social activities in a day.
3	How many days in a week do you use social media for social activities?	The purpose of this question is to find out the extent to which Rhodes University students use social media for social activities in a week.
4	What academic activities do you engage in when using social media?	The purpose of this question is to find out the most prominent type of academic/professional activities students engage in when using social media sites.
5	How often do you use social media sites for academic purposes in a day?	The purpose of this question is to find out the extent to which Rhodes University students use social media for social academic/professional in a day.
6	How many days in a week do you use social media for academic purposes?	The purpose of this question is to find out the extent to which Rhodes University students use social media for social academic/professional in a week.
7	Who do you keep in touch with when using social media sites?	The purpose of this question is to find out who students prominently communicate with when using social media sites.
8	What kind of communities/pages/groups do you subscribe to on social media sites?	The purpose of this question is to find out which kind communities/pages/groups that students subscribe to when using social media is prominent.

Table A.2: How students use social media

#	Survey question	Purpose of question
1	The use of social media (SM) as a learning tool enhances class discussions, which improves students' academic engagement.	The purpose of this question is to find out if the use of social media as a learning tool positively impacts class discussions and consequently students' academic engagement.
2	SM helps to create a learning environment, which improves students' academic engagement.	The purpose of this question is to find out if the use of social media helps create a learning environment thus positively impacting students' academic engagement.

3	SM provides useful information to students' academic work, which improves students' academic engagement.	The purpose of this question is to find out if the use of social media provides useful information for academic work that positively impacts students' academic engagement.
4	SM improves communication among students and lectures, which improves students' academic engagement.	The purpose of this question is to find out if the use of social media improves communication among students and lectures which positively impacts students' academic engagement.
5	SM improves collaboration among students and lecturers, which improves students' academic engagement.	The purpose of this question is to find out if the use of social media improves collaboration among students and lectures which positively impacts students' academic engagement.
6	SM negatively influences students' academic work productivity, which negatively impacts students' academic engagement.	The purpose of this question is to find out if the use of social media negatively impacts students' academic work productivity and consequently their academic engagement.
7	SM is a disruption to students' academic engagement, which negatively impacts students' academic engagement.	The purpose of this question is to find out if the use of social media acts as a disruption thus negatively impacts students' academic engagement.
8	SM is addictive, which negatively impacts students' academic engagement.	The purpose of this question is to find out if the use of social media is addictive therefore negatively impacts students' academic engagement.
9	SM negatively affects students' concentration in class, which negatively impacts students' academic engagement.	The purpose of this question is to find out if the use of social media negatively affects students' concentration in class and students' academic engagement.
10	SM promotes procrastination instead of students working on their academic work, which negatively impacts students' academic engagement.	The purpose of this question is to find out if the use of social media promotes procrastination that gets in the way of students' academic work thus negatively impacts students' academic engagement.
11	The use of SM for social or academic activities has no significant influence whatsoever on students' academic engagement.	The purpose of this question is to find out if students think that their use of social media in an academic environment has no impact whatsoever to their academic engagement.

Table A.3: How the use of social media influences student's academic engagement

Students' Perceptions towards the Influences of Social Media on Students' Academic Engagement at Rhodes University

Dear Student,

I am asking you to complete a survey about students' perceptions towards social media's impact on students' academic engagement. Your participation in this study will involve completing a survey questionnaire. It is a short survey and it may take up to 10 minutes or less to complete. Please try to answer all of the questions and not to submit incomplete surveys.

The collected results will provide insight into students' perceptions of how social media influences students' academic engagement in tertiary institutions. It will help me to understand the influence of social media on students' academic engagement. Hence the title: Students' Perceptions towards the influences of Social Media on Student's Academic Engagement at a Tertiary Institution: A Case Study on the use of Facebook and Twitter at Rhodes University.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any stage. If for any reason you are not comfortable answering any question(s), you are able to skip over the question(s). Google Forms is an online survey tool. Please be aware that your IP address will not be collected in the survey results. Your responses are strictly confidential and at no point will the researchers be able to identify who you are from your responses. All collected data from the survey will be anonymous, will be stored in a protected electronic format and will be password protected.

This research is being conducted by a postgraduate student in the Information Systems Department for a master's degree, under the supervision of Mr. John McNeill (Senior lecturer in the Information Systems Department). The study has been granted Ethical Clearance by the Computer Science and Information Systems Department Ethics Committee (clearance reference: CIS 16-04) and has been granted permission to go ahead by the Registrar.

Principal Investigator: Harry Moongela (harrymoongela@gmail.com)

Project Supervisor: Mr. John McNeill (J.McNeill@ru.ac.za)

Thank you in advance for your time and, live long and prosper.

*Required

Do I have your consent to continue? *

Yes

No

*Required

Section 1: Demographics

Instructions:

* Click/tick the appropriate option/box.

* Fill in the spaces provided.

1. Do you use social media sites? *

Yes

No

*Required

Social media choice

2. Which social media site (s) do you currently use? *

Facebook

Twitter

Both

None of the above

Age group

Age:

- 18-21
- 22-25
- 26-29
- 30-34
- 35 and above

Gender

Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Other

Faculty

Faculty:

- Commerce
- Education
- Humanities
- Law
- Pharmacy
- Science

Level of study

Level of study:

- Undergraduate
- Postgraduate

Degree

Degree:

Your answer

Social Media Experience

*Please note: The term social media (used in the following questions) refers to Facebook and/or Twitter.

How long have you been using social media?

- Less than 1 year
- 1–2 years
- 3–4 years
- 4–5 years
- More than 5 years

Devices Used

Devices used to access social media? (Choose all that apply)

- Phone
- Tablet
- Laptop
- PC
- Other: _____

Accessibility

Where do you usually access or use social media? (Choose all that apply)

- Home
- Residence
- Campus
- Other: _____

Section 2: How do you make use of social media?

1. What SOCIAL ACTIVITIES do you engage in when using social media? (Choose all that apply)

- Posting status updates and let others know what is happening in my life
- Posting, Tagging, Viewing photos or videos
- Keeping in touch with friends
- Receiving & sending messages/Chatting with friends
- Connect with people I have lost touch with
- See/follow what others are doing
- Commenting on others status updates/wall posts, pictures, etc.
- Get some new information and keep up to date
- Playing games (FarmVille, MafiaWars, etc.)
- Other: _____

Time spent on social activities

2. How long do you spend on social media for SOCIAL ACTIVITIES in a day?

- Less than an hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2-3 hours
- 3-4 hours
- More than 4 hours

Number of days spent engaging in social activities

3. How many days in a week do you use social media for SOCIAL ACTIVITIES?

- 1-2 days
- 2-3 days
- 3-4 days
- 4-5 days
- 6-7 days

Academic activities

4. What ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES do you engage in when using social media? (Choose all that apply)

- Sharing some course information or materials (e.g. slides, documents, videos, links, articles)
- Communicating with faculty members
- Communicating with friends about academic related topics
- Creating academic discussion groups
- Expressing educational ideas and feelings
- Building professional relationships
- Build/work on career networking
- Other: _____

Time spent on academic activities

5. How often do you use social media sites for ACADEMIC purposes in a day?

- Less than an hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2-3 hours
- 3-4 hours
- More than 4 hours

Number of days spent on academic activities

6. How many days in a week do you use social media for ACADEMIC purposes?

- 1-2 days
- 2-3 days
- 3-4 days
- 4-5 days
- 6-7 days

Connections

7. Who do you keep in touch with when using social media sites? (Choose all that apply)

- Social friends
- Fellow students
- Family
- Lecturers
- Department
- Faculty
- Institution
- Other: _____

Communities/pages/groups

8. What kind of communities/pages/groups do you subscribe to on social media sites? (Choose all that apply)

- Educational
- Entertainment
- Informational
- Other: _____

Section 3: How does your use of social media influence your academic engagement?

Please state your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. The use of social media (SM) as a learning tool enhances class discussions, which improves students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. SM helps to create a learning environment, which improves students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. SM provides useful information to students' academic work, which improves students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. SM improves COMMUNICATION among students and lectures, which improves students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. SM improves COLLABORATION among students and lecturers, which improves students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. SM negatively influences students' academic work productivity, which negatively impacts students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please state your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7. SM is a disruption to students' academic engagement, which negatively impacts students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. SM is addictive, which negatively impacts students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. SM negatively affects students' concentration in class, which negatively impacts students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. SM promotes procrastination instead of students working on their academic work, which negatively impacts students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. The use of SM for social or academic activities has no significant influence whatsoever on students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 4: What do you think are the ways that social media can be used to improve students' academic engagement?

Please state your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Using social media (SM) to create academic groups/pages among students and lecturers can help improve students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Using SM to carry out discussions related to course work among students and lecturers, can help improve students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Using SM for sharing academic work/materials among students and lecturers can help improve students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Lecturers awarding marks to students for using SM for academic purposes, can help improve students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Lecturers or tutors offering their support to students through using SM, can help improve students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please state your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6. The use of SM to support/supplement the traditional way of learning, can help improve students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. The use of SM instead of learning management systems (RU Connected), can help improve students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. Institutions offering workshops/seminars that teach students and lecturers on how to use SM for academic purposes, can help improve students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. The introduction of SM in an academic space by tertiary institutions, faculties, departments and lectures, can help improve students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. The implementation of policies to formally integrate the use of SM in the curriculum by tertiary institutions, can help improve students' academic engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Participate in an interview

If you are willing to be interviewed, please provide your email address:

Your answer

Thank for your time and contribution to our research.

Appendix B

Participant Correspondence

In this section, the author presents the documents that were administered to participants. Documents presented include the letter of invitation to participate in the research study which was emailed to potential respondents to take part in the interviews and the consent form that participants had to sign in order to take part in the interviews.

14 September 2016

Dear Student,

Re: Invitation to participate in research study

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled Students' Perceptions towards the Influences of Social Media on Student's Academic Engagement at a Tertiary Institution: A Case Study on the use of Facebook and Twitter at Rhodes University. The aim of this research is to determine the impact of social media on student's academic engagement at Rhodes University. Your participation and cooperation is important so that the results of the research are accurately portrayed.

The research will be undertaken through face-to-face semi structured interviews and the data to be collected from this research will be qualitative data of your perceptions towards the impact of social media on students' academic engagement. Your identity will be treated with complete confidentiality. The collection of this data will require about 20-30 minutes of your time to complete.

We will provide you with all the necessary information to assist you to understand the study and explain what would be expected of you (the participant). These guidelines would include the risks, benefits, and your rights as a study subject. Furthermore, it is important that you are aware that this study has been approved by the Computer Science and Information Systems Department Ethics Committee.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and this letter of invitation does not obligate you to take part in this research study. To participate, you will be required to provide written consent that will include your signature and date to verify that you understand and agree to the conditions. Please note that you have the right to withdraw at any given time during the study without penalty.

Thank you for your time and I hope that you will find our request favourable.

Yours sincerely,

Harry Moongela
Research Student

John McNeill
Supervisor



RHODES UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Department of Information Systems

Research Project Title:	Students' Perceptions towards the Influences of Social Media on Student's Academic Engagement at a Tertiary Institution: A Case Study on the use of Facebook and Twitter at Rhodes University.
Principal Investigator(s):	Harry Moongela
Participation Information	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I understand the purpose of the research study and my involvement in it• I understand the risks of participating in this research study• I understand the benefits of participating in this research study• I understand that I may withdraw from the research study at any stage without any penalty• I understand that participation in this study is done on a voluntary basis• I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential• I understand that I will receive no payment for participating in this study• I understand that the interview will be tape recorded	

Permission to use my responses for academic research:

"I hereby give permission to the researcher to interview and quote my responses in a scholarly research paper, provided that my identity is not revealed in the published record of the research. I hereby give my permission in the form of my signature below."

Signature _____ Date _____