Examining Lecturers' Perspectives on the Use of Facebook for Academic Purposes

by

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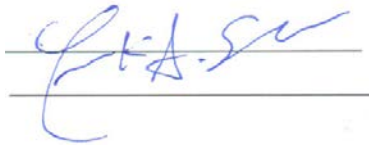University of South Africa

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23-December-2015

Declaration

I, Yannick António Sumbo, declare that **Examining Lecturers' Perspectives on the Use of Facebook for Academic Purposes** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used, or quoted, have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA or at any other higher education institution.

23-December-2015

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Acknowledgments

Abstract

This research examined lecturers' perspectives on the academic use of Facebook, specifically for teaching, in a higher education institution in Gauteng, South Africa. A survey research design was followed, and semi-structured interviews were conducted. The study sought to fill the gap in the Social Networking Sites literature by focusing on lecturers' perspectives, ascertaining how lecturers use Facebook as an academic teaching tool and determining the advantages and disadvantages thereof, and attempting to add to the debate on whether or not higher education settings could add the use of Facebook to their range of practices that may enhance teaching. The sample comprised fourteen respondents. It has emerged that lecturers are not, for the most part, utilising Facebook as an academic teaching tool. Based on the findings, a framework on how lecturers could integrate Facebook into academia is proposed.

Keywords

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the research area, presents the structure of the dissertation, and the background to the research problem. It also states what the research problem is, and identifies the research question, sub-questions and purpose.

1.1 Introduction

Among the extensive array of online tools, social networking sites (SNSs) are the most recent and appealing means of communication for people across the world (Aghazamani, 2010; Gillikin, 2015). Boyd and Ellison (2007, p.211) define SNSs as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system".

The first SNS, Sixdegree.com, was founded in 1997; currently, more than 500 such sites, with diverse technological affordances, exist worldwide (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Larson, 2014).

Facebook was established as a SNS in 2004 by Harvard University student Mark Zuckerberg (Aghazamani, 2010; O'Bannon et al., 2013). Users of this platform can create a personal profile, add other users (*friend* them), share pictures, personal information, and receive notifications when friends update their profiles. Users may also join common interest groups organised by research interests, nationalities, age cohorts and other characteristics (O'Bannon et al., 2013; Ul Halq & Chand, 2012).

The Statistics Portal (2014) reports that the countries with the most Facebook users are:

- United States (151.8 million members);

- India (108.9 million members);

- Brazil (70.5 million members);

- Indonesia (60.3 million members); and

- Mexico (44.4 million members).

According to Fuseware (2015), the number of Facebook users in South Africa is 11.8 million.

As of October 2015, Facebook had, at least, 1,477,915,220 users (Internet Live Stats, 2015). The platform offers its services in more than 100 languages worldwide (Smith, 2010); according to Ul Halq and Chand (2012), users spend more than 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook and over 50% of members log on daily.

The use of SNSs for academic purposes is an emerging trend, and "has received much attention" (Suri, 2013, p.7). The current study has examined lecturers' perspectives on the academic use of Facebook, specifically for teaching, in a higher education institution in Gauteng, South Africa.

The dissertation is organised as depicted in Figure 1.1.

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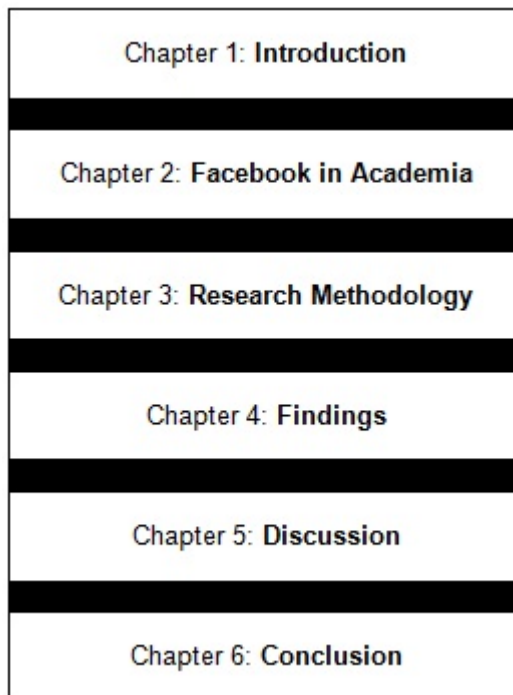
Figure 1.1: Structure of the dissertation

Chapter 1 introduces the research area, presents the background or context to the research problem, states what the research problem is, and presents the research question, sub-questions and purpose.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature to create a foundation for the research.

Chapter 3 elaborates on the researcher's chosen approaches to address the research question and sub-questions.

Chapter 4 presents the demographic characteristics of the sample first; this is followed by overall findings, a synopsis of the questions and responses, the structure of the themes, and, subsequently, the key findings under each identified theme.

Chapter 5 interprets the findings, discusses its connection with the theory, and proposes a framework on how Facebook could be integrated into academia.

Chapter 6 summarises the study, provides responses to the research question and sub-questions, states the limitations of the research, suggests its contribution, and proposes possible directions for future work.

1.2   Background

Web-based learning management systems (LMSs), defined as "a type of software designed to deliver, track, and manage training and education" (Lonn, 2009, p.1), have been utilised in higher education institutions for many years (Magro et al., 2013). These systems – for example, Blackboard, Moodle and Sakai Open Academic Environment – allow lecturers and students to share course-related resources, make course announcements, submit and return assignments, and support lecturer-student online communication (Lonn, 2009). Magro et al. (2013) assert that LMSs are all intended to assist the lecturer and to allow some degree of cooperation among students.

However, Facebook continues to be popular amongst university students, and more learners are making the platform a part of their daily routine (Junco, 2012; Magro et al., 2013). This researcher believes that, because of this, Salavuo's (2008) argument can still be made: that Facebook could be a more suitable academic complement for today's students than the more usual pedagogical tools. As further explained by Magro et al. (2013), first, students are comfortable communicating via an SNS. Second, through individual personal profiles, members (lecturers or students) can potentially locate others with identical interests and certain proficiency areas, resulting in cooperative learning opportunities and sharing of knowledge. Third, Facebook is accessible for free whereas several LMSs charge a fee unless the university licences the app. Finally, unlike the use of an LMS, the end of the academic year will not restrict student's access to course-related resources if Facebook is used.

In addition, Junco (2012) concludes that university administrators and faculty can assist students utilise Facebook in ways that are useful to their overall academic experience, affirming "that it is important for those working in higher education ... familiarize themselves with Facebook (and other such technologies) and ... design and support interventions that meet students where they are - in order to help them get to where they are going" (p.170).

Research on the use of Facebook emanates from a broad variety of fields, ranging from information technology, marketing, to the social and economic sciences, resulting in more than 400 publications in journals and conference proceedings (Wilson et al., 2012). There is also some research conducted on the use of Facebook for academic purposes. However, this researcher found that, although most of the studies are conducted in higher education settings, they rely primarily on university *student* data, that is, the data collection method (questionnaires, affective learning scales, interviews, Facebook posts and discussions) is focused on students (De Villiers, 2010; Haytko & Parker, 2012; O'Bannon et al., 2013; Rojas, 2012; Roodt & De Villiers, 2013; Suri, 2013). The same trend is found in studies that not only have reported on the pedagogical use of SNSs but have also addressed student-faculty interaction. These studies seem to have either intentionally focused their data collection on students only, or unexpectedly had the number of faculty respondents significantly outweighed by the number of student respondents (Holcombe et al., 2010; Irwin et al., 2012; Junco, 2012; Magro et al., 2013; Mills, 2011; Roblyer et al., 2010; Timonidou, 2010; Zaideh, 2012; Zanamwe et al., 2013). The disproportionate number of studies involving students as compared to those involving lecturers could, according to this researcher, be attributed to the possibility that, as compared to students, few lecturers make use of Facebook. Sarapin and Morris (2015) state that "there is a well-documented tendency for college administrators and faculty to avoid, or outright reject, new technologies" (p.16), while students, as Roblyer et al. (2010) put it, "come to school "powered-up" and wired with the [latest] technologies available" (p.134, quotes in original). Whichever the reason, this researcher considered that existing academic knowledge could be added to.

This researcher deems existing literature to be represented by many studies that investigated the viewpoints of students relating to the use of Facebook as an academic tool. For this reason, he endeavoured to fill the gap in the SNSs literature by solely collecting data from lecturers, not university students. Moreover, given that Facebook's popularity amongst the latter seems not to be slowing down, and that higher education

institutions are interested in attracting and retaining students (Junco, 2012), it seems pertinent to conduct research that exclusively focuses on lecturers' outlooks with regards to Facebook and the application thereof as an academic tool.

1.3   Problem Statement

The fact that most studies on the use of Facebook for academic purposes have mainly (if not totally) focused on student data to the exclusion of lecturer data might indicate a gap in existing scholarly and research efforts. This leads to questions concerning the weight of the reports on the pedagogical use of Facebook brought forward by previous investigators, thus opening up opportunities for advancing knowledge in this largely unexplored area.

1.4   Research Questions

It is noteworthy that this study only encompassed lecturers who used Facebook for academic purposes. The aim was to answer the following research question:

- How are lecturers using Facebook as an academic teaching tool?

Two sub-questions were identified:

1) What are the advantages of using Facebook as an academic teaching tool?

2) What are the disadvantages of using Facebook as an academic teaching tool?

1.5   Research Purpose

The purpose of this research was to (1) fill the gap in the SNSs literature by solely capturing and focusing on lecturers' perspectives, (2) ascertain how lecturers use Facebook as an academic teaching tool and determine the advantages and disadvantages thereof, and (3) attempt to add to the debate on whether or not higher education settings could add the use of Facebook to their range of practices that may enhance teaching.

1.6   Conclusion

This chapter introduced the research, noting that few existing studies examined the use of Facebook for academic purposes among lecturers. It is in this context of a possible gap in current research efforts that the research question, and its sub-questions, were asked. It is hoped that this study could thus add to the body of knowledge on the academic use of Facebook in higher education institutions.

In the next chapter, the topic being studied is taken further in a more detailed review of related works that have been published. The aim is to provide a solid base for the current study.

CHAPTER 2:   FACEBOOK IN ACADEMIA

2.1   Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature related to the use of Facebook in academia, and thus creating a foundation for the research. A literature review can be defined as a report related to the phenomenon under investigation that seeks to outline, elucidate on, and assess, existing academic knowledge (Baglione, 2012; Cooper, 1988; CQUniversity Library, 2014).

It is noteworthy that this researcher did not locate studies that applied the UGT, which was the theoretical foundation of the current research, to examine lecturers' use of Facebook for academic purposes. Sarapin and Morris (2015), which utilised the UGT to explore lecturers' perspectives on their interaction with students, through Facebook, for *social* purposes, state that Roblyer et al. (2010) was the "only one study ... found [that] applied [the UGT] to [examine] the use of Facebook by college educators" (p.16). However, upon reviewing Roblyer et al. (2010), this researcher did not locate any mentions of, and/or references to, the UGT.

As previously indicated, the literature has not been silent regarding the pedagogical use of Facebook, and most of the studies rely on university student data. Perspectives on the use of Facebook for academic purposes have been, for the most part, investigated in terms of:

(1) Whether university students use, or consider using, Facebook for academic purposes; and

(2) Whether lecturers use, or consider using, Facebook for academic purposes.

For the purposes of this document, these two terms have been, both, further divided into two classes:

a) Positive attitudes, covering studies which indicate (or suggest) that more than 50% of the participants used, or considered using, Facebook for academic purposes; and

b) Negative attitudes, were studies which indicate (or suggest) that less than 50% of the respondents used, or considered using, Facebook for academic purposes, are presented.

This chapter thus, firstly, presents studies that focused their data collection on university students (to reflect on the premise of the current research: that studies conducted on the use of Facebook for academic purposes rely primarily on university student data). Thereafter, studies on the use of Facebook for academic purposes by lecturers are presented (this is followed by a corresponding summary in tabular form). Some recommendations that have been made in the literature are noted, and a synthesis of the chapter, noting the primary aspects uncovered is presented.

2.2   Whether university students use, or consider using, Facebook for academic purposes

2.2.1   Positive attitudes

Vivian et al. (2014) collected data from 70 students, registered at different departments, from the University of South Australia. Potential participants were provided with a link to *friend* one of the investigators. The latter "immersed herself into" the students' Facebook account, and performed a *Facebook observation* that lasted for 22 weeks (p.5); she recorded their activity, interacted with them (only when students initiated the interaction), and copied and pasted into a document (linked to the specific student), students' Facebook activity for each week.

The results indicate that 97.1% of the participants used Facebook for academic-related discussions – related to, for example, course content and grades – through status updates and comments. Vivian et al. (2014) recognise that it is possible that students also utilise private messages (an element beyond the scope of their research) to discuss academic topics.

This researcher believes that although Vivian et al. (2014) note that it was indicated to potential participants that only "education-related use" of their Facebook activity would be observed, it is likely that students had their attitudes towards their use of the platform influenced because they knew that they were being observed (p.5). This prospect has not been, according to this researcher, acknowledged by the authors.

Johnston et al. (2013) assessed the use, perception and attitude of university students with refence to Facebook, and the SNS, Twitter. An online survey was conducted with 486 students from the University of Cape Town (UCT). The results show that "South African students are more dependent on using Facebook" (as compared to utilising

Twitter) (p.201), and that they also utilise the platform for academic purposes: 55% of the participants noted that they contact fellow students to discuss class-related work, 40% reported to "<u>arrange</u> study groups", and 25% "were given Facebook-related class assignments" (my emphasis) (p.205). The latter statistic is an implication that lecturers from UCT have exploited the academic affordances of Facebook as well.

Johnston et al. (2013) acknowledge the limitation of utilising a sample which mainly comprised Information Systems' students, theorising that these respondents were more likely to utilise computer related technology, and the Internet, more efficiently, as compared to other students.

It is important to highlight that within Facebook (and other SNSs), users can also create (or join) groups and discussion forums that can be accessed through their private accounts (Bateman & Willems, 2012; Facebook Help Center, 2015b). This researcher considers that Johnston et al. (2013) is not clear as to what *arrange* study groups particularly means: Facebook group creation, or use Facebook to make plans to study in groups. Meisher-Tal et al. (2012), for example, conducted a study on the application of Facebook groups as an alternative to LMSs, and report that students were satisfied with the feature, and expressed willingness to use it in the future. In contrast, Madge et al. (2009) found out that university students utilised Facebook to organise group meetings.

Karimi and Khodabandelou (2013) conducted a survey at three Iranian public universities; 70 undergraduate students participated. Consistent with Johnston et al. (2013), and Vivian et al. (2014), respondents utilised Facebook to communicate with fellow students for academic purposes: using the platform to search for "the latest information related [to their] studies, educational developments/opportunities and current affairs" (p.118) – 80% of the participants reported this.

The authors acknowledge that the data does not represent the entire population of university students, and indicate that Facebook "should be integrated completely into higher education ... as it has [a] positive impact" (Karimi & Khodabandelou, 2013, p.121).

Using a questionnaire, Alarabiat and Al-Mohammad (2015) explored the use of Facebook for academic purposes by 451 students from three public universities, in Jordan. Participants were from the Social Sciences and Humanities (53.7%), Sciences

and Technology (39%), and Medical, schools (7.3%). The results indicate that 72% of the respondents utilised Facebook to – consistent with Johnston et al. (2013), Karimi and Khodabandelou (2013), and Vivian et al. (2014) – discuss class-related work with fellow students, and "[get] help about courses" (p.92).

Alarabiat and Al-Mohammad (2015) also report that participants a) "considered Facebook ... a good method to be used for academic purposes" (86.5%) (p.94), and b) indicated that the use of the platform (for academic purposes) focuses on "administrative matters such as queries ... and notices" (40.5%) (p.97). The latter finding concurs with Madge et al. (2009), which state that the application of Facebook for academic purposes is "more to do [with] departmental or module related administrative arrangements" (p.15). Similar findings were reported by Gettman and Cortijo (2015) and Gupta et al. (2013).

Gettman and Cortijo (2015) conducted a survey on 245 undergraduate students from a liberal arts college in the United States of America (USA). The study sought to explore university students' relationship with Facebook and its use for academic purposes. It is reported that participants (1) used Facebook as an "organisational/communication tool for group projects" (54%), and (2) noted that their lecturers used the platform to communicate "class-related logistical information (e.g., posting of ... notices, updates, reminders, etc.)" (13%) (p.6).

Using another survey, Gupta et al. (2013) explored the use of Facebook, blogs, Google groups, SkyDrive and Twitter, for academic purposes. The study was conducted with 109 students, registered with the Institute of Management Technology-Centre for Distance Learning, in India. It is reported that (1) "Facebook has maximum number of users", and (2) students used SNSs for academic purposes – to obtain "regular information about the course, and dates for exams and assignments" (unspecified percentages) (p.189). Although it is suggested that the majority of the participants utilised Facebook, the identified academic-related activities were not mapped to the respective SNS, that is, Gupta et al. (2013) does not specify which academic activity is performed on which SNS.

Hinting at future research, Alarabiat and Al-Mohammad (2015) note that lecturers' perspectives on the academic application of Facebook should also be investigated, "since they represent a major contributor to any formal Facebook [academic]

endeavour" (p.98). Moreover, Gettman and Cortijo (2015) acknowledges that "understanding the most "acceptable" way to use Facebook for college classes, is not useful if we don't know if it is actually worth using", and, accordingly, calls on future research to examine the advantages of the use of Facebook for academic purposes (p.12, quotes in original).

Grosch (2013) conducted a survey on 12000 university students – "from all faculties and levels (undergraduate to Ph.D)" across five countries (Canada, Germany, Philippines, Spain, and Thailand) (p.230) – to measure the academic use of media services ("print media, electronic text, [SNSs], information and communication media, e-learning services and IT hardware" (p.228). For the purposes of this document, only Facebook-related findings are provided.

It is reported that Facebook is utilised "a lot", and "increasingly being used" for academic purposes by students in the different countries, particularly, "for studying" (unspecified percentages) (p.230). This researcher did not locate any attempt from Grosch (2013) to elucidate on how Facebook was utilised *for studying*. Furthermore, it is also reported that "students from Asian countries significantly use [SNSs more] for studying than students from western countries" (p.232).

Using a questionnaire, Sánchez et al. (2014) explored students' perceptions on the use of Facebook for academic purposes; 214 business undergraduate students, registered at the University of Huelva, in Spain, participated. The results indicate that 89% of the respondents would consider using Facebook for academic purposes. Identified reasons include the fact that "it would be convenient for them", and it "would give them the opportunity to connect with their classmates" (p.142).

Sánchez et al. (2014) also note that lecturers should exploit "the social nature of Facebook" to enhance lecturer-student communication, and, similar to Karimi and Khodabandelou (2013), recommend the integration of Facebook usage, for academic purposes, in higher education institutions (p.145).

Petrović et al. (2012) used Environmental Quality System – a compulsory module for final year undergraduate students at the school of Organisational Sciences from the University of Belgrade in Serbia – to explore the use of Facebook as an academic tool. Students were instructed to create Facebook groups, and be active contributors to online discussions related to topics such as environmental protection and ecology.

Upon completion of the module, which was offered through a 13 week semester, students were asked to take part in a survey; 68 students participated. The findings show that:

(1) 97.7% of the participants indicated that engaging in Facebook group creation, and participating in the discussions, increased their awareness of environmental issues; and

(2) 90% of the participants reported to have been motivated to make improvements in their behaviour towards the environment.

It is also reported that 53.7% of the participants noted to have created Facebook groups, and engaged in the discussions, because they "thought it was an obligation", and "thought [that they would] get extra credit" (p.359). It is, again, according to this researcher, probable that these factors lead to a change in participants' behaviour towards Facebook, and the survey instrument.

Using a questionnaire, Hussain et al. (2012) investigated the academic use of SNSs of 600 students, registered in the School of Education, from the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, in Pakistan. The results indicate that (1) 90% of the participants utilised Facebook, (2) 53% used LinkedIn, and (3) 25% utilised Twitter. It is also reported that participants used SNSs for academic purposes. Participants utilised such platforms to (1) share "learning experiences" and conduct research (76%); (2) share "academic events" (59%); and (3), concurring with Karimi and Khodabandelou (2013), search for "the latest information related [to their] studies, educational developments/opportunities and current affairs" (Hussain et al., 2012, p.192).

Similar to Gupta et al. (2013), although Hussain et al. (2012) report that the majority of the participants utilised Facebook, it does not specify which academic activity is performed on which SNS. Elhuda and Dimetry (2014) (outlined below) also report that 98.8% of the students utilised Facebook, and 96.1% used SNSs for academic purposes. It does not, however, make mention of academic activities for which SNSs were used.

A questionnaire was administered to 275 students registered at the Faculty of Medicine, Univesity of Khartoum, in Sudan. Apart from using Facebook, Elhuda and Dimetry (2014) indicate that participants noted to utilise Skype (61.3%), and Whatsapp (59%).

Zanamwe et al. (2013) note a lack of research on the use of SNSs for academic purposes "in developing countries" (p.8); the investigators used a questionnaire to collect data from 124 students, from five higher education insititutions, in Zimbabwe. The results show that (1) 64.8% of the students used computers, from campus computing labs, to connect to the Internet, (2) 93.6% of the respondents utilised Facebook, (3) 43.2% utilised LinkdIn, and (4) 41.6% used Twitter.

It is also reported that "the majority of students use [SNSs] for education … and for specific school work" (Zanamwe et al., 2013, p.15). Again, similar to Gupta et al. (2013), and Hussain et al. (2012), there is no indication of which academic activity is performed on which SNS (althought it is reported that 93.6% of the respondents utilised Facebook).

Zanamwe et al. (2013) also states that 76.6% of the students indicated that the use of SNSs for academic purposes should be implemented in higher education institutions, particularly, because SNSs would allow the sharing of course-related material, and provide a "fast way of disseminating information" (p.13). The latter is supported by Zaideh (2012) who states that SNSs allow for quick accessing and distribution of course-related resources.

2.2.2 Negative attitudes

The literature also puts forward that using Facebook for academic purposes might not be an approach which students look forward to. Alhazmi and Rahman (2013) examined the use of Facebook for social and academic purposes of 105 students from the University Technology, Malaysia (UTM). The results of the survey indicate that 36% of the participants utilised Facebook for academic purposes to – concurring with Alarabiat and Al-Mohammad (2015), Johnston et al. (2013), Karimi and Khodabandelou (2013), and Vivian et al. (2014) – discuss class-related work with fellow students. A low percentage, nevertheless, as compared to the ones of other purposes, namely to (1) keep in touch with friends (88.6%), and (2) "let others know what is happening in my life" (48.6%) (Alhazmi & Rahman, 2013, p.36). It is also reported that 79% of students indicated to opt not to *friend* their lecturers, as they prefer "hav[ing] a professional relationship with faculty rather than a social one" (Alhazmi & Rahman, 2013, p.39).

The authors (1) suggest that the low percentage may be due to the "relative recentness" of the use of Facebook for academic purposes (p.36); (2) acknowledge, as a limitation,

the use of quantitative (defined under section 3.4) measures to gauge students' perspectives on the use of Facebook; and (3) call for future research to investigate, not only students', but lecturers', perspectives on the academic application of the platform using different measures.

Grosseck et al. (2011) administered an online survey to provide insight into how 131 university students, in Romania, perceive the use of Facebook for academic purposes. The investigators (1) were lecturers, and requested students from the classes that they were teaching to participate in the research; and (2) recognise that the data collected does not represent the entire population of university students. The results show that (1) no more than 26.7% of the participants perceived the creation of Facebook groups, and Facebook as a whole, as relevant to academia; and (2) 30% of the participants utilised Facebook, for academic-related activities, to "<u>create</u> and fulfill school assignments" (my emphasis) (p.1428), and consistent with Hussain et al. (2012), to conduct research.

This researcher regards the above quotation as one with ambiguity. Furthermore, he did not locate any attempt, from Grosseck et al. (2011), to elucidate on what *create an assignment* (in this context) actually means. It is noteworthy, however, that the authors categorise themselves as "not yet hav[ing] their own long-term experience… [with] the consumption of Facebook" (p.1429).

Gafni and Deri (2012) conducted a questionnaire on 103 undergraduate electrical engineering students at four higher education institutions, in Israel. The results show that 35% of the participants used Facebook for academic purposes – "to get help [with] academic material from their [colleagues] or to get help before exams" (p.51).

It is also stated that if "students were able to limit their usage of Facebook only to … share academic information, there is no doubt that [the platform]" would contribute positively to their overall academic experience (Gafni & Deri, 2012, p.58).

Haytko and Parker (2012) used an online survey to ask 236 students registered at two universities in the USA whether the use of Facebook, for academic purposes, should be implemented in higher education settings. "The answer was a definite NO" (p.1, capitals in original). While 26.8% of the participants indicated that Facebook was a suitable tool, the remaining participants noted that the platform was not "an appropriate method for professors to use in posting course information [,] and communicating with students" (p.4). Some of the reasons that participants provided to substantiate their unwillingness

to have Facebook usage, for academic purposes, implemented in higher education institutions are provided below:

(1) Facebook is "a [SNS] that should be used for social networking, not school stuff. That's what Blackboard is for" (p.5);

(2) "Students already find themeselves getting off task without having their school work integrated into Facebook" (p.5);and

(3) "I don't think that many students would be cool with adding their professors on Facebook [,] especially if they had inappropriate things on their Facebook pages" (p.5).

Some of the reasons that participants that were in favour of the implementation of Facebook usage in higher education institutions provided are:

(1) "Facebook is something that students would check more often than their own email" (p.5);

(2) "Professors could post upcoming events for class on Facebook, send reminders for tests, and send links to course information" (p.5); and

(3) Students could use Facebook "at various times to communicate with other students and the [lecturer]" (p.5).

Haytko and Parker (2012) also submit that there is an indication that SNSs "are more fads than valuable [academic] tools" (p.6).

Thawabieh and Rfou (2015) administered a survey on 415 undergraduate students registered at the school of Arts, Finance, Education, and Science and Engineering, at a higher education institutuion in Jordan. The results indicate that while Facebook is "the most popular [SNS] among students", learners had "a low use of" the platform for academic purposes (unspecified percentages) (p.39).

The authors (1) suggest that high levels of usage might be observed if lecturers utilise Facebook for academic purposes as well, and (2) call on future research to examine students' perspectives on the use of the platform (for academic purposes) using qualitative (defined under section 3.4) measures.

Another study conducted in a higher education institution in Jordan, reported by Bsharah et al. (2014), concurs with Thawabieh and Rfou (2015) in that while Facebook is "one of the most popular SNS in [the] Middle East and Arab world", a low percentage (31%) is recorded for students' use of the platform for academic purposes (Bsharah et al., 2014, p.2). A questionnaire to collect data from 282 undergraduate students from the Education, Arts, Enginnering, and Business Administration and Economics, schools was used. It is also reported that 22.2% of the participants noted using Facebook to exchange political views.

Dunn (2013) conducted a survey on 231 students registered at the college of Social Sciences, in the University of Glasgow, in the United Kingdom (UK). The results indicate that Facebook "remains the most popular" SNS (86%), followed by Twitter (41%), and LinkdIn (22%) (n.p.). It is also reported that 24% of the participants utilised SNSs "to aide their research and studies" (n.p.). Again, although it is indicated that the majority of the participants utilised Facebook, the identified academic-related activities were not mapped to the respective SNS, neither were they elaborated on. Nevertheless, Dunn (2013) does acknowledge, and calls for future research to note, that the question should not focus on whether SNSs are, but how they should be, used for academic purposes.

Using a questionnaire, Adaja and Ayodele (2013) examined Facebook usage of 186 students from the Olabisi Onabanjo University, in Nigeria. The study was based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) (defined under section 3.2). It is reported that only 33% of the participants used Facebook "for academic information exchange" (p.63). The remaining respondents, however, revealed to rather use the platform, exclusively, for social interaction. This concurs with Akyıldız and Argan's (2012) findings, which indicate that "having fun, contacting friends … comes to the fore as Facebook usage purposes" (n.p.). Akyıldız and Argan (2012) compared students' use of Facebook for social, and academic, related activities. A questionnaire was administed to 1300 undergraduate students from Anadolu University, in Turkey. It is reported that the greater part of the participants utilised Facebook for social purposes (unspecified percentages for both social, and academic, use of Facebook).

Akyıldız and Argan (2012) also indicate that "the researcher helped … to fill out the questionnaire" (this is in reference to participants who needed additional explanation to complete the questionnaire) (n.p.). While this researcher has no evidence of any bias

that might have had an influence on the findings, he believes that the social desirability bias (defined under section 3.5) could have had an influence on participants' responses.

Using an online survey, O'Bannon et al. (2013) assessed students' use of Facebook for academic purposes, in the USA; 82 students, registered in 5-year teacher preparation programs, participated. It is reported that respondents utilised Facebook "the most" for social reasons, and "the least" for academic purposes (unspecified percentages) (n.p.). Consistent with Thawabieh and Rfou (2015), O'Bannon et al. (2013) put forward that lecturers and students "have to actually use Facebook in a course … for them to realize its value" (n.p.).

Pempek et al. (2009) administered a survey to 92 undergraduate students from two psychology classes at a private university in the USA. It is reported that (1) 17% of the participants noted using Facebook to communicate with each other for academic purposes – "finding help with schoolwork", and (2) students used Facebook, daily, for approximately 30 minutes (p.232).

Althougth the academic-related use of Facebook was "rarely reported" (p.232), Pempek et al. (2009) submits that the widespread acceptance of the platform could make it a "powerful [academic] tool if adapted to academic pursuits" (p.237).

Qureshi et al. (2014) used a questionnaire to examine students' responses towards the use of Facebook for academic purposes, in Pakistani higher education institutes; 140 students participated. It is noted that (1) there were "no clear indications that students are using Facebook for academic purposes ... [as] ... only 7.1% of the [participants] [utilised] Facebook to support their studies" (p.444), and (2) future research could develop a framework – that addressed "concerns" such as distraction and privacy – for the use of Facebook in academia (p.446).

As with Grosch (2013), this researcher did not locate any attempt from Qureshi et al. (2014) to elucidate on how Facebook was utilised *to support studies.*

Using a survey-based approach, Magro et al. (2013) examined ideas related to the use of Facebook in a university in the USA; 45 undergraduate students participated. The results suggest that whilst Facebook is the most popular SNS amongst students, "its influence has not fully penetrated the academic arena" (p.303); 15.56% of the participants noted to have used the platform for, consistent with Grosseck et al. (2011),

and Johnston et al. (2013), academic assignments. Identified reasons for the low percentage include:

 (1) Facebook's privacy policies (which were, according to several participants, confusing, and altered on a regular basis without sufficient notification); and

(2) The platform's functional restrictions (for instance, the "limited discussion formats") (p.306).

Nonetheless, Magro et al. (2013) state that a) because Facebook users might mainly comprise university students, there is the potential for it to be successfully integrated into academia; and b) "there is certainly a need" to examine how Facebook can be applied for teaching (p.304).

2.3   Whether lecturers use, or consider using, Facebook for academic purposes

Studies that explore the use of Facebook for academic purposes, where research participants are mainly or totally made up of lecturers, are rare.

2.3.1   Positive attitudes

Gülbahar (2014) conducted face-to-face interviews with 12 lecturers and 42 students from two universities in Turkey. The study, which required a lengthy data collection process, aimed at exploring the use of SNSs for academic purposes. For the purposes of this section, only lecturers' related findings are outlined. The majority of the lecturers (8), reported to use SNSs for academic purposes – to share "course material, knowledge and daily summaries" (p.58). It is also reported that faculty members "still have much to do" so that emerging technologies are effectively applied for teaching (p.61). A lecturer is quoted as saying: "the biggest barrier is the faculty members themselves. They don't feel the need to promote these tools" (p.61).

Although it is stated that the majority of the lecturers utilised Facebook, the report does not specify which academic activity is performed on which SNS.

Sturgeon and Walker (2009) observed that a growing number of lecturers were signing up on Facebook, and investigated their perspectives (and those of the students) on the use of the platform. The study was conducted at Lee University, in the USA; an online survey was administered to both lecturers (12), and a "larger number of students" (n.p.). Lecturers were also interviewed. It is reported that "over 50%" of the lecturers indicated

that they would consider utilising Facebook as an academic tool, as the platform allows both faculty and students to "know each other better, in a more personal way" (n.p.). "Anything that helps students feel more comfortable … where they can feel a connection with their instructors, opens the door to better understanding … and better learning", one lecturer is quoted as saying (n.p.).

It is also reported that (1) 40% of the lecturers noted to have *friended* their students, and (2) nearly 75% of those interviewed indicated that they did "not want to be viewed by students as equals", stating that the wall which once divided lecturers and students, had started to collapse because of the use of SNSs (n.p.). Sturgeon and Walker (2009, n.p.), like Grosseck et al. (2011, p.1429), acknowledge that their study collected "general" data, and call on future research to investigate more specific aspects related to Facebook and the application thereof.

Visagie and De Villiers (2010) examined the use of Facebook as an academic tool by conducting an online survey where 86 lecturers participated – working in the Computer Science, Computing, and Informatics departments – across five countries (South Africa, Australia, Canada, USA, and the UK). The results show that mainly participants from South Africa (56.2%) would consider utilising Facebook for academic purposes. This is followed by, first, participants from Australia (45.5%), second, Canada (37.5%), third, the USA (28.6%), and finally, the UK (26.7%).

Participants that indicated that they would consider using Facebook as an academic tool where asked to provide a reason as to why they would utilise it. Identified reasons include:

(1) Facebook's capability to allow for group work and student-student, as well as student-faculty, course-related interaction;

(2) The fact that students are already comfortable using the platform;

(3) Facebook's capability to a) potentially equip students with "new concepts regarding ICT" (n.p.), and b) consistent with Zanamwe et al. (2013), allow the sharing of course-related resources; and

(4) The fact that students have a preference for Facebook over LMSs.

Similarly, participants that indicated that they would not consider utilising Facebook for academic purposes, where asked for, and provided the following, reasons:

(1) The existence of other tools, particularly LMSs like Blackboard and Moodle;

(2) Concerns related to security and privacy – it was reported that a) "there is a lack of control to some extent over the content on Facebook" (n.p.); and b) lecturers were unwilling to *friend* their students, just like students were unwilling to *friend* their lecturers, as both sides would like to maintain a distinction between the social and the academic; and

(3) Concerns related to, consistent with Haytko and Parker (2012), the suitability of Facebook as an academic tool – participants aired uncertainty over the acceptance of the platform for academic-related activities, pointing out that "there are a lot of distractions on Facebook", and the platform itself is "seen as a distraction" (n.p.).

Visagie and De Villiers (2010) also stress the importance of lecturers informing their students of the Facebook application as an academic tool, with an emphasis on the creation of Facebook groups. Furthermore, the authors note that students' participation should not be made compulsory. Magro et al. (2013) agree, but also suggest that lecturers assign marks for students' participation in order encourage them to apply Facebook for academic purposes.

It is also important to highlight that, within Facebook, users can *like* other Facebook pages that are of interest to them; according to the Facebook Help Center (2015c), "Liking a Page means you're connecting to that page", which allows the user to see posts from the page that he/she has *liked*, in his/hers *News Feed* (n.p.). Dare and Sir Gâr (2011) assert that making use of Facebook groups and pages are the two effective methods to utilise the platform to create an online presence for an academic course. The following is an outline of some of the differences:

- Facebook groups allow (1) for more privacy settings (for example, posts can be made visible to group members only); (2) for adjustments to require potential members to be approved by the administrator(s); (3) members to receive notifications by default when any other member posts in the group; and (4) members to participate in chats, upload images to shared albums, and share documents (Facebook Help Center, 2015a).

- In contrast, (1) "<u>anyone</u>" can *like* a Facebook page and participate in the discussions (my emphasis) (n.p.); (2) there is no restriction on the number of people that can *like* a page; and (3) posts, and page information, are available to everyone on Facebook (Facebook Help Center, 2015a).

Like Visagie and De Villiers (2010), Dare and Sir Gâr (2011) also recommend the application of Facebook groups for academic-related activities, with the latter pointing to its "invited membership" characteristic, as an advantage over Facebook pages (Dare & Sir Gâr, 2011, p.27).

Nonetheless, DiVall and Kirwin (2012), for example, established a Facebook page for Comprehensive Disease Management – a course that provides pharmacy training skills and discusses topics such as disease state management, and contagious diseases – to examine the extent to which course-related discussions between students and lecturers could be facilitated. Both students and lecturers were encouraged, by the course coordinators, to *like* the Facebook page, and be active contributors to online discussions. It is reported that there was an increase in online academic-related discussions as the year progressed, particularly during examination weeks. At "peak use", the page had 117 *likes* (p.2).

Irwin et al. (2012) also investigated the use of Facebook for academic purposes by creating four Facebook pages. Similar to DiVall and Kirwin (2012), students were informed that *liking* the page was not compulsory, and that additional marks would not be awarded. The investigators

(1) were lecturers (within the department of Health) and had to create individual Facebook pages, access it at least once a day, monitor discussions, and reply to questions; and

(2) were responsible for posting course-related information during the semester, and advising students to *like* (or *follow*) the page;

Irwin et al. (2012) reports that occasionally, lecturers had difficulty "keep[ing] up" with Facebook page activities that had been initiated (p.1226).

DiVall and Kirwin (2012), and Irwin et al. (2012), indicate that the research was conducted at the Northeastern University (in the USA), and at the Griffith University (in Australia), respectively. This researcher, however, considers that because, as indicated

above, anyone can *like* a Facebook page, anyone in the world that had a Facebook account could have *liked* the page, and perhaps engaged in the online discussions that took place. This prospect, as well as a corresponding mitigation strategy, has not been, according to this researcher, acknowledged, or discussed, by either group of authors.

2.3.2 Negative attitudes

Existing research also put forward that the majority of lecturers might not be applying, or willing to apply, Facebook (irrespective of the feature) for academic purposes. Cloete et al. (2009) administered a questionnaire to 45 southern African ICT (Information and Technology) lecturers. At the outset, the authors indicate that academics can also engage in Facebook group creation in order to share ideas related to topics such as teaching and research, with those who join. The results of the questionnaire show that:

- Although 64.4% of the lecturers believe that Facebook can be applied as a supplement to one's teaching strategy, only 42.2% would consider utilising the platform as an academic tool where student-student, or student-faculty, course-related interaction (for group work or online discussions) could take place.

- 91.1% of the participants have not joined any Facebook group that is linked to their teaching, or research, interests.

Unlike Visagie and De Villiers's (2010), Cloete et al. (2009) did not seek to explore the reasons as to why participants, who indicated that they would consider applying Facebook as an academic tool, would consider applying it.

However, participants that indicated that they would not consider using Facebook as an academic tool, were asked to provide a reason as to why they would not utilise it. The main reasons identified concur with Visagie and De Villiers's (2010) findings:

(1) The existence of "a dedicated secure site" – potentially referring to a LMS – (54.2%) (p.20);

(2) Concerns related to the suitability of Facebook as an academic tool (12.5%); and

(3) Concerns related to security (4.2%).

Cloete et al. (2009) (1) also report that 4.2% of the participants indicated that they were "not competent in the use of Facebook" (p.20); and (2) put forward that lecturers might

have opted to not *friend* their students because they "want to maintain… the level of respect [and]… might be sensitive about maintaining their credibility as a professional individual" (pp.19, 20).

Using a survey, Charity and Daluba (2014) explored the perceptions of 20 lecturers and 332 students, on the application of Facebook as a teaching and learning tool in Kogi State University, in Nigeria. Again, for the purposes of this section, only lecturers' related findings are outlined.

It is reported that the majority of the lecturers (unspecified percentage) do not look forward to incorporating Facebook into academic practices; this prompted the authors to suggest that workshops, and conferences, on e-learning (specifically for academics) are held in the future.

Charity and Daluba (2014) also point to electricity failure, and poor and expensive internet access, as constraints that prevent the implementation of Facebook as an academic tool. Other such aspects are, particularly, related to the fact that a) both students and lecturers might use Facebook to post inappropriate content (Lenartz, 2012), and/or b) as Roodt and De Villiers (2013) put it, "any form of abuse" due to, or as part of, interactions, through Facebook, between students and lecturers might transpire (p.3).

In 2013, the Babson Survey Research Group, a research organisation, published results of an online survey whose sample comprised 7,969 lecturers from "all disciplines" from across "all higher education", in the USA (Babson Survey Research Group, 2013, pp.5, 24). The study aimed at examining lecturers use of SNSs for personal, and teaching, purposes. Results show that:

- Approximately 30% of lecturers do not, regularly, use SNSs for any purpose;

- Higher rates for the use of SNSs for teaching were recorded for the faculties of: a) Humanities and Arts, Professions and Applied Sciences, and Social Sciences – all higher than 40%, but less than 45%; and
b) Natural Sciences, and Mathematics and Computer Science – both lower than 40%;

- 59% of lecturers do not use SNSs for teaching. Participants reported to be more willing to use SNSs, Facebook in particular, for social, and personal, purposes,

than to integrate it into academia. The remaining 41% of the participants opted to mostly utilise other tools, such as blogs and wikis, for teaching;

- A rate of approximately 20% is recorded for the use of Facebook for group assignments; and

- Over 63% of lecturers reported to have concerns over privacy.

The authors affirm that the application of SNSs as academic tools "will remain limited", unless the issue of privacy is addressed (Babson Survey Research Group, 2013, p.3).

Roblyer et al. (2010) conducted an online survey to determine the likelihood of 62 lecturers and 120 students using Facebook for academic purposes in a southern college in the USA. It is reported that lecturers are not "particularly warm toward the possibility" (p.138): only 21% of the lecturers, indicated that Facebook could be integrated into academia. Similarly, the findings do not suggest that lecturers perceive privacy to be a matter of concern in this context: only 22.6% of the lecturers indicated to be concerned about their privacy.

Roblyer et al. (2010) categorise their findings as a "prelude" to future research, and acknowledge that the perceptions of Facebook's users will probably change, as technological advances are made over the years (p.138).

2.3.3 Summary of reviewed studies

Table 2.1 summarises the studies – that explore the use of Facebook for academic purposes, where research participants are (or include) *lecturers* – reviewed in this chapter.

Table 2.1 Summary of reviwed studies

Study	Scope	Participants	Countries involved	Research method	Main finding
Gülbahar (2014)	SNSs	12 lecturers and 42 students	Turkey	Face-to-face interview	66% of the lecturers utilised SNSs for academic purposes Facebook was

					the most used platform
Sturgeon and Walker (2009)	Facebook	12 lecturers and a "larger number of students" (n.p.)	USA	Face-to-face interview Online quantitative survey	"[o]ver 50%" of the lecturers would consider utilising Facebook for academic purposes (n.p.)
Visagie and De Villiers (2010)	Facebook	86 lecturers	South Africa, Australia, Canada, USA, and UK	Online quantitative survey	Mainly participants from South Africa (56.2%) would consider utilising Facebook for academic purposes
DiVall and Kirwin (2012)	Facebook	3 lecturers, 114 students	USA	Content analysis	There was an increase in online academic-related discussions as the year progressed
Irwin et al. (2012)	Facebook	4 lecturers, 253 students	Australia	Content analysis	Lecturers had difficulty "keep[ing] up" with Facebook page activities (p.1226)
Cloete et al. (2009)	Facebook	45 lecturers	Countries in southern Africa	Online quantitative survey	42.2% would consider utilising Facebook for academic purposes
Charity and Daluba (2014)	Facebook	20 lecturers and 332 students	Nigeria	Quantitative survey	The majority of the lecturers do not look forward

					to using Facebook for academic purposes (unspecified percentage)
Babson Survey Research Group (2013)	SNSs	7,969 lecturers	USA	Online quantitative survey	59% are willing to use SNSs, Facebook in particular, for social purposes
Roblyer et al. (2010)	Facebook	62 lecturers and 120 students	USA	Online quantitative survey	21% of the lecturers indicated that Facebook could be used for academic purposes

2.4   Muñoz and Towner's Recommendations

Although Facebook can be utilised for academic purposes, lecturers are reluctant to apply it mainly because of "the thought of having to [*friend*]*"* their students (Harwood & Blackstone, 2012, p.2). Muñoz and Towner (2009) provide recommendations on how lecturers can integrate Facebook into academia. These have been supported by various reports – including Baldwin (2014), Boghian (2013), Couillard (2010), Gardner (2010)**,** Power (2012), Singh (2013), and Toland (2013) – and are outlined below:

1) Lecturers can set up an additional Facebook profile, specifically for academic purposes. This profile a) can display the lecturer's email, and office, address, and phone numbers; and b) should include few personal pictures. Items like favourite quotes and internet links can also be posted;

2) Lecturers "must" let students know that they have a Facebook profile by a) listing its internet link in the module syllabus, and email signatures, or b) displaying it during introductory classes (p.8);

3) Lecturers "should create an icebreaker activity", such as initiating a debate by posting a question or video, to encourage students to engage in the online discussions (p.9); and

4) Concurring with Visagie and De Villiers (2010), lecturers should not designate students' participation to be compulsory, as not all students have a Facebook account. Lecturers that use Facebook for academic purposes should provide students with alternatives, such as utilising LMSs (Magro et al., 2013; Muñoz & Towner, 2009). Magro et al. (2013), however, state that ensuring that content, in both Facebook and the LMSs, is "synchronized … can mean double work for" the lecturer (pp.300, 301).

Muñoz and Towner (2009) also state that "efforts should be made by [lecturers] to expand their pedagogical portfolio", and, hinting at future research, further note: "it is our conjecture" that the advantages of the use of Facebook for academic purposes include an expansion of the traditional lecture format (my emphasis) (p.9).

2.5   Synthesis

This researcher considers that the prime aspects are fourfold:

First, not only the majority of studies that examined the use of Facebook for academic purposes have mainly (if not totally) focused their data collection on students only, but have also employed quantitative measures, particularly online quantitative surveys. The benefits associated with conducting thereof include automated data collection, and access to participants at distant sites (Wright, 2005). Babson Survey Research Group (2013) states that "no [data collection] instrument can capture all the nuances of opinion on complicated issues such as the impact of [SNSs] on faculty personal and professional lives" (p.20). This researcher agrees, but also subscribes to Rojas' (2012) view that, because "qualitative interviewing" allows the investigator to first build rapport with participants, it allows the investigator to better understand participants' responses (p.34).

Second, while there are reports on lecturers' use of Facebook for academic-related activities, this researcher did not detect an attempt to investigate whether lecturers are allowed to use Facebook during working hours, or at all, for academic purposes with their students. Existing literature is, according to this researcher, unclear on whether

lecturers that use Facebook for academic purposes a) presuppose that they are allowed, or b) are authorised by the respective administrators of the institution, to do so.

Third, privacy, particularly with reference to whether lecturers *friend* their students (and vice-versa), seems to be a matter of concern. Vivian et al. (2014), however, assert that the use of SNSs for teaching needs to be further investigated, regardless of issues surrounding privacy.

Lastly, the majority of the studies (with the data collection method focused on either students or lecturers, and with either high or low percentages recorded for the academic use of Facebook) seemed to have sought to discover whether or not participants used Facebook for academic purposes, but have not endeavoured to find out about the advantages and disadvantages thereof. Accordingly, DiVall and Kirwin (2012) call for future research to not only seek to determine whether lecturers use Facebook for academic purposes, but assess the advantages and disadvantages thereof.

Unlike many previous research studies, this research attempted to fill the gap in the SNS literature by collecting data solely from lecturers, not university students. This researcher did not aim to find out how many, and whether, lecturers use, or would consider using, Facebook for academic purposes. To explore perspectives of those lecturers who used Facebook for academic purposes, specifically for teaching, is what he aimed to achieve.

2.6   Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature related to the use of Facebook in academia, noting that (1) the majority of studies relied on quantitative measures, (2) there is ambiguity with regards to whether lecturers are authorised to use Facebook for academic purposes, and (3) concerns surrounding privacy have been pointed out. The chapter also noted that (4) there is lack of clarity with regards to the advantages and disadvantages of the use of Facebook for academic purposes, and (5) no study that applied the UGT to examine the use of Facebook for academic purposes by lecturers was found.

In the next chapter, the various approaches chosen to address the research question and sub-questions are discussed.

CHAPTER 3:   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

According to Polit et al. (2001), research methodology refers to the techniques utilised to collect and examine data in the course of the research investigation. This, in the current study, consists of systematic procedures, steps and strategies employed to acquire and analyse lecturers' perspectives regarding their use of Facebook as an academic tool.

This chapter indicates the various approaches selected to conduct the study, and, based on the characteristics of the approach, provides reasons for the choices made. The chapter argues for the value of using the UGT, together with an interpretive philosophical perspective and a qualitative paradigm, as the basis for this study. The reasons for using a survey research design, semi-structured interviews and purposeful sampling, are also provided. Thereafter, the study site, characteristics of the sample, as well as particulars on data collection, data analysis and presentation, and scientific rigor, are discussed.

Lastly, this chapter discusses ethical considerations, and presents a diagrammatic representation of the process that was followed to complete the research.

3.2   Theoretical Foundation

Theory "refers to a particular kind of explanation" (Tavellaei & Abu Talib, 2010, p.572). The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (2009) states that theory is a group of statements designed to clarify a phenomenon, while WordNet 3.0 (2012) states that theory is a concept that can guide behaviour.

Theories can be applied to a study to assist the investigator in designing research questions, collecting relevant data, interpreting it, and generating explanations about the topic being studied (Reeves et al., 2008). This research was based on the theoretical foundation of the UGT.

UGT is a perspective that investigates how people utilise mass media (television, radio, newspapers), and it is grounded on the assumption that users select specific media technology and content according to perceived needs or wants (Matei, 2010; Papacharissi, 2008). Based on these felt needs, the environmental setting, and the

characteristics of the media technology, people use media and experience related gratifications (Papacharissi, 2008). According to the University of Twente (2014), the key aim of the theory is to (1) describe how people use media technology, and (2) determine the positive and negative effects of media use.

Dating back to the 1940s, early UGT research explored the rationale for listening to radio (Herzog, 1940; Herzog, 1944), and reading newspapers (Berelson, 1949). Other early studies covered the use of the videocassette recorder (VCR) (Levy, 1981), watching cable (Jeffres, 1978) and religious television (Pettersson, 1986). Papacharissi (2008) notes that a typical UGT research focuses on a particular platform, or compares uses and gratifications across mediums.

Historically, scholars have, almost since the inception of the UGT, considered it to be not rigorous, particularly, over its "lack of precision in major concepts" (p.6), like, for example, the "lack of empirical distinction between needs and motivations" (p.27); it has, therefore, also been reported that "[UGT] researchers attach different meanings to concepts such as uses [and] gratifications" (p.12) (Ruggiero, 2000). Nonetheless, Ruggiero (2000) submits that "any communication theory is inherently deficient" (p.27), and hinting at future studies within the UGT, further states that "if the Internet is a new dominion of human activity, it is also a new dominion for [UGT] researchers" (p.28).

This researcher applied the UGT to this study because:

(1) It can be argued that Facebook is a type of mass media. Matei (2010) states that "mass media is slowly metamorphosing into [SNSs]" (n.p.). This notion is also supported by Dijck (2013) and Gelles (2013);

(2) He believes that the key aim of the theory, as delineated by the Universtiy of Twente (2014) (outlined above), is in accordance with the study's research question and sub-questions; and

(3) He considers that the theory provides "lenses" (Reeves et al., 2008, p.634) through which he may further explore the findings, and provide coherent explanations regarding lecturers' use of Facebook for academic purposes.

Papacharissi (2008) states that the UGT is a strong theoretical base because it allows researchers to identify and describe media uses and consequences.

3.3   Philosophical Perspective

Orlikowski and Baroudi (1990) indicate that investigators ought to take on a philosophical perspective that is consistent with their own research interests and predispostion. Personal motivation is an important element in choosing a particular method, and people have different motivations (Walsham, 2005). This researcher's motivation is based on interpretivism.

Interpretive researchers assume that reality consists of people's subjective experiences (Blanche & Durrheim, 1999), and rely on human sense making (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994). Information systems (IS) research is interpretive when investigators' knowledge can be gained solely by social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, tools, and other artefacts; this type of research attempts to achieve understanding of a phenomenon through the meanings that people ascribe to it (Klein & Myers, 1999).

Interpretivism puts forward that reality, as well as our knowledge thereof, is a social product and thus cannot be understood independently of the social actors (including the reseacher) that create and interpret that reality (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1990). The world is seen as "an extension of human consciousness and subjective experience" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p.253). Interpretive reseachers consider that "individuals act towards things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them, that meanings arise out of social interaction and are developed and modified through an interpretive process" (Boland, 1979, p.260).

Interpretevism motivates investigations from the perspective of, and through, human actors themselves; interpretive reseachers recognise that meanings can be formed, transferred and used, and thus interpretations may change as circumstances also change (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1990). This philosophical perspective is mainly applicable when the investigator's phenomena of interest is dynamic, as well as both context and time dependent (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1990). The investigator can gather data by examining participants within their social settings, using a clearly-described set of constructs and instruments, that will assist him or her gauge, and understand the research subject matter (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1990).

According to Fay (1987), interpretive researchers ignore contradictions which may exist between shared meanings. These are *deviant cases* – those that might not fit with the

conclusions (Brikci & Green, 2007). Fay (1987) also adds that the interpretive perspective neglects to explain how certain meanings are likely to change over time.

This researcher believes that interpretivism:

(1) Is best suited to investigate the situation surrounding Facebook and the application thereof as an academic tool from the perspective of lecturers because it allows them to use their own words, and draw on their own concepts and experiences (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1990); and

(2) Offers support to investigate the research questions, and to enhance in-depth understanding of the research subject matter (Visagie, 2010). Moreover, according to Johari (2009), the interpretive philosophical framework "is the best solution for IS research" (p.3).

To further commit the study to interpretivism, this researcher puts forward basic suppositions on the ontological, epistemological, and methodological, levels in section 3.11.

Because of Fay's (1987) argument, outlined above, that interpretive researchers ignore contradictions which may exist between shared meanings, this researcher searched for deviant cases, and endeavoured to account for why they differ, as this also strengthened the data analysis (Brikci & Green, 2007). Moreover, it is important to mention that this study presents snapshots of current or previous Facebook users' perceptions. This researcher believes that these perceptions are likely to change over time because Facebook also changes rapidly (Bosque, 2013; Roblyer et al., 2010).

3.4   Research Paradigm: Quantitative versus Qualitative

Quantitative and qualitative methods are two approaches used to develop knowledge (Tewksbury, 2009). Historically, scientists have favoured quantitative over qualitative data (Blanche et al., 2006). Researchers believed that most facts could be gauged by utilising objective quantifiable measures; qualitative research was discarded because, they argued, it was susceptible to bias (Blanche et al., 2006).

Quantitative methods employ numerical representation for the purpose of providing a description and explanation of phenomena. Qualitative methods employ non-numerical examination and interpretation, for the purpose of ascertaining the underlying meaning

and pattern of relationships. While quantitative studies stress measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, qualitative methods highlight process and meaning, and are not meticulously inspected nor gauged in terms of quantity, degree of intensity or rate of recurrence (Casebeer & Verhoet, 1997; Easterby-Smith et al., 1991; McDaniel & Gates, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Zikmund, 2000). Tewksbury (2009) corroborates this, stating that the missing part of a qualitative study is the amount or quantity of what is being studied. The numerical description of concepts and their relationships are not the focal point of a qualitative study. Those are the focal point of quantitative studies (Mack et al., 2005).

According to Mack et al. (2005), the main distinction between quantitative and qualitative approaches is flexibility; a quantitative approach is fairly inflexible. Identical questions are asked in the same order and participants are allowed to choose response categories that are close ended or fixed. This inflexibility, however, allows for noteworthy comparison of responses across participants and study sites. Still, it entails an in-depth understanding of the vital questions so that the relevant ones will be asked in the best possible way, and the range of possible answers are identified.

Qualitative approaches are usually more flexible, allowing greater spontaneity and adaptation of the interaction between the investigator and research participants (Blanche et al., 2006). Questions are not necessarily worded in precisely the same manner with each participant; research questions may be reformulated as a result of new material being collected, or a change may be made in sampling strategies in response to new findings (Blanche et al., 2006). According to Mack et al. (2005), respondents can use their own words, and the researcher has the opportunity to respond immediately, asking participants to elaborate, or respond with subsequent relevant *probes* – "[unbiased] questions, sentences, sounds, and even gestures researchers use to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses and clarify why or how" (p.43). However, flexibility is not an indication of how scientifically meticulous an approach is. The extent of flexibility rather represents the type of understanding that the researcher is trying to achieve from the approach (Mack et al., 2005).

Table 3.1 presents a comparison between qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Table 3.1: Comparing Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches

	Quantitative	Qualitative
General framework	Seek to confirm propositions about phenomena	Seek to explore phenomena
	Instruments use a more rigid style of eliciting and categorising responses to questions	Instruments use a more flexible, iterative style of eliciting and categorising responses to questions
	Use highly structured methods such as questionnaires, surveys, and structured observation	Use semi-structured methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups and participant observation
Analytical objectives	To quantify variation	To describe variation
	To predict causal relationships	To describe and explain relationships
	To describe characteristics of a population	To describe individual experiences
		To describe group norms
Group studied	Larger samples	Smaller samples
Question format	Closed-ended	Open-ended
Data format	Numerical (obtained by assigning numerical values to responses)	Textual (obtained from audiotapes, videotapes and field notes)
Flexibility in study design	Study design is stable from beginning to end	Some aspects of the study are flexible (for example, the addition, exclusion, or wording, of particular interview questions)
	Participant responses do not influence or determine how and which questions researchers ask next	Participant responses affect how and which questions researchers ask next

	Quantitative	Qualitative
	Study design is subject to statistical assumptions and conditions	Study design is iterative, that is, data collection and research questions are adjusted according to what is learned
Final Report	Statistical report with correlations, comparisons of means and statistical significance of findings	Narrative report with contextual description and direct quotations from research participants

(Mack et al., 2005; Xavier University, 2012)

3.4.1 Positioning the Current Study

This research is a qualitative study. While this researcher is aware of the robustness of quantitative research projects (Strictly Financial, 2014), a sense that the themes in which he was interested in would be best explored through qualitative approaches, was a ground for his choice (Silverman, 2013). Creswell (2007) explains that qualitative research is to be conducted when the researcher considers that comprehensive understanding of the research subject matter can only be acquired by directly talking to people.

This researcher intends to offer a contribution to the SNSs literature by capturing and focusing on lecturers' perspectives with reference to the use of Facebook as an academic tool. Nkwi et al. (2001) provide examples of topics that qualitative paradigms can concentrate on; these include "understanding different perspectives, such as those of professionals" (my emphasis) (p.4). This researcher also considers that, because the qualitative approach provides more emphasis on interpretation and is about gaining in-depth understandings of *what is* happening (Tewksbury, 2009), it is more suitable for the what he aimed to achieve. The approach allows researchers to investigate issues in-depth, and in detail, as they locate and endeavour to understand the categories of information that emanate from primary data (Blanche et al., 2006). Particulars on data collection, and analysis, are discussed in section 3.10 and section 3.11.

Furthermore, personal experience and training is an important element in choosing a particular paradigm (Creswell, 2003). This researcher has no comprehensive

knowledge, or skills, in statistics, nor computer statistical programs. A qualitative approach, on the other hand, employs, as noted, more of a literary form of writing and experience in conducting interviews and observations (Creswell, 2003), with which he has some experience.

3.5   Research Design

Research studies need a design or structure before data collection and/or analysis can actually take place; a research design will ensure that data collected permits the investigator to answer research questions as unequivocally and economically as possible (Lee, 2007; Vaus, 2001).

This research employed a survey research design, as the key aim was to describe and draw understanding from the current situation surrounding the use of Facebook for academic purposes in higher education settings.

The term *survey research* (also known as *descriptive survey*) is used by a number of scholars "to refer to almost any form of descriptive" research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p.195). The strategy is utilised to collect descriptive information about one or more groups of people: their perspectives, experiences, attitudes, characteristics, or behaviours at a given time (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Stangor, 2010). Hofstee (2006) indicates that a survey research design is employed when the researcher intends to collect data from a small number of individuals who have the capability to articulate their thoughts, and are willing to engage in the study.

Survey based approaches are commonly used in a variety of disciplines, such as information technology, education, sociology, commerce, and public health, and can employ various methods, like interviews (face-to-face, or over the telephone), or questionnaires (manually distributed, or using the Internet) (Gulbahar & Guven, 2008; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Szolnoki & Hoffmann, 2013; Trochim, 2000). Certainly, variations on the procedures to conduct a survey research will be found (Creative Research Systems, 2014; Guyette, 1983; Kelley et al., 2003; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Trochim, 2000). However, irrespective of the survey method, and of the procedures, the aim is to investigate a phenomenon "as it is" (the current situation) (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p.190). Szolnoki and Hoffmann (2013) compare face-to-face, telephone, and online, survey methods, and conclude that the first "clearly performs better than the

other methods" (p.61), and "deliver the best results" (p.57). This is also supported by Dialsingh (2008), Mathers et al. (2002) and Rooney et al. (2013).

Survey research is an "excellent way" to find out about, and attempt to elaborate on, how participants think (Hofstee, 2006, p.122), and what they do (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Stangor, 2010). Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) affirm that in a survey, "information is collected ... in order to <u>describe</u>" (my emphasis) (p.390). The face-to-face survey approach, in particular, is advantageous because it allows the investigator to build rapport and gain participants' cooperation. However, some participants might not always be insightful about their thoughts and experiences. Others might "intentionally misinterpret the facts" in order to favourably impress the researcher (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p.196). This is known as *social desirability* – when respondents provide answers to create a favourable impression (Ethier et al., 2000).

This researcher believes that a survey research design is more suitable for what he aimed to achieve because he does not intend to refute existing findings on the use of Facebook for academic purposes, but rather to offer a contribution to the SNSs literature by capturing and focusing on perspectives of lecturers in order to understand their usage behaviour and viewpoints related to the academic application of Facebook.

As indicated, survey research is also referred to as descriptive research. Therefore, this researcher considers the following as additional grounds for his choice:

(1) Best (1963) points out that in descriptive research, the investigator describes and interprets effects that are being felt or trends that are developing;

(2) Martinez (1988) indicates that descriptive research is employed mainly when the intention is to study contemporary events – the research questions should concern the present state of affairs, albeit that they may affect the future; and

(3) According to the University of Mumbai, descriptive research is concerned with opinions held about a phenomenon at a specific place and time (University of Mumbai, n.d.).

Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) explain that descriptive accounts might have a contextual focus, such as teachers in classrooms. Following this logic, this researcher puts forward that the specific contextual focus for this study are lecturers in higher education settings that use Facebook for academic purposes. Furthermore, he

encouraged participants to be as open and honest as possible in their responses (Blanche et al., 2006), and believes that this helped in mitigating against the social desirability bias. Particulars on data collection, and analysis, are discussed in section 3.10 and section 3.11.

3.6   Research Method

Interviews are one of the primary qualitative research methods, or data-gathering techniques (Mack et al., 2005; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). They are a type of conversation (Burgess, 1984; Lofland & Lofland, 1995), with a purpose (Webb & Webb, 1932). Blanche et al. (2006) subscribe to this notion, adding, however, that "at the same time they are also highly skilled performances" (p.297). They differ from every day conversation because the investigator is focused on carrying them out in the most rigorous way, in order to ensure reliability and validity (defined under section 3.12) (Patton, 1990).

This researcher conducted semi-structured interviews. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) indicate that explanations and terminology used for the approach are not essentially consistent, so that what authors refer to as a semi-structured interview, is also referred to by various academics as focused, unstructured, in-depth, or open-ended survey, interviews.

According to Patton (1990), semi-structured interviews are conducted with a *topic guide* – a list of the central questions the researcher would like to cover, with perhaps useful prompts to encourage the interviewee to talk about specific issues if they do not come up spontaneously. Harrell and Bradley (2009) corroborate this, stating that in a semi-structured interview, a guide with questions and themes should be used. This kind of interview allows the investigator to collect detailed information in a somewhat conversational style.

This researcher believes that because semi-structured interviews are frequently utilised when the investigator wants to explore details of a topic, and thoroughly understand the responses provided (Harrell & Bradley, 2009), they are more suitable for what he aimed to achieve. The approach provides the ability to collaborate with participants to exchange views and ask complex questions (Neuman, 2003; Rea & Parker, 2005; Sarantakos, 1998).

This researcher utilised the *one interviewer and one interviewee face-to-face* approach. The encounter allowed him to read nonverbal communication (Becker, 2011) which influenced his understanding. Additionally, he considers that because the approach only included him and the interviewee, participants did not feel reluctant to discuss their viewpoints (Mack et al., 2005), causing the strategy to net useful information to answer the research questions. Leedy and Ormrod (2013) outline major guidelines to be considered in order to carry out productive face-to-face interviews:

(1) Write down some questions before the interview, and ensure that they are all referred to during the session. It is the investigator's responsibility to "gently guide [the interview] back on course [if it] drift[s] in an unproductive direction" (p.156);

(2) Give explanations about the purpose of the research and elaborate on what will happen to the findings. The investigator is to get informed consent before an interview is conducted;

(3) Find an appropriate location and record the session: Creswell (2007) a) advises investigators to find, if possible, a quiet location free from distractions; a location that allows appropriate audio recording, and b) explains that audio recording is a necessity in accurately capturing information;

(4) Show interest in what the participant is saying without disclosing own perspectives: This can be accomplished with probes such as "Go on" and "What do you mean?" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p.159); and

(5) Inform participants on how they can find out about the research findings.

As noted, it is claimed that qualitative research is open to bias (Blanche et al., 2006). Writers have elaborated on "unbiased versus leading questions" (Mack et al., 2005, p.42), and, at length, on other do's and don'ts for interviews (Blanche et al., 2006; Patton, 1990; Seidman, 1991). These are, to name but a few:

- Avoid leading questions.

- Listen more and talk less.

- Ask participants to rephrase or reconstruct.

- Tolerate silence and allow the participant to be thoughtful.

This researcher believes that his previous experience with semi-structured interviews assisted in ensuring trustworthiness, and attaining research objectives. Participants' views were explored with respect for the individual's perspectives and his or her space (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999).

He understands the difference between unbiased and leading questions, and believes to have ensured that the latter were not included in the topic guide (Appendix D), which, to map the UGT, includes questions (1) of whether there was a *need* to use, (2) on how lecturers *use*, (3) on the advantages of (or the *gratifications* experienced in) using, and (4) on the *negative effects* of the use of, Facebook as an academic teaching tool.

3.7   Sampling

The word *sampling* is a reference to the selection of individuals, units and/or settings to be studied (Patton, 2001). There are several types of sampling strategies in qualitative research (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). According to Mack et al. (2005), the three most common methods are: purposive sampling, quota sampling (regarded as a type of purposive sampling) and snowball sampling (regarded as a type of purposive sampling as well). Ritchie and Lewis (2003) explain that purposive sample, or *purposeful* sampling, is the strategy that is integral to many of the methods utilised. Patton (2001) reveals that qualitative studies commonly utilise purposeful or *criterion-based* sampling, that is, a sample that has characteristics applicable to research questions.

This study employed purposeful sampling. According to Creswell (2003), in purposeful sampling, investigators select sites or participants that are willing to, and can best help understand the research problem by reflecting on and sharing their knowledge. Patton (1990) explains that the purpose of purposeful sampling is to choose *information-rich cases* whose participation will elucidate on the research questions. "Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful* sampling" (Patton, 1990, p.169).

This researcher believes that because the strategy can group participants according to preselected criteria relevant to research questions (Mack et al., 2005), it is more suitable for what he aimed to achieve. As indicated above, the specific contextual focus of this research, as characterised by Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002), is lecturers in a higher education setting that use Facebook for academic purposes.

3.8   Study Site and Participants

The study was conducted at a public degree-conferring body in Gauteng, South Africa, which offers undergraduate, as well as postgraduate, programmes.

This researcher chose this particular institution, and chose to select information rich cases from therein, because he was confident that members of its academic staff would provide insightful and useful information that would benefit the research. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) explain that selecting study sites and participants "involves identifying those which, by virtue of their relationship with the research questions [might be] able to provide the most relevant, comprehensive and rich information" (p.49).

Lecturers who used Facebook for academic purposes were the researcher's data sources as the population chosen, as indicated above, should be those to whom research questions apply (Blanche et al., 2006).

3.9   Number of Participants

"Qualitative inquiry seems to work best for people with a high tolerance for ambiguity... Nowhere is this ambiguity clearer than in the matter of sample size... My universal, certain, and confident reply to [sample size related questions] is this: "it depends"" (Patton, 1990, pp.183, 184).

Qualitative research will normally study a small number of individuals or situations rather than collect data from large samples (Blanche et al., 2006; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Maxwell, 2009). Blanche et al. (2006) argue that the "temptation" is to apply the same sampling strategies used in quantitative research to qualitative research, and then judge qualitative studies as being scientifically less rigorous because they employ smaller samples (p.288).

However, Patton (1990) affirms that a qualitative study sample "*only seems small*", when compared with the sample size needed for representativeness, that is, when the aim is to generalise from a sample, to the population of which the sample is a part (p.184, italics in original). The sample, as well as any other aspect of a qualitative study, should be judged in context – according to the purpose of each study, and sampling approach utilised (Bandler & Grinder, 1975a; Bandler & Grinder, 1975b; Patton, 1990).

Various studies show that sample sizes can be fairly small. For example, Bandler and Grinder (1975a; 1975b) developed Neurolinguistic Programming by studying three therapists; Freud established the field of psychoanalysis based on less than ten client cases; Piaget contributed a key breakthrough to our understanding of how children think by observing his own two children – as noted in Patton (1990). Blanche et al. (2006) recommend a sample of perhaps ten to twenty participants, particularly when investigators intend to carry out relatively brief, semi-structured interviews.

The sample of this study comprised fourteen participants. This researcher is aware that whereas there seems to be no general consensus about sample size in qualitative studies, a consideration is that the sample should be large enough to ensure that at a certain point, there will be no new concepts emerging – this is called *theoretical saturation* (Blanche et al., 2006; Patton, 2001). It is felt that (1) fourteen data sources, or sampling units (Blanche et al., 2006), have yielded information that is rich in detail, and assisted in attaining research objectives, and (2) a larger sample would not supply new information that would challenge or add to the to this researcher's interpretive account; in fact, it could provide redundant information, to the extent that it would become repetitive (Blanche et al., 2006).

The sample size of this research was also established, in part, by practical constraints like the amount of time available for the study (Blanche et al., 2006). It would, therefore, be "unmanageable" to carry out and analyse a large number of interviews, unless the researcher was intending to "spend several years doing so" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p.83). Patton (1990) states that information from a small number of people can be extremely useful, particularly if the participants are information rich. Only lecturers that used Facebook for academic purposes – regardless of the accessing device (mobile phone, laptop, desktop computer, etc.) – were able to participate. This researcher, in view of his own experience with the use of Facebook, with different accessing devices, believes that there is little difference in the devices' capability to run Facebook and its applications. Furthermore, he presupposed, correctly, that because lecturers talk to audiences, the risk of encountering participants that were hesitant to share ideas, or that are less articulate, was diminished. Creswell (2007) points out that when conducting interviews, investigators need participants who are not hesitant to speak and share ideas. Less articulate interviewees may provide data of poor quality.

3.10   Data Collection

The number of participants in this research is not "a strict quota" (Mack et al., 2005, p.5). This is to say that this researcher was not, necessarily, looking to interviewing, for example, seven lecturers from the Computer Science Department, and another seven from the Law Department. Interviewees were not primarily chosen to reflect corresponding proportions in the population. As mentioned above, it is possible that few lecturers make use of Facebook, let alone for academic purposes. This researcher, therefore, endeavoured to find participants that not only used Facebook for academic purposes, but were also willing to engage in the study. Orb et al. (2000) explain that the desire to participate in research is dependent on the subject's willingness to share his or her perspectives. This means that the first fourteen participants that were found, that met the requirements, made up the sample.

Data is the primary, basic material with which an investigator will work; it can take the form of numbers (in quantitative research) or text (in qualitative research) (Blanche et al., 2006). Burns and Grove (2009) define data collection as the accurate, methodical gathering of information pertinent to the research purpose and objectives of a study. Mack et al. (2005) indicate that recruitment and data collection approaches are determined by the type and number of data collection activities, and by the traits of the study population. The strategies are normally flexible, and, in the current study, included:

(1) After obtaining ethical approval, using the university's website in order to obtain lecturers' email addresses. The email message noted in Appendix A was sent to all the lecturers that had their email addresses displayed; the explanatory statement (Appendix B) and the consent form (Appendix C) were attached. This disclosure of the nature and purpose of the research helps establish rapport (Creswell, 2007).

The explanatory statement is an information sheet that included specific elements such as the purpose of the study, the strategies to be utilised in data collection, the time involved, when and how to find out about the aggregate research finding, contact details and the signature of the researcher. The consent form mainly elaborated on privacy aspects, as well as participation, and withdrawal, stipulations. Both explanatory statement and consent form were adapted from Blanche et al. (2006) and Pham (2009). According to Mack et al. (2005), the willingness to participate depends on how well

participants understand the purpose of the study, what is expected of them, and how their privacy will be respected.

(2) In cases where lecturers were willing to participate, a suitable date and time to physically visit the participant's place of work in order to conduct the interview was agreed on. This researcher suggested that the session took place in the participant's office. As previously indicated, Creswell (2007) advises investigators to find, if possible, a location that allows appropriate audio recording. This researcher, while at the study site, carried printed versions of the consent form (as this document had to be signed before interviews took place), the topic guide, the audio recording device, and a note book.

(3) Interview sessions were recorded using an audio recording device (this information was included in the explanatory statement and in the consent form), specifically, this researcher's cell phone. Respondents did not show signs of uneasiness with the presence of the device. He turned all mobile network connections off, to ensure that disturbances, in the form of phone calls or text messages, did not take place.

Audio recording allowed he researcher to devote attention to listening while probing in-depth. Blanche et al. (2006) indicate that audio recording an interview shows that the investigator takes what the participant says seriously, but warns that the procedure should not cause both researcher and participant to perform for the recorder rather than talking to each other.

It is unusual for participants to decline being recorded so long as they are reassured about confidentiality, have clear explanations about the research, and know about what happens to transcripts (these were included in the explanatory statement) (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). This researcher has two cell phones, and carried both while at the study site. This was to mitigate against a situation where one of the devices, for some reason, malfunctioned before or during an interview.

He a) employed active listening skills such as reflection, leaning forward, nodding, asking for clarification, and maintaining eye contact in hopes to facilitate and encourage participants to talk until there were no more issues emerging (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Mabuda, 2009), and b) as previously noted, encouraged participants to be as open and honest as possible in their responses (Blanche et al., 2006).

(4) To ensure that the interview quality was not compromised in any way, interview notes were consolidated within 24 hours, and audio recordings were also transcribed within that period. Mack et al. (2005) explain that during interviews, researchers might take notes to remind themselves of questions they need to refer to again, where clarification is needed. This researcher transcribed every audio recording using MSWord. This facilitated the moving around of data and the searching for particular words, as compared to having it in an audio file (Blanche et al., 2006). Moreover, this increases accuracy, as compared to employing a third party transcriptionist (Mack et al., 2005).

(5) This researcher has kept transcripts and all textual data gathered on his computer, and in his Dropbox account (in encrypted files) to ensure that they do not get lost. Bricki and Green (2007) caution that investigators should not "leave transcripts lying around" as safety of those being interviewed should always be considered (p.22).

3.11   Data Analysis and Presentation

Analysing and presenting qualitative data is one of the most confusing portions of qualitative studies (Burnard et al., 2008). Data analysis, in qualitative research, entails organising the data, reducing it into categories, and lastly representing it in figures, tables or discussion. This is the typical approach that academics utilise; certainly, variations will also be found (Creswell, 2007). This research employed *thematic analysis*, as it is the most common strategy used for qualitative projects (Brikci & Green, 2007; Pope et al., 1999), and being an approach in which the researcher has experience.

Bricki and Green (2007) define thematic analysis as "one that looks across all the data to identify the common issues that recur, and identify the main themes that summarise all the views you have collected" (p.23). This researcher analysed data *manually* and not by means of computer software. Burnard et al. (2008) note that "such programs do not "analyse" ... they simply manage the data and make handling of them easier" (p.430). Nevertheless, this researcher managed data *by hand* because (1) the process of content thematic analysis is the same (Burnard et al., 2008; Creswell, 2007), (2) he did not intend to place "a machine" between him and the data, as this could cause "an uncomfortable distance" between the researcher and the data (Creswell, 2007, p.165), (3) most of such programs do not follow MS Windows conventions (e.g., transcripts

have to be converted from MS Word into rich text format (Burnard et al., 2008), and (4) the time required to familiarise oneself with computer-aided qualitative analysis might be substantial (Brikci & Green, 2007; Creswell, 2007).

This study followed the procedure employed in thematic analysis, as identified by Burnard et al. (2008). This researcher deems its approach to be systematic, with easy to understand steps. He thus:

(1) Read each transcript, and made notes in the margins of words or brief sentences that summarised what was being said in the text – *open coding.*

(2) Wrote down these words or short phrases onto a new set of pages; every duplication was crossed out (Burnard, 1991; Burnard, 2006).

(3) Looked for overlapping or similar categories. These categories were grouped together, and further refined and reduced. He relied on analytical and theoretical notions devised during the study to accomplish this (Pope et al., 1999). A reduced list of several categories were then compiled.

(4) Assigned each of the categories its own coloured marking pen. Each transcript was worked through, and data that fit under a specific category was marked with the corresponding colour.

(5) Cut out and paste onto the A4 sheets all sections of data, under each category (already assigned a particular colour). Subject dividers were labelled with each category label.

A qualitative investigator can collect data in the form of spoken language, and analyse it by identifying and categorising themes (Blanche et al., 2006). Analysing qualitative data also involves interpreting findings of the study (Burnard et al., 2008). This researcher understands that the best way to conduct a sound interpretive analysis is to familiarise oneself with the data by listening to the recordings, reading the transcripts and the notes, and then interpret data "from a position of emphatic understanding" (Blanche et al., 2006, p.321). Patterson (1985) defines *emphatic understanding* as an attempt to understand how subjects feel, think and perceive things, themselves and the world around them.

Thematic analysis is a strategy located under the umbrella of interpretive analysis (Smith, 1992). Blanche et al. (2006) indicate that in interpretation, themes from the thematic analysis are used as subheadings. While interpretation seldom proceeds in an orderly manner, a convincing account of the phenomena being studied ought to be the end result (Blanche et al., 2006).

To further commit the study to interpretation (and to the data collection strategies chosen) this researcher put forward the following basic suppositions, keeping in mind that none can be incontrovertibly right (Blanche et al., 2006):

- Ontology – "specifies the nature of the reality that is to be studied, and what can be known about it" (Blanche et al., 2006, p.6).

  Facebook exists, and it is being used by both lecturers and university students. Roode (1993) explains that SNSs exist in higher education because they are products of our minds.

  This research means that existing literature holds both studies that highlight students' perspectives on, as well as studies that draw attention to lecturers that have experience with, the use of Facebook for academic purposes. It constitutes a stepping-stone towards the future of Facebook in higher education settings.

- Epistemology – "specifies the nature of the relationship between the researcher (knower) and what can be known" (Blanche et al., 2006, p.6).

  This researcher believes that he is the constituent standing between lecturers' views, and the portrayal of these views. He had to interpret lecturers' perspectives, and thereafter draw a picture in an attempt to make lecturers' "voices heard" in a systematic presentation of data. Blanche et al. (2006) support this, indicating that in interpretive research, the researcher is the main instrument for analysing the data.

  Olikowski and Baroudi (1990) explain that understanding a phenomenon within its context allows the investigator to contribute to the relevant discipline. Blanche et al. (2006) argue that in interpretive research, data is "collected in context and with minimal disturbance to the natural setting ... However ... recognizing a setting as 'natural' and knowing when it has been unduly 'disturbed'" is not a straightforward undertaking (p.287, quotes in original).

This researcher, thus, endeavoured to understand the situation surrounding the use of Facebook as an academic tool through "first-hand accounts" (Blanche et al., 2006, p.288) of actual lecturers in a higher education institution that use Facebook for academic purposes, but did not go to a lecture hall physically, or ask to monitor activity of participants' Facebook profiles.

This researcher's knowledge was gained through social constructions such as language and consciousness, culminating in the writing of a descriptive account that is interesting, plausible and convincing (Klein & Myers, 1999).

- Methodology – "specifies how researchers may go about practically studying whatever they believe can be known" (Blanche et al., 2006, p.6).

As noted, (1) this researcher went physically to the study site and conducted semi-structured interviews with lecturers, and 2) the *one interviewer and one interviewee face-to-*face approach was employed. This researcher believes that the chosen approaches assisted in gathering useful information to answer the research questions, and create knowledge that is credible (Weber, 2004). Lecturers who used Facebook for academic purposes were this researcher's data sources. Their perspectives were set to influence his understanding. Moreover, a survey based approach research endeavors to describe, provide explanations, and interpret *what is* in the present.

This researcher remained subjective in the study. Webster's New World Dictionary (2002) states that subjective means of, or resulting from, the feelings of the person thinking, while Webster's New World Dictionary (1999) states that subjective is affected by, or produced by, the mind resulting from a person thinking. According to the Old Dominion University (2013), subjective information is one's viewpoint; it can be based on facts, but it is still the researcher's interpretation of the facts. This is to say that this researcher engaged in reasoning in his mind (Visagie, 2010) in an attempt to achieve understanding because he believes that knowledge and meaning are results of interpretation, and thus cannot be set independent from a thinking, reasoning human (Gephart, 1999). This researcher believes that the strategy is appropriate as the knowledge that he sought to gain, and that he thereafter interpreted, involves human thought (which this researcher perceives to be context-dependent). The meaning of what was investigated depended on the particular situation (Blanche et al., 2006) in

which lecturers involved in this study found themselves. According to Orlikowski and Baroudi (1990), a researcher's assumptions, values and interests will always shape his or her investigations. However, this researcher attempted to, as much as possible, distance himself from this situation by considering the views of the different participants (Goede & De Villiers, 2003). Jette (1989) indicates that what characterises findings as subjective is the degree to which they involve the perceptions of the participants being studied.

Writers have identified quite a few approaches to present qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Fetterman, 1991; Riessman, 1993). Burnard (2004) indicates that there are no standardised templates. As noted, this researcher has, under *Chapter 4: Findings*, presented the demographic characteristics of the sample, overall findings, a synopsis of the questions and responses, the structure of the themes, and, thereafter, the key findings under each identified theme. This is followed by *Chapter 5: Discussion*, where he interpreted the findings, and discussed its connection with the UGT. Hofstee (2006) explains that researchers should always indicate whether or not the theory was supported by the findings. This study linked the new evidence gathered to appropriate existing research (Burnard et al., 2008). This researcher has also, under *Chapter 5: Discussion,* proposed a framework on how Facebook could be integrated into academia.

A concluding chapter, where he summarised the findings and suggested applications thereof, follows (Burnard et al., 2008). He has, as suggested by Blanche et al. (2006), discussed his interpretation with his supervisor who was able to consider it from a fresh perspective, and provide additional insights into theme formulation. Walsham (2006) states: "the researcher's best tool for analysis is his or her mind, supplemented by the minds of others when work and ideas are exposed to them" (p.325). Again, personal experience played a role in choosing this strategy, as it has been applied in previous research.

3.12   Scientific Rigor

Notwithstanding the arguably unstructured form that data collection in qualitative studies take, it is vital to make sure that the research is reliable, and that its validity is protected (Brikci & Green, 2007).

Reliability and validity are vital issues that need to be addressed in qualitative studies, although these terms are usually interpreted somewhat differently and have different implications in quantitative research (Lacey & Luff, 2001). In the context of qualitative research, Ritchie and Lewis (2003) indicate that, when discussing reliability (and validity), some authors rather use the terms *trustworthiness* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), *consistency* (Hammersley, 1992), *confirmability*, or *dependability* in relation to the findings (Blanche et al., 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When discussing validity, authors use terms such as *credibility*, *transferability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and *plausibility* in relation to the research claims (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Nonetheless, all of these elements are under the umbrella of reliability and validity, and are indispensable to appraising soundness and the *correctness* of qualitative evidence (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Reliability generally concerns "the replicability of research findings and whether or not they would be repeated if another study, using the same or similar methods, was undertaken" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p.270). The applicability of this notion to qualitative studies has been questioned several times: Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the concept is misleading, given the likely complexity of the topic under investigation. Gubrium and Holstein (1997) state that qualitative studies, because they are dynamic, can never be, nor should be, repeated. Hughes and Sharrock (1997), advocating for the constructivist school, affirm that replication is an artificial goal to pursue. Blanche et al. (2006) explain that interpretive researchers do not assume that they are investigating an unchanging reality and therefore do not expect to have their findings replicated. Seale (1999) agrees, stating that the notion constitutes a "somewhat unrealistic demand", but explains that "showing, as much as possible," the procedures that have led to a particular set of conclusions is good practice in relation to reliability (p.158).

This researcher, thus, indicates that he has (1) described the strategy to data collection and data analysis, as this might also help other researchers to critically gauge the value of the study (Burnard et al., 2008); (2) given reasons for choosing the approaches; (3) compiled a diagrammatic representation of the process that was followed to complete the research (Figure 3.1, under section 3.14); (4) explained the process of generating themes (Lacey & Luff, 2001); and (5) *where possible*, linked the new evidence gathered to appropriate existing research (there was no "bending" of data to force links with existing literature) (Burnard, 2004, p.117; Burnard et al., 2008).

Validity is "traditionally understood to refer to the correctness or precision of a research reading" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p.273). The intention is to determine whether the investigator is calling what he or she is calling by the *right name* (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Lacey and Luff (2001) indicate that the emphasis is on the validity of the interpretation of the findings. Again, the applicability of this notion to qualitative studies is subject to uncertainty, as different views question the existence of means of actually verifying accuracy in social studies (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Burnard et al. (2008) state that despite continuous debate, there is no unanimous conclusion to the "issue of validity in qualitative analysis" (p.431). Lacey and Luff (2001), however, put forward that validity can be gauged by the degree to which the qualitative account appears to reasonably, and precisely, reflect the data that has been collected.

This researcher, thus, indicates that he has (1) used quotations in the presentation of the analysis to convince readers that interpretations relate to the data gathered (Lacey & Luff, 2001); (2) presented findings in way a that is in accord with the research design, the approach to data collection, and to data analysis chosen (Lacey & Luff, 2001); and (4) discussed his interpretation with his supervisor.

This researcher has not engaged in *Respondent Validation* – sending transcripts or quotations to participants for accuracy check, or asked respondents to validate, refute or otherwise comment on the interpretation or drafts of the report (Burnard et al., 2008; Lacey & Luff, 2001). This is because participants could, perhaps, change their perceptions and want to modify their opinions, which would then cause the researcher to modify the report.

3.13   Ethical Considerations

This researcher needed ethical reviews from both Unisa and the institution in which the study was conducted, henceforth referred to as B. He formally applied for ethical clearance at the School of Computing Ethics sub-committee at Unisa, and at the respective Ethics committee at B, before any data collection activity was undertaken. The approval from Unisa is contained in Appendix E, while the one from B is in Appendix F.

Appropriate protocols, with particular reference to consent by, and confidentiality for, all participants, had to be observed. As noted, an explanatory statement, and a consent form, was sent to every potential respondent. The latter was signed by all lecturers that

chose to participate. The dissertation does not include names or identifying characteristics of B, nor of its employees and/or participants. To help protect anonymity, faculty and department names were adjusted.

Information provided that could lead to the identification of any institution or individual was not made known in this report, or to any other party. This researcher will ensure that B and the research's sampling units remain, at all times, anonymous in any reports or publications of the research (this information has been included in the consent form).

3.14   Research Process

Figure 3.1 is a diagrammatic representation of the process that was followed to complete the research. Blanche et al. (2006) note that qualitative research should be seen as a process rather than as a set of procedures, as investigators may not make straightforward distinctions between the different phases of the research.
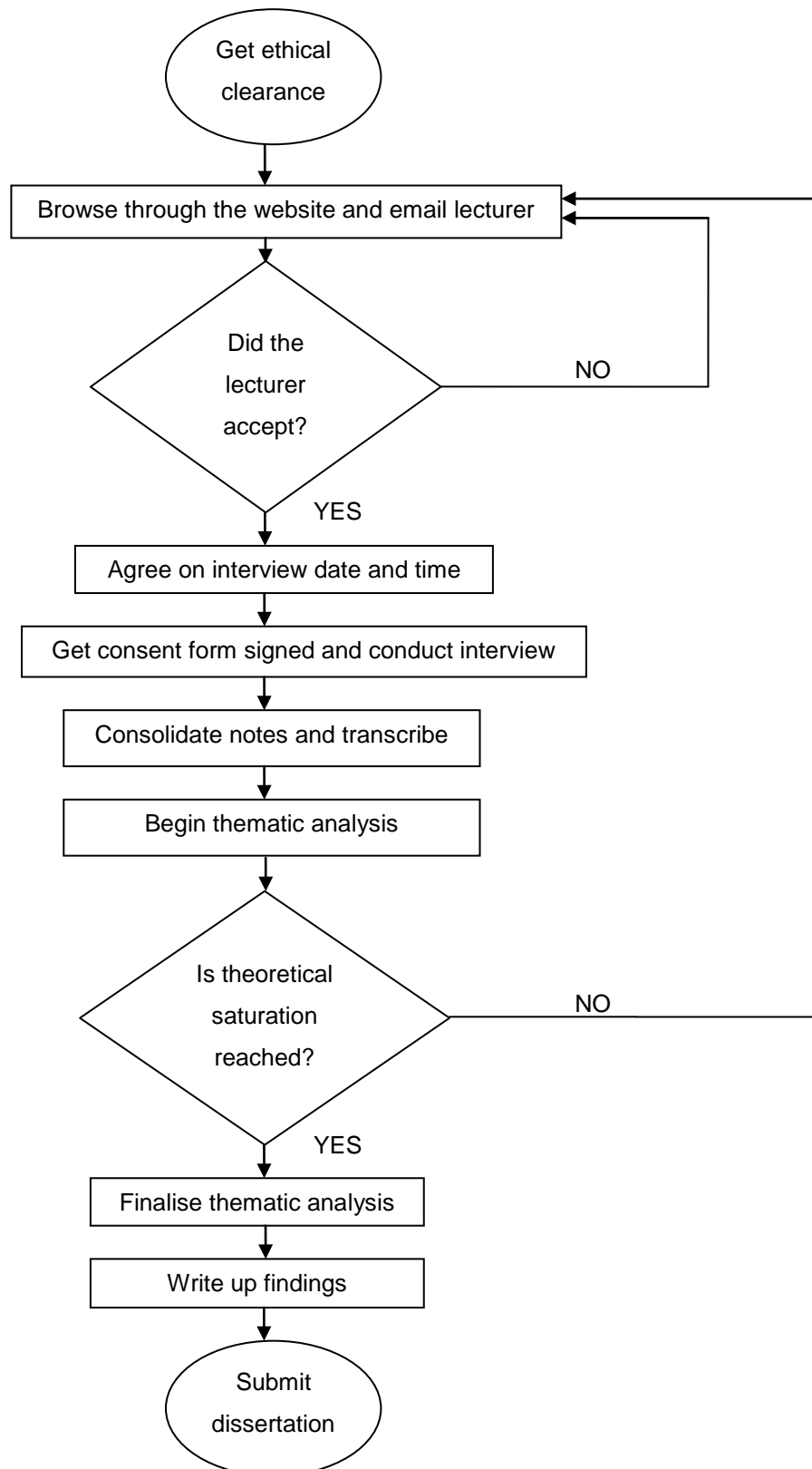
Figure 3.1: Diagrammatic representation of the research process

3.15   Conclusion

This chapter described the various approaches selected to address the research question and sub-questions, noting each strategy and discussing the appropriateness of the choices. It submitted that the UGT allows researchers to identify and describe media uses and consequences. Further, it argued for the value of using an interpretive philosophical perspective, a qualitative paradigm and a survey research design in this study, noting a) that qualitative approaches provide more emphasis on interpretation (Tewksbury, 2009), and b) this researcher's intention to understand lecturers' current usage behaviour and viewpoints related to the academic application of Facebook.

The chapter also a) highlighted that the study was conducted in a public degree-conferring body in Gauteng, South Africa – and only encompassed lecturers who used Facebook for academic purposes – and b) noted particulars on data collection, data analysis and presentation, and scientific rigour.

Lastly, this chapter discussed ethical considerations, and presented a diagrammatic representation of the process that was followed to complete the research.

The findings of the study are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the demographic characteristics of the sample first; this is followed by overall findings, a synopsis of the questions and responses, the structure of the themes, and, thereafter, the key findings under each identified theme, using verbatim quotes as support base.

Six broad themes have been identified, further divided into specific subthemes, and presented in a manner that facilitates a logical flow of information. Unless otherwise indicated, quotes in italics are verbatim comments made by a participant; identifiers such as P1 and P2, for participant one and participant two, for example, have been added to enhance the reliability of the comments (the identifiers reflect the order in which the interviews were conducted).

4.2 Demographics

Table 4.1 illustrates the divisions, departments, as well as the number of participants involved in this study.

Table 4.1: Divisions, departments and participants

Division	Departments	Number of participants
Management faculty	Knowledge and Information Hospitality and Tourism Commerce Marketing Public Administration Information Systems	7
Arts faculty	Multimedia Arts	1
	Graphic Design	1
Science faculty	Biological Chemistry	1
	Ecology and Energy	1
Economics and Finance faculty	Accounting	1
Health Sciences faculty	Radiography and Radiation	1
Academic Support Centre	Language support	1
Total		14

85% of the participants in this study were women.

4.3   Overall Findings

Figure 4.1 illustrates the devices with which participants accessed Facebook, for academic purposes. The majority of the respondents indicated that they accessed the platform through their mobile phones.
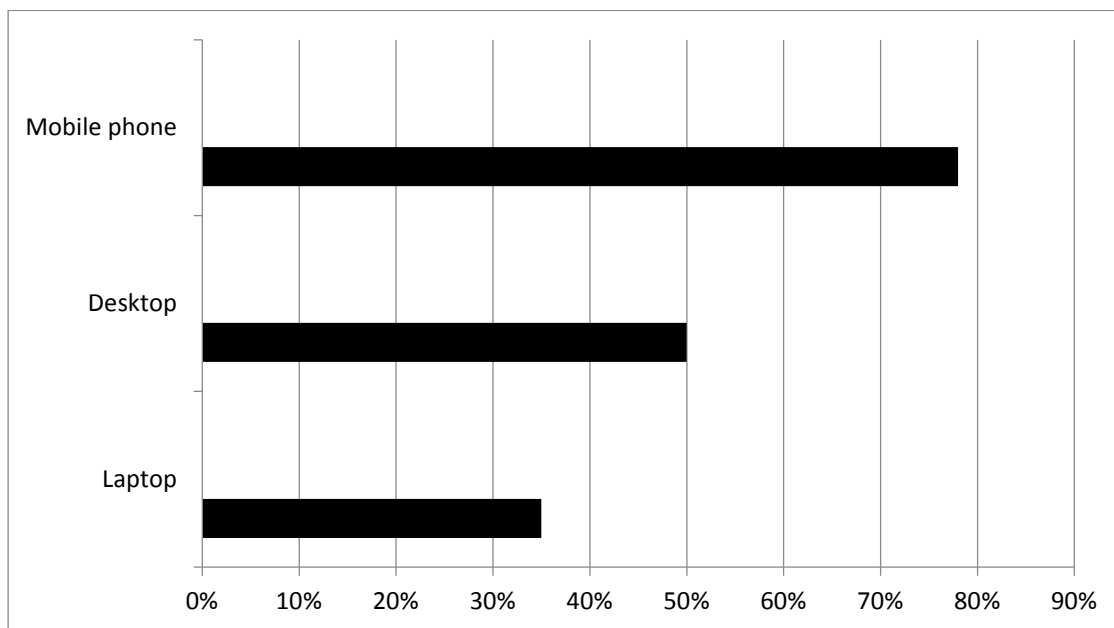
Figure 4.1: Devices used to access Facebook

As previously noted, Visagie and De Villiers (2010) and Dare and Sir Gâr (2011) recommend the use of Facebook groups for academic-related activities. Participants of this study were asked about the feature they utilised for academic purposes with their students.

- Contrary to the recommendation, 50% of the participants used Facebook pages instead [P2, P4, P9, P10, P11, P12 and P13]. One of these participants had set up two different Facebook pages for two of the modules that he/she taught (one for second – and the other for third – year students) [P10].

- 21% of the participants indicated that they created Facebook groups [P1, P3 and P7].

- Another 21% created a separate Facebook account that was only used for academic purposes with their students [P6, P8 and P14]. This echoes Muñoz and Towner's (2009), previously noted, recommendation that lecturers set up an additional Facebook account, specifically for academic purposes.

- One participant used his/her own personal account [P5]. This participant accepted his/her students as Facebook friends and used the account for academic purposes with them as well.

Participants were unsure about the year in which they started using Facebook for academic purposes. 29% indicated that they started in 2013. The earliest year recorded is 2007, and the latest is 2015.

Furthermore, two lecturers indicated that they used Facebook for academic purposes in the past, but did not currently do so [P1 and P5].

4.4   Synopsis of the Questions and Responses

Table 4.2 is a synopsis of the different questions and responses gathered.

Table 4.2: Synopsis of the questions and responses

Subject	Responses
Applying Facebook as an academic teaching tool	● 85% of the participants mainly posted reminders and/or announcements instead ● 50% posted articles ● 42% posted videos ● Other rates are lower than 16%
Advantages of using Facebook as an academic teaching tool	● 63% reported the extension of the traditional lecture hall ● 29% noted the ability to transmit information to students rapidly
Friending students from one's personal account	● 85% were not in favour ● 15% did so
Potential changes on Facebook to increase privacy	● 71% did not point to any potential adjustment ● 29% provided insights
Using Facebook during working hours	● 92% did so ● 1 participant noted that he/she did not do so
Being allowed to use Facebook during working hours	● 65% did not know or were not sure ● 35% indicated that they were allowed
Being allowed to use Facebook for academic purposes with students	● 92% indicated that they were not sure ● 1 participant stated that he/she was allowed
Disadvantages of using Facebook as an academic teaching tool	● 79% noted the challenge of isolating the use of Facebook for academic, from the use of Facebook for social, purposes ● 35% pointed to students' Facebook posts of a sexual nature, and, equally, students' Facebook posts of a political nature ● Other rates are lower than 22%
Informing students of the academic use of Facebook	● Every participant informed their students during introductory classes
Assigning of extra marks	● 1 participant did so
How lecturers may best leverage Facebook to enhance its application as an academic tool	● 50% indicated that there should be a change in senior lecturers' attitude towards Facebook towards Facebook ● Other rates are lower than 30%

4.5   Themes and Subthemes

Six broad themes emerged from the thematic analysis, and these (as well as their respective subthemes) are arranged as depicted in table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Themes and subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
Effective use of Facebook	● Using Facebook for notifications ● Using Facebook to post course-related material
Benefits of the use of Facebook	● Facebook as a tool for extending the lecture hall ● Rapid access to information
Facebook and the private and work domain	● Facebook and privacy aspects ● Knowledge about Facebook usage in the workplace
Disadvantages of the use of Facebook	● Facebook as a distracting influence ● Unintended use of Facebook
Strategies to involve students	● Informing students of the academic use of Facebook ● Assigning extra marks
Enhancing the academic use of Facebook	● Older lecturers' attitude change towards Facebook ● Maintaining momentum ● Involving institutions' administrators

These themes and subthemes are presented from section 4.6 to section 4.11.

4.6 Effective Use of Facebook

This theme aggregates participants' effective uses of Facebook. It encompasses two subthemes: (1) using Facebook for notifications, and (2) using Facebook to post course-related material.

4.6.1 Using Facebook for Notifications

"It is more for ... [informing] ... about work than for actually doing work" (Madge et al., 2009, p.1).

When asked about how they applied Facebook as an academic teaching tool, 85% of the participants explained that they mainly used the platform to post reminders and/or announcements for their students instead.

[P2] noted:

> *"So what I, mostly, do is: I put announcements in there ... so maybe their tutorial is due on Friday; I type: 'Remember, your tutorial is due on [Friday]! ... so they get that constant reminder".*

This sort of approach was felt to be worthwhile as students were not utilising the already-provided mechanisms to obtain information

> *"You see, [students] don't read their study guides. They don't know when assignments are due ... they don't know about their tests; so hum, I post due dates and so on"* [P14]

or as a reminder of upcoming tasks such as assessments

> *"Hum, I use [Facebook] to sort of warn [students] ... if there's something coming up; assessments and stuff like that"* [P13]

and venues

> *"I always put up test dates and sometimes venues ... I don't know what's going on in [students'] heads. They easily forget"* [P12]

and even term marks

> *"I post the term marks that we have every year. I don't post individual marks but I post other term marks I set up ... I say: 'this term, your marks [will] consist of the following: x marks for this, y marks for that' ... [students] will see it and know how to prepare [themselves for evaluations]"* [P6].

[P10] encapsulated his/her application of the platform for notifications by stating:

> *"I use it, firstly, for notifications you know, is more of a notification strategy ... I put up posters on Facebook about essay extensions, reminders to submit work and hum, various notifications".*

This echoes the findings reported in Hew (2011) and Madge et al. (2009) that, as previously indicated, the application of Facebook for academic purposes is "not to do with the pedagogic aspects of teaching ... but more to do [with] departmental or module related administrative arrangements" (Madge et al., 2009, p.15). One of the participants that indicated that they used Facebook for academic purposes in the past, but did not currently do so, stated:

"... in the end, [students] would mostly ask: 'When is the test? What do we have to study for the test?' So more of an administrative nature rather than actual work; so the purpose for which I initially implemented [the Facebook group] wasn't coming through very well" [P1].

4.6.2 Using Facebook to Post Course-related Material

The second highest rate recorded for how participants used Facebook as an academic teaching tool is at 50%, to post "*interesting articles*" [P9]. This is followed by 42%, to post videos. Other rates recorded – for notes, songs, and competitions – are lower than 16%.

Respondents made a point that they posted material that they believed was an add on to the course that they taught.

"I basically [post] anything which, for me, enriches the course [I teach]. Articles, videos, sometimes even songs which might be related to a specific historic time" [P10].

[P7] supported [P10] by stating that he/she posted

"articles, mostly, related to programming ... things that are specifically homework or assignment wise".

He/she continued:

"Basically, I put something and say: 'I found this article on this specific type of program. It does x, y and z and you can possibly use it for your assignment'".

[P11] noted that

"... videos are just great [because] I can show different paintings, different works and students get inspired ... works by Picasso, Van Gogh and other artists".

This notion was supported by [P5] who stated that videos *"can be very potent".* He/she added:

"... you share a video on Facebook and boom! ... It assists students, you know. It's not like when they have to read, read and then try to remember what they read".

As previously noted, Junco (2012) points out that "those working in higher education [could use Facebook to] ... design and support interventions" that are useful to students' overall academic experience (p.170). This was advocated by [P6], who noted that

"... it's a combination! Starting on Monday, I'm going to start spelling competitions ... [because] I've picked up many spelling errors. Not only here on Facebook, but on adverts that students post out there you know, around campus. They've got many spelling errors ... so, I'll post three pictures ... and say: 'for a prize ... find me the most spelling errors.' [The competition] is language-based ..."

and by [P2] who explained

"I also put notes. I have a Dropbox link. I put the link to the Dropbox on the [Facebook] page, and I put all the notes in there ... the Dropbox does not take up any space you know; I mean, some of [the students] don't have the space on their phones, or on their tablets or whatever, whereas the Dropbox is in this cloud ... so my students can access the notes without having to worry about space ..."

4.7   Benefits of the Use of Facebook

This theme addresses the benefits of, or gratifications experienced in, using Facebook as an academic teaching tool. It encompasses two subthemes: (1) Facebook as a tool for extending the lecture hall, and (2) rapid access to information.

4.7.1   Facebook as a Tool for Extending the Lecture Hall

63% of the participants noted that an advantage of utilising Facebook as an academic teaching tool is the fact that the platform allows for an extension of the traditional lecture hall.

Respondents pointed out that lectures were time-constrained.

"When you [teach] a subject like Programming, there're ... a lot of examples, ideas to solve a specific problem ... Students may have difficulties to understand the method I taught in class ... they might find it a bit complex. So, Facebook helps change the game a bit. I can share as many methods, you know, and they can pick whichever works for them; but I don't have the time to do that in class" [P7].

[P4] supported this by noting

"... for example, Accounting has many fields ... there's only so much one can mention in a class ... but on Facebook, you know, there're no limits".

[P10] expressed his/her appreciation of the increased scope for interaction with students by stating

"... all I have allocated to me is two classes a week. Facebook is my way of communicating beyond those parameters ... I can share additional reading material, additional visual material".

This extension allowed students to contact the lecturer *"at anytime"* [P12]

"... so if they have a question on a Saturday at 9 o'clock, they can ask me and I'll reply; so they basically have a lecturer available 24 hours day" [P12]

and also meant that students did not have to share the same physical space with the lecturer and/or other students

"... some students are not confident enough to come see me face-to-face or to speak in class. They rather go to Facebook later and say: 'hi [Sir/Ma'am], I didn't quite get that part when you said this or that'" [P8].

[P2], who used a Facebook page, noted: *"[students] also do not need to have a Facebook account. If [they] just Google the page, [they'll] be able to find it".* As noted, on a Facebook page, posts are available to everyone (Facebook Help Center, 2015a). The respondent expressed his/her concerns regarding non-fully paid up students' access to course-related material, as well as the restricted interaction between them and the lecturers. He/she continued:

"I realised that quite a lot of students have got financial problems ... With the Blackboard [system], which we're using now, students are forced to register for the course to get access to [course-related material], whereas Facebook is open. So even if [students] are not registered for the specific course … [and are not allowed to attend to lectures, they] can still get the information ... So Blackboard is ... disadvantaging to the students. Some of them only get the money to formally register right before the tests. And, by then, they're quite far behind already. But because they can access the notes and [interact with the lecturer] on Facebook, they still stand a chance. So yes, Facebook helps in that way".

There are ethical questions that could be raised here where a student would continue to receive assistance while being blocked from university resources. Such issues, however, where not included in the current research.

4.7.2 Rapid Access to Information

Another positive aspect reported is in reference to the ability to transmit information to students rapidly – reported by 29% of the participants.

Lecturers were appreciative of the speed at which notifications and course-related material were accessed.

"... students have social media on their phones ... So in order to put notes on, or announcements and things like that; if I post it on Facebook it'll be immediately available to them" [P2]*.*

[P3] acknowledged that

"just about all of [the students] got smart phones and hum, it pulls us together quickly if you know what I mean. I put something now and I know they'll quickly get it".

[P6] supported [P3] by noting:

"[students'] cellphones... are so fancy they can stop the satellites revolving around the earth ... hum, instant access to information! That's what I'm trying to say".

[P7] substantiated the fact that Facebook can be used to transmit information to students quickly by referring to its share feature, a trait which Blackboard lacks:

> *"Facebook ... beats the Blackboard system in terms of sharing information ... it's just quicker and much nicer. For example, if I'm using RSSReader ... and I see something interesting for my students, I can share it from there. I don't have to go to Facebook to put the article up or something. If you go to almost every blog, every news site ... it just says: 'share on Facebook, share on Twitter or share on Pinterest'. I haven't seen a site that said: 'share on Blackboard'"*.

4.8   Facebook and the Private and Work Domain

This theme gives an account of the place of Facebook in the private and work domain. It encompasses two subthemes: (1) Facebook and privacy aspects, and (2) knowledge about Facebook usage in the workplace.

4.8.1   Facebook and Privacy Aspects

"... social networking ... 'blurs the line between work and personal life'" (Bosque, 2013, p.436).

As previously noted, Sturgeon and Walker (2009) report that 40% of lecturers *friended* their students (from their personal accounts). The rate of participants in this study that indicated that they *friended* their students (from their personal accounts) is much lower – only 15% reported this. These participants, however, also indicated that that they only did so where the students were the ones to send the friendship request. One of the participants stated:

> *"I honestly don't have issues with that because I believe in engaging with students via any platform ... BUT I will not, myself, go request the student as a friend; but if the student requests, I don't have any problem with that"* [P8].

85% of the participants, however, remarked that becoming Facebook friends with their students was, as one respondent said, *"a bad idea"* [P13].

[P11] uttered a sigh, and then noted:

"*That's mixing personal with work. I used to do that but no, not anymore*".

[P9] stated that the wall between work and personal should be kept intact.

> "*You see, my friends are my friends; my students are my students. There's a wall, you see? This is private and this is work! So this thing of accepting students you know, makes the wall hum, hum, break, if you know what I mean*".

These respondents (from the group of 85%) also indicated that they had concerns with regards to having private information accessible by their students.

[P13] asserted:

> "*... I DO NOT want my students to know about my personal life, and in the same way I don't want to know about theirs ... I put up photos of my kids; their school plays and hum, places ... that I take them. I don't know where those photos might end up*".

Similar remarks, with reference to respondents' family members, were made by [P12] who noted

> "*I got one child. I post photos of my family ... I don't think that's information that I should share with my students*"

[P14] who, in an assertive manner, advocated for a boundary

> "*We wear different hats. The hat that I wear when I am a lecturer is a different hat to what I wear when I am [father/mother], or a [brother/sister]. There has to be a boundary ... I don't want [my students] to see the things I share about my children, my family, no!*"

and [P1] who noted that Facebook suggests groups that one has joined, and pages that one has *liked,* to one's Facebook friends

> "*... you know, I can be on an Epilepsy group [or page] because my child has got Epilepsy; and the students will now wonder ... So they can go into my profile and see that; in addition, Facebook will suggest [groups and] pages to my students, if they're friends with me on Facebook, you know*

...groups [and] pages that deal with the same thing ... and now, my students will start speculating: 'Oh my God this [man/woman] has got Epilepsy!' ... and it's my private life as opposed to academic or professional life".

One participant hinted that *friending* students could, apart from providing them with private information, cause them to perceive the module to be trivial:

"It's not just about private information .... From the moment you start accepting friend requests from students ... they'll be like 'hum, the lecturer is my friend. My friend!' and the moment they start feeling that way you know, they actually think the subject is a joke ... So, it's important to keep that relationship you know; keep it professional at all times. So, personally, I don't accept their requests" [P4].

Participants were also asked about what they thought Facebook should change, or implement, to increase privacy. 71% of the participants did not point to any potential adjustment and/or new feature. The researcher considers that it is possible that this could have happened, mainly because participants could not, at the time of the interview, *"think of anything"*, as one participant noted. He/she said:

"... maybe if you gave me a couple of days to think about it but right now, hum, I really can't think of anything" [P8].

Conversely, at least 29% of the participants provided insights into the subject by expressing their concerns over information that they provided to SNSs

"I think better control over the data that users share. By 'data', I don't mean just the stuff that we see somewhere and share; I mean my photos, my phone number, email address and so on. I've googled myself and I wasn't pleased with what I found. I've discovered that other sites grab my information from Facebook and Twitter for example, and populate it on their sites; and I've never been to those sites! I've never seen it before but my data is there! And the only reason is there, is because it was made publicly available on social media ... I think that's one of the things that should be changed. Users should be told of the ramifications of making information public" [P7]

provided insights by expressing their concerns over privacy settings

> *"I think the biggest thing is, they should ... maybe once a month, have like a pop up that says: 'do a quick check on your privacy settings' , to make people check you know: 'are you actually happy with your privacy settings?', and maybe show screenshots, for example, with steps. I think they do have something like that, but maybe like, a reminder"* [P4]

provided insights by expressing their concerns over the possibility of having their Facebook accounts compromised

> *"People talk, almost on a weekly basis, about their account being hacked. That's worrying. [Facebook] should find a better way to manage that"* [P10]

and provided insights by expressing their concerns over the fact that one's permission to mention one's name in a post on Facebook is not sought

> *"I hate the fact that I don't have a say in whether somebody mentions me in a post. For example, a while ago, someone mentioned me ... the post itself was not derogatory but the person also typed – I'm going to swear now – 'shit' somewhere in there. I don't use words like that but now is there for the world to see. My pastor sees it! My name is attached to that and I've got no way in which to monitor that. You don't have a say in what you're mentioned in"* [P1]*.*

The rate of participants that aired concerns over privacy recorded in this study (85%) is higher than the ones recorded in recent research. Babson Survey Research Group (2013), and Roblyer et al. (2010), for example, indicate that, as noted above, 63% and 22.6% of lecturers, respectively, reported to be worried about their privacy. Only the later mentioned study, however, was exclusively focused on Facebook and not on SNSs in general. One of the participants in the current research made the following concluding remark:

> *"... anybody using Facebook must realise that they're all at a certain level of public access; and if you aren't [aware] then you're not being very realistic about Facebook and what it actually is and ... the kind of rights, or*

lack of rights, that we have by using [it]. That's the nature of the beast. If you use it, you need to be careful" [P10].

4.8.2   Knowledge About Facebook Usage in the Workplace

"Employers should ... have a comprehensive, tailored social media policy in place and ensure that employees read and understand it" (William Fry, 2013, p.12).

Participants were asked whether or not they used Facebook during working hours. Only one said *"no"* [P4]. 50% of the participants, most of which displayed some hesitation before answering, said *"yes"*.

Some of the variety in the access to Facebook can be seen in the following comments:

> *"Yes! I won't even lie, hey! I do!"* [P12].

> *"I would say hum,* [laugh] *I-I-I log into Facebook during working hours but I don't sit the whole day on Facebook"* [P2]*.*

> *"Do I use Facebook during working hours? Hum, this is awkward* [laugh] *I try not to but yes, I do"* [P14].

[P6] conceded that he/she was logged in on Facebook *"the whole day".*

> *"Yes! It's open on my computer the whole day. I'm logged in right now. I do that because I can think of something to post at anytime ... a video that might help them understand something I said in class or whatever".*

He/she later added that all of his/her colleagues used Facebook during working hours

> *"if you check all of these offices, everyone around here goes to Facebook during working hours. If they say 'no', they're lying"*.

At least 42% of the participants, however, supported the argument that *"during a working day"*, as one respondent put it, "*anybody has got downtime*". He/she continued:

> *"So if I get up, and make a cup of coffee, or I'm thinking, or I need to breathe; I can either look out my window, or I can go sit in our*

departmental sitting room, or I can check what's going on Facebook ... but ... it's still working hours" [P1].

According to Dictionary.com (2015), downtime is a time during working hours when an employee is not productive. Thus, the rate of Facebook use during working hours found in this study is 92% (50% that said *"yes"*+ 42% that supported the *"downtime"* argument).

Support for the downtime argument can be found in remarks such as the following:

"I have a huge issue if Facebook is open on the screen all the time. It draws your attention away. I don't mind if I check something or like something while I am making a cup of tea, or I share something while I've got downtime because you need downtime during the day" [P5]*.*

"[laugh] ... during working hours? Eish! Yea, it's there, it's on. I don't have a look all the time but I mean while I'm having my coffee, while I'm standing in the passage, I do" [P7]*.*

"I do. I really do but it doesn't take over my work; it's in a balanced fashion you know; whilst I'm snacking on something, or whilst I'm drinking my tea" [P8]*.*

[P3] put forward that "*working hours' is not a clear thing when you're a lecturer".* He/she added:

"We don't have specific working hours. It's a university you know. I mean, well, lecturers don't! If you get your work done, you get your work done. But secretaries, for example, have specific working hours and if they're on Facebook then that's bad. [I do so] while I'm on my tea break".

Participants were also asked whether they were allowed to use Facebook during hours. Not one respondent said no. However, 65% did not know or were not sure. Participants referred the question back to the interviewer

"... are we? I don't know, I think we are allowed" [P12]

and expressed their unawareness of the existence of a policy

"... I don't know if there's anything that prevents me from doing that" [P11]

"I don't know if there's a policy but the truth is, I can sit here all day and be on Facebook, and I don't think anybody would know unless they're sitting somewhere checking what people are doing" [P13]*.*

[P3] stated that he/she did not know but also indicated that Facebook was no longer a blocked website.

"Well, I don't know if it's written anywhere ... If we can or we can't ... but we can access it now. There was a time when we couldn't. So the question is 'who is going to stop me in my office?"

35% of the participants indicated that they were allowed to use Facebook during working hours. The rationalisation, however, was somewhat ambiguous as respondents referred to access

"I think we wouldn't have access to [Facebook] if we weren't. The reason why we have access is because so many of my colleagues have set up Facebook pages" [P10]*.*

departmental policy

"Hum, well, in our department, we don't have a problem with it; so, yea!" [P2].

and even the institution's marketing approach

"Yes, we are! And how I know that we are, is that hum, because we get emails from the Head you know, the Marketing manager. He/she tells us: 'if there is something in your subject and stuff, post it on Facebook'. So yes, we are" [P4].

When asked about whether they knew if they were actually allowed to use Facebook, for academic purposes, with their students, 92% of the participants indicated that they were not sure.

Two of the participants indicated that they did not believe that there was an issue.

"I hum, I don't think there's a problem with it because the university itself has got a Facebook page ... So, if it's not allowed hey, I don't know but I doubt so; we haven't got into trouble yet" [P2]

"It was never officially communicated to us ... nobody ever told us, or rather told me, that I shouldn't use Facebook with my students. Plus, we also use Instagram for Marketing purposes; so I don't know. I don't think there's a problem really" [P5].

[P10] expressed his/her uncertainty about the institution's approval of the use of non-university tools

"I would imagine that we're probably not encouraged to [use Facebook, for academic purposes] because the university paid so much money for Blackboard and other platforms. I don't know but I don't think that the university would be delighted about it"

while [P8] verbalised his/her uncertainty of the existence of a policy, as well as of its content

"I think 2 years ago, [the university] came up with some kind of policy or guidelines for the use of Facebook ... for academic purposes and so on. I just don't know what it says".

Only one respondent stated that he/she was allowed to use Facebook, for academic purposes, with his/her students: *"... it's actually on my KPA"* [P6]*,* he/she noted, which is assumed to be an acronym for Key Performance Areas. This particular participant reached for this document and showed the specific paragraph – which stated that he/she was allowed to use Facebook for his/her modules – as proof.

The rates of uncertainty regarding a SNS policy recorded in this research (65% unsure as to whether they were allowed to use Facebook during working hours, and 92% unsure as to whether they were actually allowed to use Facebook, for academic purposes, with their students) are higher than the ones recorded in recent studies. Manpower Group (2010) and William Fry (2013), for example, report that 5% and 43%, respectively, of employees are uncertain about their companies SNSs' policy. These studies, however, focused on Facebook, LinkdIn and Twitter.

4.9   Disadvantages of the Use of Facebook

This theme notes the disadvantages of the use of Facebook as an academic teaching tool. It encompasses two subthemes: (1) Facebook as a distracting influence, and (2) unintended use of Facebook.

4.9.1   Facebook as a Distracting Influence

As previously noted, 21% of the participants in this study created a separate Facebook account that was only used for academic purposes with their students. The remaining group of 79% were asked the following question: "When using Facebook for academic purposes, do you end up checking the 'News Feed' instead – to check what your other Facebook friends (not your students) are up to?" Every respondent said *"yes"*. One participant added: *"It's impossible not to! I mean, it's right there in my face"* [P9]. [P10] noted that *"Facebook is an amazingly absorbing platform"*. He/she added:

> *"I think it's almost unconscious ... I quite often forget what I went on Facebook to do cuz the minute I see 'News Feed', my head just goes empty and I'm like: 'I'm sure I came here to do something else'; and then I go back to my class pages".*

Respondents, often, made remarks in reference to the fact that isolating their use of Facebook for academic purposes, from their use of Facebook with their other Facebook friends (not their students), was particularly challenging. The data analysis revealed that participants considered this to be the main disadvantage of using Facebook as an academic teaching tool. A point was made that *"Facebook's original purpose will always hunt you [down]"* [P14]. The respondent added:

> *"I use it for academic stuff but, I mean, it was made for me to check my friends' photographs and check what they're doing. So, this mixing, really, is part of the package. It's not good [but] it just comes with it".*

[P1] expressed that it is

> *"gruelling to only, ONLY use Facebook for academic purposes because there's that much distraction there. You have it to control yourself much more to ensure that you're not distracted".*

This was supported by [P3] who stated

"... the thing is, it's very hard not to. It's just, I don't know ... and [my] attention shifts immediately".

[P13] noted what he/she did while checking on his/her other Facebook friends (not his/her students)

"[I] just find [myself] there, you know; and all of a sudden I'm liking my friends' pictures, reading their [Facebook] status[es] and so on" [P13]

while [P11] also pointed out that he/she quickly noted that he/she got distracted

"I do. Really, I do! Like, within a minute or so, I'm like: 'No! Why am I scrolling through 'News Feed?" [P11].

Magro et al. (2013) states that the fact that Facebook can be a distraction is not "unreasonable … since Facebook's primary use is as a social connection tool" (p.300).

4.9.2   Unintended Use of Facebook

The second highest rate recorded for disadvantages of using Facebook as an academic teaching tool is at 35%, in reference to students' Facebook posts of a sexual nature, and, equally, students' Facebook posts of a political nature.

[P6] explained that he/she saw *"this bush sex picture",* and chose to ignore it. He/she added:

"... I was horrified ... At first, I thought it was a picture of a rape. It really upset me; but then I thought about it and decided to just leave it because if you make a big thing out of it, then it becomes a huge thing. I didn't want to highlight ... and dramatise it cuz then [students] would ... only focus on it".

[P3] labelled what he/she saw *"low class porn"*, and opted to remove the student from the Facebook group.

"I've seen this ... what's the word? Kind of like low class porn ... very derogatory of women ... I messaged that person immediately and [removed] him/her right away".

[P12] noted that "*students tend to go overboard with their posts of a political nature*". He/she, however, also pointed out that he/she did not get too involved in these sorts of discussions.

> "*Oh dear Lord, their political views ... but those are their views ... I might give my two cents ... but I never get too deep into it*".

Another respondent expressed her dissatisfaction by noting:

> "*Recently, someone posted: 'Amandla to Xenophobia!' ... then tried to explain him/herself [by posting]: '[foreigners] are taking our jobs. Can you blame the people for getting upset? ... the government [of South Africa] should make them leave [the country]' ... I wrote a very angry retort for everybody to read ... and [later] removed him/her*" [P13].

As previously noted, Bsharah et al. (2014) also report that students use Facebook to exchange political views.

Other rates recorded for disadvantages of using Facebook as an academic teaching tool include the fact that students air their displeasure, through Facebook, of the lecturer and/or the institution (reported by 21% of the participants)

> "*... not every student will make it; and when they don't make it, it's always: 'the lecturers are not this or the university is bad'. [I] get that from students on the Facebook page ... I just ignore it really*" [P4]

> "*... sometimes students comment emotionally you know ... when they fail the test [or] feel like [it] was too hard. They go to the [Facebook] group to vent out their frustration ... I address [such situations] in class*" [P7].

It was also reported that students contact lecturers, through Facebook, to request for financial aid (reported by two participants)

> "*A student sent me a message recently because he/she had financial problems. In fact, I get lots of cases like this. I'm talking about students sending messages [to me] to ask for money*" [P6]

> "*I have been asked, on more than one occasion, for money ... 'I need money to go home, money for accommodation, money for textbooks'; on*

private messages, you know. I was like: 'no, I'm your lecturer, you're my student; I don't think so ... how would it be seen, if a lecturer gave money to his/her students?' ... so yea, that, I have been asked for. It kept on happening so I ended up talking to my HOD about it; so he/she is aware of it" [P2].

Once more, there are ethical questions that could be raised here where a lecturer would provide financial assistance to his/her students. Such issues, however, where not included in the current research.

Lecturers also expressed their dissatisfaction over the fact that anyone can post on a Facebook page (reported by two participants)

"... a lot of foreign people ... people that are not students, like people from India and a lot from middle Africa; they're looking for post doctorate positions and then they post that onto the page; and that is not what the page is for. They type things like: 'I'm so and so, and I'm looking for a post doctorate [position], and these are my research interests'; ... I have to delete that because [it is] MY teaching tool, for MY students, at THIS university. Not for [them] to submit [their] resume[s]" [P2]

"It's bloody difficult to control .... I mean, anyone can post ... I do not have the time to figure out whether you're a student or not ... and it's not just 'Peter Smith' [for example]; I see 'Dj Bum-Bum Smith', 'Sweetie the Best' ... and so on ... I don't have the time to go over 700 plus Facebook [profiles] to check whether [they're my students'] or not" [P11].

In addition, [P6] noted that students' Facebook posts are often typed in their home language

"The students, 95% of the time, speak in their mother tongue. They put things on Facebook in their mother tongue and that's a drawback; a big problem because I want to promote English. We are an English subject ... So the Facebook [account], though it's meant for academic purposes, doesn't promote English; that's a problem"

and that students use Facebook to *"stalk"* the lecturer

"One of my ... students was stalking me. He/she asked me out; I started getting funny photos from him/her and everything. I ... [later] blocked him/her."

Osterholm et al. (2007) indicate that "education venues", such as Facebook in the current study, "may provide particularly fertile ground" for stalking (p.6), and further state that "imposition of boundaries is the responsibility of the [lecturer]" (my emphasis) (p.5).

4.10   Strategies to Involve Students

This theme describes what research participants did to prompt their students to use Facebook for academic purposes. It encompasses two subthemes: (1) informing students of the academic use of Facebook, and (2) assigning extra marks.

4.10.1 Informing Students of the Academic Use of Facebook

Every participant in this research stated that they informed their students, during introductory classes, that they utilised Facebook for academic purposes. This echoes Muñoz and Towner's (2009), previously noted, recommendation that lecturers "must" let students know that they have a Facebook profile by a) listing its internet link in the module syllabus or b) displaying it during introductory classes (p.8).

It was noted that not only participants often talked about this

> *"... in the beginning of the year, I told them: 'you can catch stuff from the [Facebook page]'; and I constantly remind them. [For example], at the end of a lecture, I say: 'I'll also post this or that on Facebook; check it out later'"* [P13]

included the *like us on Facebook* logo on the class register

> *"I mention it at the beginning of every lecture series ... sometimes, I print out the 'like us on Facebook' logo, and I put it on the first register of every term; so when they sign the register, they see that"* [P10]

but also made references of their Facebook pages, groups, and accounts, in the study guides

"I tell them; usually right at the beginning of the year, first lecture, when we go through the learning guide, expectations, tests ... In fact, it's stated in the learning guide as well ... I just tell them cuz I doubt they really go through that" [P14]

"When we have our first lecture together, they get their study guides; and in the study guide, I put the Facebook icon, and then I give them the name of the page and ... advise them to like it" [P2]*.*

4.10.2 Assigning Extra Marks

Contrary to the suggestion made by Magro et al. (2013), that lecturers assign marks for students' participation in order encourage them to apply Facebook for academic purposes, only one participant indicated that he/she did so. He/she explained:

"I came up with something. I don't like it but it works. In the beginning of the year, I tell my students: 'if you join ... you get 5% free for term 1. I get about 500 students joining the page immediately. As soon as they hear that, they're on" [P6]*.*

The remaining participants, however, indicated that they did not assign extra marks, or provide any other form of incentive, to encourage students to utilise Facebook for academic purposes.

While some respondents communicated, in an assertive manner, that they were against assigning additional marks for students' participation

"No! ... 'extra marks' [is] too much help ... [students] don't get extra marks" [P7]

"Never; no! Facebook is not a channel of extra marks ... I don't do that" [P9]

others looked forward to doing so

"I haven't [assigned extra marks]. I probably should; it sounds like a good idea" [P3]

"I do not assign marks ... mainly because I don't have guidelines. I'm not really sure how the university would feel about that ... but I certainly would in future" [P10].

Furthermore, no participant in this study indicated that they compelled their students to utilise Facebook for academic purposes as Blackboard could be utilised instead. Magro et al. (2013), Muñoz and Towner's (2009) and Visagie and De Villiers (2010), as previously noted, also indicate that lecturers (1) should not designate students' participation on Facebook academic-related activities to be compulsory, and (2) that use Facebook for academic purposes should provide students with alternatives, such as utilising LMSs.

4.11 Enhancing the Academic Use of Facebook

This theme provides participants perspectives on improving the use of Facebook for academic purposes. It encompasses three subthemes: (1) older lecturers' attitude change towards Facebook, (2) maintaining momentum, and (3) involving institution's administrators.

4.11.1 Older Lecturers' Attitude Change Towards Facebook

When asked to provide their perspectives on how lecturers may best leverage Facebook to enhance its application as an academic tool, 50% of the participants hinted that, as one respondent said, *"older lecturers are a problem"* [P6]*.* He/she added: "*I've picked up that lecturers are Facebook illiterate,*

[participant begins to whisper]

> *especially, the older lecturers. Many of them see it as a toy. So that's the first problem: the illiteracy of it; the attitude towards it ... older lecturers' attitude towards Facebook should change".*

Gülbahar (2014) also reports that "older instructors don't use ... [SNS]" (p.65), and, as previously noted, "the biggest barrier is the faculty members themselves. They don't feel the need to promote these tools" (p.61).

[P8] stated that

> *"it's mainly about the change of mentality. If the lecturer sees Facebook as a toy, he/she won't use it for academic purposes. That's how older lecturers see it ... like a plaything".*

This was supported by [P2] who noted that

> *"the younger lecturers, the newer lecturers ... are more like: 'oh, this is what the students are doing; let me try it as well.' However,*

[participant begins to whisper]

> *if you get the older professors, they're not going to go into Facebook. You understand what I mean? ... Try to tell a lecturer that has been here for 25 years that he/she should now use Facebook for teaching; he/she's not going to do that. So you see, it's a 'how you see it' thing".*

[P6] indicated that *"it's important to look at the age groups".* He/she continued:

> *"older lecturers and technology; older lecturers and Facebook, I don't know. They might not mix. [Older lecturers] might not have patience for it ... their mindset ... should change first".*

4.11.2 Maintaining Momentum

Other perspectives offered in reference to how best lecturers may leverage Facebook to enhance its application as an academic tool included the fact that lecturers should post current material (reported by 29% of the participants)

> *"Put recent things on ... things that are happening right now. That always gets many likes and comments from students"* [P13]

> *"Put on articles about things that are coming out. Things that concern your discipline. New apps, new phones, [for example]"* [P7]

> *"Give students up-to-date things. If you post 'Jurassic Park' kind of things, you won't get feedback. Students don't want to read about museums! And this is coming from a Tourism lecturer. You must make it current; for instance: 'What's the effect of Xenophobia on Tourism? What's the effect*

of breaking down statues on Tourism?' These are current. These should
be asked on Facebook ... students would definitely interact" [P5].

Another point was made that lecturers should post on a regular basis (noted by 21% of the participants)

"[Lecturers] got to work it out; [they] got to be dedicated because it's not
easy. [They] need to keep up ... try to always put something up" [P6]

"Students have to be enticed, all the time, to participate. That means that
lecturers have to, often, come up with something [to post]" [P1]

"You see, it's a lot of work. [Lecturers] need to post regularly to keep it
going" [P12].

It was also suggested that lecturers should refrain from posting lengthy material (noted by two participants)

"Students won't read long articles, long posts. They won't share it either.
No one will watch a 15 minutes video ... no long-form content kind of
things" [P14]

"... there are so many things that can be shared: articles, videos and stuff.
[However,] the article can't be too long cuz [students] won't read it. Wait!
Not even the video can be too long ... If you're going to teach on
Facebook, make it hassle-free you know. Give the students some break ...
keep it short" [P4].

Furthermore, it was also submitted that *"it has to be fun"* [P6]. This was supported by [P2] who stated

"I noticed that if [lecturers] overload students with [academic-
related] information, it won't work. [They] need to put on other
things as well. Don't just put notes, notes, notes; it won't work.
Make it fun. [Add] internet memes, jokes, stuff like that"

and by [P6] who noted

"One of the things lecturers need to understand is this: it has to be fun! Don't make your students wish you could die just because your Facebook page is boring. I found out that students pay attention to [my] page cuz it's fun. I could be wrong but hey ... I post motivational quotes, jokes ... I get a lot of 'likes' for those".

At least one participant suggested that lecturers should appoint a *"Facebook assistant"* [P7]. He/she explained:

"Maybe the lecturer [should] appoint a student who is ready to step up if he/she is too busy to post. A Facebook assistant, if you will ... If the lecturer doesn't have enough time, this assistant should be ready to maintain the page. It shouldn't only depend on [the lecturer]" [P7]*.*

The latter coincides with Irwin et al. (2012), previously noted observation that, occasionally, lecturers had difficulty "keep[ing] up" with Facebook academic related activities (p.1226).

4.11.3 Involving Institution's Administrators

Two of the perspectives offered in reference to how best lecturers may leverage Facebook to enhance its application as an academic tool appear to be beyond lecturers' powers. First, a point was made that the use of Facebook, for academic purposes, has to be made compulsory. [P2], who stated that

"Facebook, as an academic tool, is elective ... I think it'll only really work ... if it's made compulsory for all of us"

and [P8] who added that

"I think it starts from the top. I mean, there's only so much lecturers can do ... It'll only work if it's made compulsory; not only for students but for lecturers as well"

were in favour of this concept.

Second, at least one participant pointed out that Internet services should be upgraded.

"Technology is one of the problems ... We don't have access to Wi-Fi in some areas on campus. So if I want to google something, or show something on Facebook to my students, I can't do that [during] a lecture. The bandwidth is so slow. If I want to load something for my students, it takes 15 to 20 minutes; and I'm talking about a 45 minutes lecture. That's a problem" [P10]*.*

This echoes Charity and Daluba's (2014), previously noted, finding that poor internet access prevents the implementation of Facebook as an academic tool. Tarantino and McDonough (2013) assert that "educational institutions must also consider the financial commitments involved with" integrating Facebook into academia (n.p.).

4.12   Conclusion

This chapter presented the demographic characteristics of the sample, overall findings, a synopsis of the questions and responses, the structure of the themes, and, thereafter, the key findings under each identified theme. Six broad themes (with thirteen subthemes in total) have been identified, addressing (1) participants' effective uses of Facebook, (2) the benefits of, or gratifications experienced in, using Facebook as an academic teaching tool, (3) the place of Facebook in the private and work domain, and (4) the disadvantages of the use of Facebook as an academic teaching tool. The themes also addressed (5) what research participants did to prompt their students to use Facebook for academic purposes, and (6) participants perspectives on improving the use of Facebook for academic purposes.

The findings are explored in the next chapter in an effort to outline what they mean, and how they echo, or differ from, existing research and the UGT. Thereafter, a framework on how Facebook could be integrated into academia is also proposed.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1   Introduction

According to Bak (2003), a discussion chapter states interpretations and demonstrates how the findings support (or not) related works that have been published, and the theory used. Bak (2003) adds that researchers can consider including "other [aspects] that may be pertinent to the [discussion chapter]", like, for example, suggestions for improvements related to the topic being studied (p.45).

This chapter interprets the findings, discusses its connection with the UGT, and proposes a framework on how Facebook could be integrated into academia.

5.2   Interpreting the findings

"Students are renowned for needing constant reminders and for not always reading instructions. They often claim that they were not aware of [a particular] instruction, [and] due dates" (Cannell, 2013, p.55). The majority of the participants in the current study indicated that they, most often, utilised Facebook for notifications related to academic work, or as Madge et al. (2009) puts it, for notifications "about academic-work related matters" (p.13), and not for teaching, or "actually doing work" (p.1). This signals that lecturers make use of Facebook for academic purposes with their students by, predominantly, utilising the platform for administrative reasons.

Participants also indicated that they incorporated different practices and shared a variety of material which, they believed, fostered students' understanding of the course, assisted students in preparing for evaluations, assisted students that experienced financial difficulties and, fundamentally, as one participant said, *"enrich[ed] the course"* they taught [P10]. Respondents pointed out that they shared articles and videos, and also posted notes, as well as course-related songs and competitions for their students. This points to Facebook being utilised to complement lecturers' teaching strategy, but, furthermore, supports the statement made by Roblyer et al. (2010) that when Facebook is utilised for academic purposes, the transferring of knowledge is second to the use of the platform for administrative reasons.

There is an indication that lecturers recognise and exploit Facebook's capability to allow for an extension of the traditional lecture hall. This was the highest rate recorded for

advantages of, or gratifications experienced in, using Facebook as an academic teaching tool, and was seen particularly useful in mitigating against the fact that lecturers were time-constrained. Moreover, the findings support Muñoz and Towner's (2009), previously indicated, "conjecture" that the advantages of the use of Facebook for academic purposes include an expansion of the traditional lecture format (p.9).

The other advantage recorded is in reference to the ability to transmit information to students rapidly. This is paralleled to Zaideh (2012) and Zanamwe et al. (2013) which, as previously noted, submit that SNSs allow for quick accesssing and distribution of information.

The findings suggest that lecturers want to keep a distinction between their private and work domain. However, although Cloete et al. (2009), as previously noted, infers that lecturers might have opted to not *friend* their students because they "want to maintain … the level of respect [and] … might be sensitive about maintaining their credibility as a professional individual" (pp.19, 20), the majority of the respondents in this study expressed concerns, particularly, over the possibility of having information about their family members revealed to their students.

Similar to the group of participants that indicated they were uncertain as to whether they were allowed to use Facebook, for academic purposes, with their students, the ambiguous remarks – made by the group of participants that indicated that they knew they were allowed to use Facebook during working hours – suggest that participants of this study (with the exception of one) had never specifically read, or somehow been formally made aware of, any policy document related to Facebook usage in their workplace. Therefore, they presumed that they were allowed to use Facebook, for academic purposes, with their students.

The findings substantiate Zuckerberg's (2012) statement that "Facebook was … created to … accomplish a social mission …" (n.p.). Participants indicated that isolating their use of Facebook for academic purposes, from their use of Facebook with their other Facebook friends (not their students), was particularly challenging. This was the main disadvantage found of using Facebook as an academic teaching tool. Participants got distracted, and consequently, the use of the platform for academic purposes was commonly disrupted by its use for social reasons. Visagie and De Villiers (2010), as

previosly noted, report that lecturers that indicated that they would not consider utilising Facebook for academic purposes, also hinted at the platform's distracting influence.

The second highest rate recorded for disadvantages is in reference to students' Facebook posts of a sexual nature, and, equally, students' Facebook posts of a political nature. Other rates recorded relate to a) students airing their displeasure, through Facebook, of the lecturer and/or the institution, b) students contacting their lecturer, through Facebook, to request for financial aid, c) the fact that anyone can post on a Facebook page, d) the fact that students' Facebook posts are often typed in their home language, and e) students using Facebook to *"stalk"* [P6] the lecturer. These negative aspects support Cannell's (2013) argument that "as lecturers do not have control over Facebook, [the platform, by default,] sets itself up [for misuse]" (p.35). As previously noted, aspects that prevent the implementation of Facebook as an academic tool are, particularly, related to the fact that "any form of abuse" might transpire (Roodt & De Villiers, 2013, p.3).

Cloete (2010) states that "the older the [person] the less [concerned he/she is] with the hype [surrounding] new media" (p.31). This has been supported by the findings of the current study, which show that the most recurrent perspective – on how best lecturers may leverage on Facebook to enhance its application as an academic tool – relates to senior lecturers' attitude change towards Facebook.

5.3   Connection Between the Findings and the UGT

The findings of this research are in accord with the UGT. As noted, the theory is grounded on the assumption that users select specific media technology and content according to perceived needs or wants (Matei, 2010; Papacharissi, 2008).

Early in the interview sessions, participants were questioned on whether there was a specific need to utilise Facebook for academic purposes. Respondents provided answers that correlate with the main findings of this study; that is, participants indicated that they wanted (or needed) to post notifications related to academic work, and supplementary course-related material, for their students. Accordingly, participants used Facebook to post: reminders and/or annoucements (main use), articles, videos, notes, as well as course-related songs, and competitions, for their students. This coincides with the following statements from Cloete (2010):

(1) "the main use of Facebook revolves around communication" (p.104); and

(2) "users are largely meeting a communication gratification from the utilization of Facebook" (p.105).

Other gratifications experienced are in reference to the extension of the traditional lecture hall, and the ability to transmit information to students rapidly. As noted, participants believed that their use of Facebook for academic-related activities, fostered students' understanding of the course, assisted students in preparing for evaluations, assisted students that experienced financial difficulties and, essentially, served as an enhancement to the course they taught. This also concurs with Cloete's (2010) report, which further states that Facebook users experience the gratification of utilising the platform as a "multipurpose and versatile … tool" (p.110).

As previously indicated, the aim of the UGT encompasses determining the negative effects of media usage as well (Universtiy of Twente, 2014). In the current study, these are in reference to a) the challenge of isolating the use of Facebook for academic, from the use of Facebook for social, purposes, b) students' Facebook posts of a sexual, and political, nature, c) students airing their displeasure, through Facebook, of the lecturer and/or the institution, d) students contacting their lecturer, through Facebook, to request for financial aid, e) the fact that anyone can post on a Facebook page, f) the fact that students' Facebook posts are often typed in their home language, and g) students using Facebook to *"stalk"* [P6] the lecturer.

The UGT has borne evidence of its appropriateness for research studies that seek to determine how people use media, and the consequences of that use.

5.4   Proposed Framework to Integrate Facebook into Academia

Based on the findings, a framework on how lecturers could integrate Facebook into academia is presented in Figure 5.1.
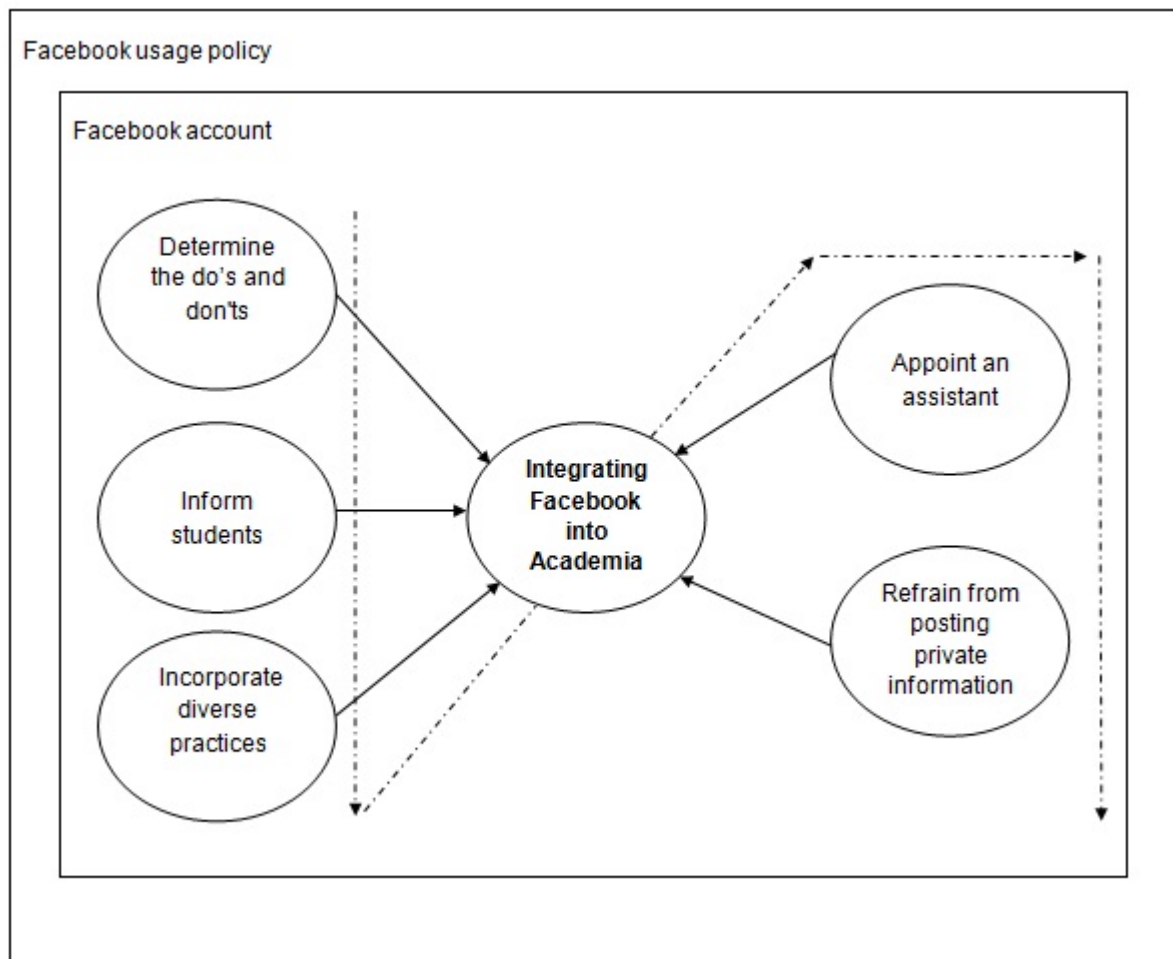
Figure 5.1: Proposed Framework to integrate Facebook into academia

Explaining the framework:

(1) Lecturers should familiarise themselves with their institution's Facebook policy. This set of statements, if existing, must be read and understood. Particularly, lecturers must find out if the policy states that they are allowed to use Facebook for academic-related activities with their students, and how. This is the context for the proposed framework, indicated as the background in the figure.

(2) Concurring with Muñoz and Towner's (2009), lecturers should consider creating a separate Facebook account, specifically for academic-related activities. As previously noted,

- Visagie and De Villiers (2010) and Dare and Sir Gâr (2011) recommend the application of Facebook groups for academic-related activities; and

- 50% of the participants in this study used Facebook pages instead.

However, lectures reported that the main disadvantage of using Facebook as an academic teaching tool is in reference to the challenge that is detaching their use of Facebook for academic purposes, from their use of Facebook with their other Facebook friends (not their students). This researcher believes that this challenge can be mitigated, if not at all removed, if a separate Facebook account, specifically for academic purposes, is created. Its profile can display the lecturer's email, and office, address, and phone numbers (Muñoz & Towner, 2009).

(3) Lecturers should determine the do's and don'ts of the Facebook profile. These aspects:

- Should be included in the module syllabus – and under the Facebook profile's 'About' tab – and later discussed during introductory classes, and

- Could highlight a) the fact that students can, and are encouraged to, post course-related material, and b) the non-posting of sexual, political, remarks, videos or otherwise, that could have derogatory connotations.

This researcher considers that additional criteria for the do's and don'ts could be added at lecturers' own discretion given that *what is appropriate* (and what is not) is – he believes – dependent on one's own frame of reference. For example, this research points to contacting one's lecturer, through Facebook, to request for financial aid, as one of the disadvantages of using Facebook as an academic teaching tool. However, ethical questions that could be raised in reference to the appropriateness (or lack thereof), of a lecturer providing financial assistance to his/her students, were not included in the current study.

(4) Consistent with Muñoz and Towner's (2009), lecturers a) must inform their students of the existence of the profile by listing its internet link in the module syllabus, and email signatures, or displaying it during introductory classes (p.8), but b) are not advised to send friendship requests to their students, as this might be perceived "as an invasion of privacy as well as intimidating" (p.8).

(5) Lecturers should incorporate diverse practices to encourage students to engage with the Facebook profile. These include:

a) Posting course-related material such as, but not limited to, articles and videos.

b) Posting current material, that is, the latest topics that relate to the fields of study.

c) Posting on a regular basis.

d) Refraining from posting lengthy material such as, but not limited to, videos that are 15 minutes in length.

e) Posting motivational quotes, Internet memes, and jokes, because *"it has to be fun"* [P6] as well.

f) Assigning marks for students' participation, as suggested by Magro et al. (2013).

It is important to highlight, however, that the implementation of Facebook in higher education institutions might call for the respective administrators to address Internet services-related issues (Tarantino & McDonough, 2013).

(6) Lecturers should consider appointing a "Facebook assistant"; this should be a student, perhaps the tutor, that *"is ready to step up if [the lecturer] is too busy to post"* [P7].

(7) Lectures should refrain from posting private information in this profile but keep in mind that "there is no such thing as 100% privacy on the Internet ... [hence, users are to] learn to live with this reality and act accordingly" (Gizmo's Freeware, 2013, n.p.).

Such a framework could, if adhered to, 1) assist lecturers in using, and experiencing gratifications related to the use of, Facebook for academic purposes, and 2) strengthen arguments from current research that higher education institutions could implement the use of Facebook to their range of practices that may enhance teaching.

5.5   Conclusion

This chapter interpreted the findings, highlighting that (1) when Facebook is used for academic purposes, the transferring of knowledge is second to the use of the platform for administrative reasons, (2) the highest rate recorded for advantages of, or gratifications experienced in, using Facebook as an academic teaching tool is in

reference to the extension of the traditional lecture hall, and (3) the main disadvantage of using Facebook as an academic teaching tool is in reference to the challenge that lecturers encountered in detaching their use of Facebook for academic purposes, from their use of Facebook with their other Facebook friends (not their students).

The chapter also discussed the connection between the findings and the UGT, indicating (1) that the theory was supported by the findings, (2) lecturers' need to post notifications related to academic work, and supplementary course-related material, for their students, and (3) participants' uses of, the gratifications experienced in using, and the negative effects of the use of, Facebook as an academic teaching tool.

Lastly, a framework was proposed in efforts to assist lecturers in applying Facebook for academic purposes.

The next chapter integrates the various aspects covered in the dissertation, providing an overview, answers to the research question and sub-questions, highlighting the limitations and contributions of the study, and suggesting areas for further research.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

According to Assan (2012), a conclusion chapter "reaches a final judgment ... it is a belief based on [the researcher's] reasoning and on the evidence [that he or she] accumulated" (p.1).

This chapter summarises the study, provides responses the research question and sub-questions, states the limitations of the research, suggests its contribution and proposes possible directions for future work.

6.2 Research Summary

This study employed a survey research design. It endeavoured to (1) fill the gap in the SNSs literature by collecting data from lecturers, (2) ascertain how lecturers use Facebook as an academic teaching tool and determine the advantages and disadvantages thereof, and (3) add to the debate on whether or not higher education settings could add the use of Facebook to their range of practices that may enhance teaching.

 Specifically, the study addressed the following research question:

- How are lecturers using Facebook as an academic teaching tool?

Two sub-questions were identified:

1) What are the advantages of using Facebook as an academic teaching tool?

2) What are the disadvantages of using Facebook as an academic teaching tool?

The study (1) was conducted at a higher education institution in Gauteng, South Africa, (2) used the theoretical foundation of the UGT, and (3) employed purposeful sampling, and semi-structured interviews. The sample comprised fourteen respondents. Only lecturers who used Facebook for academic purposes were able to participate. A consent form was signed before interviews were conducted.

The research employed thematic analysis done manually. Data was interpreted, and key findings were reported under each identified theme, using appropriate verbatim

quotes as a support base. Where possible, the new evidence gathered was linked to appropriate existing research (Burnard, 2004; Burnard et al., 2008).

The section below provides answers to the research question, and the sub-questions identified. Moreover, it is noteworthy that:

(1) One of the unforeseen findings of this research relates to lecturers' uncertainty with regards to policy towards Facebook usage in their workplace. It has emerged that lecturers presume that they are allowed to use Facebook, for academic purposes, with their students. William Fry (2013) states: "the overriding message for employers is to implement a social media policy tailored to the needs of their organisation ... [and] ... ensure that employees are aware of the policy and understand how it affects them" (n.p.).

(2) The majority of the respondents in this study expressed concerns, particularly, over the possibility of having information about their family members revealed to their students. Facebook, like most SNSs, has privacy and security settings that allow users to limit the accessibility of information to certain groups of users but, as Bosque (2013) states, "it may be more prudent to follow the advice that if it is not something you would want public, it is probably not something you should be posting" (p.440).

6.3 Responses by Question

6.3.1 How are lecturers using Facebook as an academic teaching tool?

The majority of the participants indicated that they are not, most often, using Facebook as an academic teaching tool. The platform is used for notifications related to academic work, but not for teaching. This echoes the findings reported in Hew (2011) and Madge et al. (2009), that the application of Facebook for academic purposes is "not to do with the pedagogic aspects of teaching ... but more to do [with] departmental or module related administrative arrangements" (Madge et al., 2009, p.15).

Participants of this study also indicated that they incorporated different practices, and shared a variety of course-related material which, essentially, served as an enhancement to the course they taught. To complement their teaching, participants used Facebook to post articles, videos, notes, as well as course-related songs and competitions for their students.

It has also emerged that participants did not require their students to use Facebook for academic purposes, and with the exception of one, all participants did not assign marks for students' participation on Facebook academic-related activities.

6.3.2 What are the advantages of using Facebook as an academic teaching tool?

The highest rate recorded for advantages of, or gratifications experienced in, using Facebook as academic teaching tool relates to the extension of the traditional lecture hall. This was seen particularly useful in mitigating against the fact that lecturers were time-constrained.

The other advantage recorded is in reference to the ability to transmit information to students rapidly.

6.3.3 What are the disadvantages of using Facebook as an academic teaching tool?

Lectures reported that the main disadvantage of using Facebook as an academic teaching tool is in reference to the challenge that is detaching their use of Facebook for academic purposes, from their use of Facebook with their other Facebook friends (not their students).

Other disadvantages recorded are in reference to a) students' Facebook posts of a sexual, and political, nature, b) students airing their displeasure, through Facebook, of the lecturer and/or the institution, c) students contacting their lecturer, through Facebook, to request for financial aid, d) the fact that anyone can post on a Facebook page, e) the fact that students' Facebook posts are often typed in their home language, and f) students using Facebook to *"stalk"* the lecturer.

6.4 Research Limitations

This researcher acknowledges that the study is limited in terms of the following:

(1) The fact that it was conducted at one study site, and with the majority of participants from one faculty. Investigating the use of Facebook for academic purposes from the perspective of lecturers at multiple sites, evenly distributed across faculties, could possibly provide data that is more diversified, since different participants could be familiar with dissimilar realities and experiences.

(2) Though the sample might be seen as small, the focus was on data analysis and not on statistical accuracy. Moreover, in qualitative research, the intention is not to generalise the information, but to elucidate the particular and the specific (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006). This researcher does believe, however, that findings from this research can be applied, or relevant, to other similar contexts or groups even though the findings may not be generalisable or representative in a statistical sense (Blanche et al., 2006).

(3) The fact that lecturers who took part in the survey selected themselves as participants by responding to the invitation email (a problem that is not uncommon in survey research); and

(4) The fact that it presents a snapshot of current or previous users' perceptions. Because Facebook changes rapidly, it is likely that these perceptions will also change over time (Bosque, 2013; Roblyer et al., 2010), as will the affordances offered by Facebook.

6.5 Contributions and Future Research

This study is a response to Alhazmi and Rahman's (2013) call for future research to investigate, not only students', but lecturers', perspectives on the academic application Facebook using different measures. As noted, not only the majority of studies that examined the use of Facebook for academic purposes have mainly (if not totally) focused their data collection on students only, but have also employed quantitative methods.

As previously indicated, it is not this researcher's intention to refute existing student-based findings on the topic, but rather to offer a contribution by understanding and voicing lecturers' views. Pasek et al. (2009) states: "The question is not whether individuals are using a particular medium, but how" (n.p.). Unlike many previous research studies, this researcher did not aim to find out how many, and whether, lecturers use, or would consider using, Facebook for academic purposes. This study:

(1) Has uncovered how lecturers use Facebook as an academic teaching tool, and provided clarity with regards to the advantages and disadvantages thereof; it can further our understanding of the influence that this medium has on higher education settings. As noted, DiVall and Kirwin (2012) call for future research to assess the advantages and disadvantages of the use Facebook for academic purposes.

(2) Can be valuable to both lecturers and students as technology-driven types of involvements can allow faculty members to foster new strategies of mentorship and relationship-building with students, which in turn can be favourable to student satisfaction – a key element to consider (Astin, 1993; Boyer, 1990; Pascarella & Ternzini, 2005; Powless, 2001) since higher education institutions are interested in attracting and retaining students (Junco, 2012).

(3) Is a stepping-stone towards the future use of Facebook in higher education settings; it can be valuable to institutions when creating policies around the use of SNSs, assist administrators in making more informed decisions about the use of Facebook in higher education institutions, and support (or not) Facebook initiatives through better understanding of how lecturers perceive the medium and its weight as an academic teaching tool.

(4) Attempted to fill the gap in the literature by introducing to the body of knowledge a report based on uncommon sampling units for research studies in SNSs – lecturers. It is, furthermore, early research, conducted within the UGT, on lecturers' perspectives on the use of Facebook for academic purposes. As noted, no such study was found by this researcher.

(5) Assisted in proposing a framework on how Facebook could be integrated into academia. Such a framework could, if adhered to, assist lecturers in applying Facebook for academic purposes, and strengthen arguments from current research that higher education institutions could implement the use of Facebook to their range of practices that may enhance teaching. As noted, Qureshi et al. (2014) call for future research to develop a framework for the use of Facebook in academia.

Possible directions for future research include:

(1) Examining whether the use of Facebook for academic purposes leads to changes (positive or negative) in students' participation and results. Future research could, for example, compare students' marks with their online participation to determine whether there is a correlation.

(2) Investigating the use of Facebook for academic purposes from the perspective of lecturers at multiple sites, to determine whether findings can be confirmed or not.

(3) Examining whether lecturers' use of Facebook for academic purposes shows differences based on a) the nature of the module that they teach, or b) whether students are undergraduate or postgraduate. This can shed light to the extent to which Facebook use could be implemented in higher education institutions.

(4) Determining whether the use of Facebook, in particular, for academic purposes, is somehow linked to gender. Madden and Zickhur (2011) state that females are more likely to utilise SNSs; the majority of participants in the current study were women. If gender has an influence on users' (lecturers and/or students) engagement with Facebook academic related-activities, it might have an influence on students' overall academic experience – if the use of this medium is implemented in higher education institutions (Tarantino & McDonough, 2013).

6.6   Conclusion

This chapter summarised the study, provided responses to the research question and sub-questions, stated the limitations of the research, suggested its contribution, and proposed possible directions for future work. The work of other authors cited in this document is acknowledged next.

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8: APPENDICES

8.1   Appendix A: Email to lecturers

Subject: MSC in Computing: Study on the Academic Use of Facebook

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Yannick Sumbo and I'm studying for my master's degree at the University of South Africa (UNISA).

The dissertation is entitled "Examining Lecturers' Perspectives on the Use of Facebook for Academic Purposes".

I am searching for lecturers (of any discipline) who utilise Facebook for academic purposes, and might be willing to be interviewed as part of my study; participation is entirely voluntary and anonymous.

I have attached an Explanatory Statement and a Consent Form.

I look forward to hearing from you

Kind regards,

Yannick

8.2 Appendix B: Explanatory Statement

UNISA | university of south africa

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

<u>Title</u>**: Examining Lecturers' Perspectives on the Use of Facebook for Academic Purposes**

Hello,

My name is **Yannick Sumbo** and I'm studying for my master's degree at the University of South Africa (UNISA).

I chose you as a participant because I am confident that you will be as open and honest as possible, and provide relevant, comprehensive and rich information that will contribute to this research.

The purpose of this study is to (1) capture and focus on lecturers' perspectives, (2) ascertain how lecturers use Facebook as an academic teaching tool and determine the advantages and disadvantages thereof, and (3) attempt to add to the debate on whether or not higher education institutions could add the use of Facebook to their range of practices that may enhance teaching.

The knowledge obtained could be valuable for a number of reasons. For example, it could (1) be relevant to institutions when creating social media policies, (2) assist administrators in making more informed decisions about the use of Facebook in higher education institutions, and (3) support (or not) Facebook initiatives through better understanding of how you perceive the medium and its weight as a teaching strategy.

What does the research involve?

1) I have obtained your email address from the official university website. You have now received an Explanatory statement (this document) and a Consent Form.

2) *If you are willing to participate*, kindly reply so that a suitable interview date and time can be organised. I can physically visit your place of work (irrespective of the campus)

in order to conduct the interview. I will bring a printed version of the consent form (as this document **must** be signed before interviews take place).

3) The interview session will be recorded using an audio recording device. Your name, and that of the university, however, **will at all times remain anonymous** in any reports or publications of this research.

4) Only lecturers that have experience with the use of Facebook for academic purposes, and are willing to engage in the study will be able to participate. Failure to meet these terms will determine exclusion.

Interview sessions are not expected to surpass 30 minutes.

I will transcribe the session and keep the audio recording file (as well as the transcript and the signed consent form) for 5 years, after which it will be destroyed.

Your participation is voluntary and you are not being required to take part in this study. You can withdraw at any time.

Please be assured that no one will be able to link you, the university, to any of the answers you might give. Your name, email address, and the name of the institution will remain confidential.

Financial compensation: None.

If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research findings, please let me know at the time of the interview, or contact Yannick Sumbo on 0795442204 or yannicksumbo@hotmail.com from July 2017.

If you have any other question in relation to any other aspect of this study, please contact my supervisor, Colin Pilkington, on pilkicl@unisa.ac.za.

Sincerely

Yannick Sumbo

8.3 Appendix C: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Title: Examining Lecturers' Perspectives on the Use of Facebook for Academic Purposes

Note: The researcher will bring a printed version of this document to the interview, as you are requested to sign it before the interview take place. The signed copy is to remain with the researcher for his records.

I have read the Explanatory statement and **have understood that:**

(1) I will be interviewed by the researcher, and the session will be recorded,

(2) My participation is voluntary, and I can withdraw at any time,

(3) The decision to participate, or to withdraw, will not, in any way, affect me negatively,

(4) Data from the interview, as well as this document, will ONLY be accessible by the researcher, and will be destroyed after 5 years,

And

(5) I DO NOT give permission to be identified by name or any other identifying characteristics at any point during, or after, the conclusion of the study. I, and my university, will remain anonymous at all times in any reports or published findings.

Participant's name _____

Signature   _____   Date____/____/____

8.4   Appendix D: Topic Guide

1. Which faculty, and department, are you working in?

2. How did you realise that Facebook could be used for academic purposes, specifically as an academic teaching tool?
Prompts:

● *Was there a specific need to utilise it?*

● *When did you start using Facebook as an academic teaching tool?*

3. How are you using Facebook as an academic teaching tool?
Prompts:

● *Find out about the feature used: Facebook groups, pages, or any other feature.*

● *What do you usually share with your students (images, videos, Internet links)?*

● *Do you start course-related debates with your students? How frequently? What is your role in these debates (how do you engage in the discussions, if at all)?*

● *Find out about the participant's accessing device (desktop computer, mobile phone, tablets).*

● *Do you have a separate Facebook account that is only used for academic purposes with your students?*

4. How do your students find out that you are a lecturer that uses Facebook for academic purposes?
Prompts:

● *Do you assign extra marks, or provide any other form of incentive, to encourage your students to utilise Facebook for academic purposes?*

● *What about students that do not have a Facebook account? Do you instruct/advise them to have one? Are you concerned that they might be missing out?*

5. How do you feel about becoming Facebook friends with your students?
Prompts:

● *Do you have any concerns related to having personal information accessible to your students? Why?*

● *What do you think Facebook should change, or implement, to increase privacy?*

6. What are the advantages of, or the gratifications experienced in, using Facebook as an academic teaching tool?
Prompts:

● *As compared to face-to-face delivery, and using Blackboard (the LMS utilised at B).*

7. How do you feel about using Facebook during working hours?
Prompts:

● *Do you use Facebook during working hours?*

● *Are you allowed to use Facebook during working hours?*

● *Do you know if you are actually allowed to use Facebook, for academic purposes, with your students?*

Skip to 9 if the participant indicated he/she has a separate Facebook account that is only used for academic purposes with students.

8. When using Facebook for academic purposes:

a) Do you end up checking the 'News Feed' instead - to check what your other Facebook friends (not your students) are up to?

IF YES, skip b)

b) What happens when you get notifications from your other Facebook friends (they have tagged you on pictures, statuses, or they simply want to chat with you)?

9. What's your reaction to inappropriate posts, tags, comments, messages, from your students?
Prompts:

●*What have you seen, that your students have shared (or have sent to you in private), that you found out of line? What have you done about it?*

10. Can you think of other disadvantages, or negative impacts, of using Facebook as an academic teaching tool?
Prompts:

● *As compared to face-to-face delivery, and using Blackboard (the LMS utilised at B).*

11. What are your thoughts on how lecturers may best leverage Facebook to enhance its application as an academic tool?

12. Further comments.

8.5 Appendix E: Ethical approval from Unisa

UNISA college of science, engineering and technology

Dear Mr Yannick António Sumbo (57534217)

Date: 2015-04-09

Application number:

041/YAS/ 2015

REQUEST FOR ETHICAL CLEARANCE: (Examining Lecturers' Perspectives on the Use of Facebook for Academic Purposes)

The College of Science, Engineering and Technology's (CSET) Research and Ethics Committee has considered the relevant parts of the studies relating to the abovementioned research project and research methodology and is pleased to inform you that ethical clearance is granted for your research study as set out in your proposal and application for ethical clearance.

Therefore, involved parties may also consider ethics approval as granted. However, the permission granted must not be misconstrued as constituting an instruction from the CSET Executive or the CSET CRIC that sampled interviewees (if applicable) are compelled to take part in the research project. All interviewees retain their individual right to decide whether to participate or not.

We trust that the research will be undertaken in a manner that is respectful of the rights and integrity of those who volunteer to participate, as stipulated in the UNISA Research Ethics policy. The policy can be found at the following URL:
http://cm.unisa.ac.za/contents/departments/res_policies/docs/ResearchEthicsPolicy_apprvCounc_21Sept07.pdf

Please note that the ethical clearance is granted for the duration of this project and if you subsequently do a follow-up study that requires the use of a different research instrument, you will have to submit an addendum to this application, explaining the purpose of the follow-up study and attach the new instrument along with a comprehensive information document and consent form.

Yours sincerely

Prof Ernest Mnkandla
Chair: College of Science, Engineering and Technology Ethics Sub-Committee

(PROF IW ANDERTON)   14 APRIL 2015

Prof IOG Moche
Executive Dean: College of Science, Engineering and Technology

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and Technology
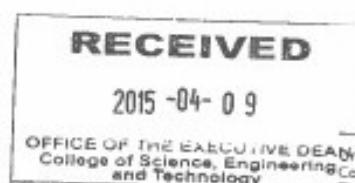
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Florida Park, Roodepoort
Private Bag X6, Florida, 1710
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UNISA college of science, engineering and technology

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8.6 Appendix F: Ethical approval from B

Date: Tue, 21 Apr 2015
Good day

Thank you for forwarding all the documents. Permission is granted that you may proceed with your research under the following conditions:

- The name, or any specific reference to ███████████████ may not be used in your dissertation/thesis.
- Staff must not be "harassed".
- We are in no position to help you in any way with your research.

Good luck with your research.

Regards

[Institution's motto and logo]

Prof ████████████
Tel: ████████
Email: ████████