



**AN EXAMINATION OF THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN FORMAL
ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION AT A SELECTED UNIVERSITY IN THE
WESTERN CAPE**

by

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ABSTRACT

Within modern society, social media has become an important channel through which communication can be facilitated. Social networks can be maintained even in geographically dispersed contexts. The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the ability to maintain these networks. Organisations have a social media footprint to communicate with broader society. Due to its prevalence in society, social media has infiltrated organisations and is used in different applications. It is expected that the use of social media is accounted for in the domain of organisational communication. However, this is not the case as organisations' use of social media has outpaced academic research. This study explores the use of social media platforms for formal organisational communication through the lived experiences of university academics and administrative staff. The study adopted the ontological research paradigm, where primary data was collected utilising a qualitative exploratory design derived from concepts found in the literature. A sample of eleven respondents was selected through the use of the convenience sampling technique. The research data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews with respondents. An interview guide developed by the researcher served as the research instrument for data collection.

The findings revealed findings showed that both administrative and academic staff view communication as a key function of their job as they have a broad network of internal and external stakeholders who they communicate with in the organisation. In addition, it was found that they utilised a combination of bottom-up, top-down, and lateral approaches to the flow of their communications within their respective job roles. The study also found that respondents' use of social media for work purposes increased because of remote working. The usage patterns revealed increased levels of effectiveness. Respondents experienced improved levels of access to key individuals and information when required. Highlighted factors influencing use of social media platforms for organisational communication included longer working hours, increased workload, and connectivity issues.

The conclusion was that if staff are correctly capacitated to use social media together with effective boundary setting, and increased regulation from a policy perspective, there is merit for social media platforms to be recognised as communication channels and used within formal organisational communication.

Keywords: Social Media Platforms; Organisational Communication; Internal Communication; Vertical Communication; Horizontal Communication; Administrative Staff; Academics; Higher Education Institution



DECLARATION

I, Justin Jared Hess declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Unless otherwise stated by reference or acknowledgement, the work presented is entirely my own.

This work is based on the research supported wholly by the National Research Foundation of South Africa (Grant Number: 123029).

Signature: _____


Date: _____ 13/08/2023



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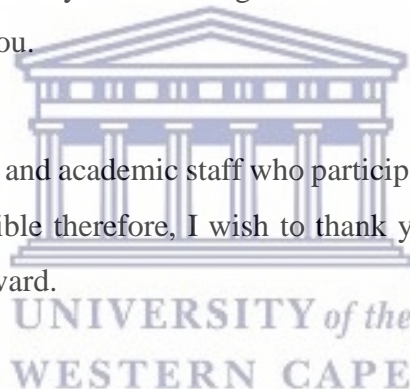
First and foremost, I would like to give thanks to my Heavenly Father for His favour, guidance, grace, and gift of good health to see me through to the end of my master's degree.

To my parents, Marius and Shereen and my sister Miché, thank you for being such a core source of strength and support during this journey. The frequent check-ins and words of encouragement was appreciated more than you will ever know.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Communication is a unique activity that all human beings participate in as it forms a core part of what makes us social. As social beings, we use language as our primary means of communication, but we also incorporate the use of other forms such as gestures, symbols, images, written text, electronic devices, body language and silences (John, 2018). Communication can be defined as a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behaviour (John, 2018). Translating the concept of communication into the organisational context, it can be defined as the medium through which the functions of leading, planning, organising, and controlling happen in organisations (John, 2018).

Organisations cannot function without sound systems of communication to ensure effective and efficient flow of information between stakeholders and achievement of their imperatives. Therefore, organisations need to evaluate which forms of communication are most effective to facilitate sharing of information. According to Wariara (2017), communication is a core component of the sustainability of any organisation. This means that the best method of communication must be selected to achieve the intended outcomes.

Against the foregoing background that communication has been framed as a human behavioural process which also exists in the organisational setting, the introduction of social media has added another dimension in how we perceive and engage. According to Roshan et al., (2016), social media can be defined as a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. It has moved this human behavioural process into a virtual space which influences our perception and understanding of the communication process. The adoption of social media by individuals has grown significantly and as a result, organisations have started to use the technology for strategic purposes (Högberg, 2018).

The catalyst for the increase in usage of social media can be attributed to the introduction of the smartphone and its subsequent prevalence in the 21st century. It has become an acceptable integral part of daily life which has transformed the way we interact with one another. This form of communication has meant that people can be connected anywhere, anytime. South Africa is reported to have around 23.77 million social network users, with this figure expected to rise to 26.81 million by 2025 (Tankovska, 2021). Wireless communication has taken various forms such as instant messaging and social networking platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. These platforms are inexpensive to use and are freely downloadable on smartphone devices. In addition, they provide various functionalities such as sharing images, videos, audio clips and documents. Further adding to the prevalence of digital communication is the increased use of online video conferencing platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Therefore, organisations need to investigate how these can be used as tools for effective communication in the workplace.

Robbins, Judge, Odendaal and Roodt, (2016) state that 71% of modern organisations use electronic communication as their primary medium of communication. This makes it an indispensable resource and knowing how to use it for the benefit of the organisation is critical. The challenge for organisations is how to communicate with their stakeholders in meaningful and impactful ways. The prevalence of social media in organisations presents another perspective toward achieving organisational effectiveness. The challenge is also further magnified due to modern organisations' reliance on digital communication. Organisations have to keep abreast of changes in technology to function optimally. This study focuses on the Higher Education sector which has undergone a wide range of changes and has had to adapt its operations to keep abreast of change.

According to Naidoo-Chetty & du Plessis (2021), the Higher Education sector has endured an array of changes such as globalisation, massification, lack of job security, decolonisation and several technological advancements. These advancements have had an impact on the day-to-day operations of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). One such area of advancement has been in the context of organisational communication and how employees communicate with each other. Higher Education employees have formed part of the large-scale remote work experiment experienced on a global scale because of the novel SARS-Cov-2, COVID-19 pandemic that impacted every sector of economic activity. PwC (2020) states that the sector is

faced with new technological, financial, and collaborative challenges in the face of the pandemic. An example of collaborative and technological challenge has been the process of migrating communication channels through digital means to adapt them for remote working purposes.

For this study, a critical part of internal organisational communication will be examined. Santiago (2020) positions internal communication as a multifaceted construction because it accounts for the provision and dissemination of information, and creates a sense of community in organisations. It is a crucial activity for employee communication. To this end, internal communication will be viewed as the channel through which communication flows to facilitate work in the organisation. The traditional methods of internal communication are memos, notice boards, email, and intranet (Robbins et al., 2016). Although these methods are still useful, there are gaps in their scope and focus as well as practical application. This is where social media could fill the gap as a form of internal organisational communication as it can function in either top-down, bottom-up and lateral applications between employees (Arifin & Omar, 2018).

Organisational communication processes have evolved in the 21st century, with a variety of technological tools such as instant messaging, audio and video conferencing, wireless networks and information systems. These technological tools have been used rapidly as the global pandemic forced everyone to adapt to social distance lifestyle. In the academic context, universities were faced with the challenge of making laptops available to all staff and devise plans and processes to run internal operations and administration remotely (Hedding et al., 2020). The pandemic has rapidly operationalised the long-debated notion of remote work which has now become increasingly mainstream.

However, how does the use of social media influence internal communication processes? To this end, this study will seek to explore the use of social media platforms for organisational communication at a selected tertiary institution in the Western Cape, to gauge whether various social media platforms including online video conferencing platforms can facilitate the communication process to ensure organisational effectiveness.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

When the notion of organisational communication comes to mind, the methods considered are emails, telephone calls, memos, and face-to-face conversations. The advent of social

networking and the subsequent Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has resulted in organisations adopting new ways of communicating with their internal and external stakeholders. Because organisations are microcosms of the people in society (Ankrah, Proverbs, Antwi & Debrah, 2009), it is expected that these applications will filter there as well.

Literature shows the wide use of social media platforms for various purposes across different economic sectors (Dlamini & Johnston, 2018; Roshan, Warren & Carr, 2016; Wushe & Shenje, 2019). In the higher education sector, literature focuses on the use of social media platforms to facilitate teaching and learning activities (Lubua, Semlambo & Pretorius, 2017; Mkhize & Nxumalo, 2017; Ruxwana & Msibi, 2018; Mpungose, 2019; Jere, 2020) but does not sufficiently account for its use by university academic and administrative staff. This has become a necessary gap to fill when considering the context of work in the COVID-19 pandemic.

The notion of remote work and virtual teams has been a recurrent theme in literature for several years (Olsen, 1983; Koehne, Shih & Olson, 2012; Johnson & Suskewicz, 2020) and its implications on employees' perception and performance in the work place and how managers lead their teams in the virtual space. COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this process by negating a planned implementation process for organisations to ensure business continuity during the pandemic. Subsequently, employees in corporate and public sectors formed part of a global remote work experiment which brought major changes not only to their work-life integration but how they communicated with one another.

The higher education sector was one of the hardest impacted with rapid transformation required in how operations were conducted. In response to the pandemic, emergency work-from-home and teaching and learning plans were developed and implemented to ensure continuity (Jappie, 2020). Although behavioural changes were required from both staff and students, literature indicates the change from contact to virtual working in the academic context predominantly captured from the student's and academic's perspective with emphasis placed on teaching and learning activities (Jappie, 2020). Considering this, not much focus has been placed on how university strategic and administrative operations were facilitated in the virtual context and the impact this had on its support staff. A substantiating factor for this could be the notion that support staff are not perceived to be core intellectual capital in the academic context even though their roles are critical to effective operations of the organisation (Ryttberg &

Geschwind, 2017). The study, therefore, seeks to explore the platforms used to facilitate organisational communication by way of narrative accounts to capture employees' experiences in engaging with these platforms and gain insight into their long-term suitability in organisations.

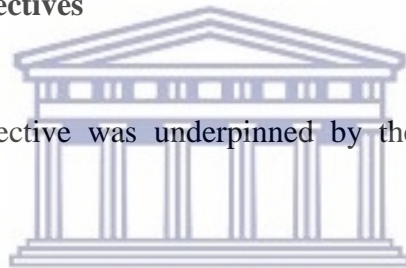
1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

1.3.1 Research Aim

The aim of the study was to explore how social media platforms were used in a selected university to facilitate organisational communication and exploring their efficacy through the views of administrative and academic staff from identified faculties.

1.3.2 Specific Research Objectives

The overarching research objective was underpinned by the following specific research objectives:



- To determine the motivation that administrative staff and academics have for using social media in their organisation and the gratification gained from facilitating the organisational communication process.
- To determine whether social media usage proves more effective and efficient than traditional organisational communication methods.
- To determine the positive outcomes from the experiences of administrative staff and academics using social media platforms for organisational communication.
- To determine the negative outcomes from the experiences of administrative staff and academics using social media platforms for organisational communication.
- To determine the benefits and drawbacks of using social media platforms for organisational communication and as a tool for conducting work.
- To make recommendations on the suitability of using social media platforms for organisational communication.

1.3.3 Specific Research Questions

In answering the main research question, the following specific research questions were outlined to direct the study:

- How do administrative staff and academic staff use social media platforms as a communication platform within their organisation?
- Does social media platform usage prove more effective and efficient than traditional methods of communication?
- What are the positive experiences of administrative staff and academics by using social media platforms to facilitate organisational communication?
- What are the negative experiences of administrative staff and academics for using social media platforms to facilitate organisational communication?
- What gratification does administrative staff and academics get from using social media platforms as organisational communication platforms?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of conducting work via these social media platforms?
- What are the recommendations regarding the suitability of the use of social media platforms as a channel for facilitating organisational communication?

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1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The development of the Internet in the form of Web 2.0 has digitised the communication process. Contemporary technologies such as computers, smartphones, the internet, and other Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have brought major changes to the way we live, work, and socialise in modern society (Roshan-Rukshana, Shibly & Abdul-Haleem, 2019). Therefore, it is important to study how we interact with these technological systems that have impacted our lives in multiple ways.

According to the PwC Africa Vice-Chancellor Pulse Survey (2020) conducted amid the pandemic, people engage with social media daily as a means of communication. The survey

indicated that 94% of global higher education leaders identified digital transformation as the number one action to consider in the short-to-medium term to meet the priorities of their respective institutions. Considering these projections, this study seeks to add value to the understanding of digital transformation in academia from the perspective of exploring the suitability of adopting a system of internal communication through various social media platforms. This in turn, explores the suitability of an academic institution adopting its own form of Enterprise Social Media (ESM) which refers to the use of social media technology for internal strategic purposes (Högberg,2018).

According to the Deloitte Human Capital Trends Report for South Africa (2018), the “hyper-connected workplace” was ranked the number one important trend in South Africa. The report states that new communication tools are rapidly entering the workplace. 70% of global respondents projected that workers would be spending more time on collaboration platforms while 67% foresee growth in work-based social media and 62% forecast an increase in the use of instant messaging. The findings of the report indicated that only a small percentage of South African respondents consider using social messaging and online collaboration tools in the next three to five years and that South African respondents overall prefer face-to-face and telephonic communication (Maharaj & Page, 2018).

However, these findings are likely to have changed in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic as the use of social media platforms for work purposes increased due to rapid migration to remote working arrangements. This warrants further research hence, the significance of this study. It holds potential implications for organisational factors in the academic setting such as the adaptation of employee behaviour and skillset, team effectiveness and organisational and employee development, and technological proficiency.

It is therefore envisaged that the study will contribute to business practice by providing a qualitative perspective of employee engagement with social media platforms to guide digital transformation in the workplace communication. In addition, the study envisages to provide insight into the notion of remote working and/or work-from-anywhere (WFA) from an employee experience perspective. This has a bearing on organisational HR and IT policy implications in terms of employees’ preferred methods of working. Finally, the study will seek to provide insight into organisational behaviour in the academic context and how social media

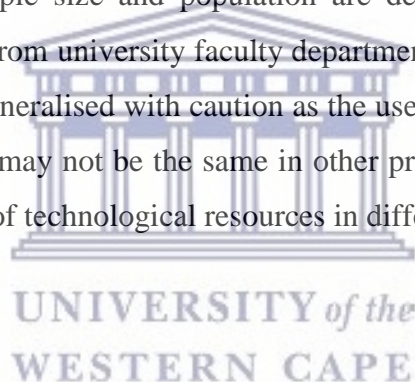
technologies could help the organisation to guide its work teams amidst the uncharted territory of a pandemic-influenced workplace.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

1.5.1 Delimitation

The focus of the study was placed on administrative and academic staff employed across three of the seven faculties at a selected university in the Western Cape, South Africa. The study followed the qualitative research method with an exploratory research design approach.

The delimitation of the research is that it is solely focused on the Western Cape area, and the sample signifies convenience sampling from a university's selected faculty departments in the Cape Town area. The delimitation of the study to one institution allows it to represent a case study for this topic. The sample size and population are derived from male and female academics and administrators from university faculty departments in Western Cape area. The results of the study are to be generalised with caution as the use of social media platforms for organisational communication may not be the same in other provinces. This could be due to varying availability and usage of technological resources in different provinces.



1.5.2 Delineation

The indicated variables under study for this research include social media platform usage and organisational communication. The variables will explore the academics and administrators' user experience of social media platforms in organisational communication. The guiding theoretical frame used in this research is the Uses and Gratifications Theory devised by Katz, Blumer and Gurevitch (1974).

1.6 DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

To situate this study, the following key definitions have been operationalised:

1.6.1. Social Media – “A group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allows the creation and exchange of user generated content” (Ahmed, Ahmad, Ahmad & Zakaria, 2018, p.532).

1.6.2. Social Media Platforms – “When we refer to social media, applications such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram often come to mind” (Kapoor, Tamilmani, Rana, Patil, Dwivedi & Nerur, 2018).

1.6.3. Organisational Communication – Organisational communication includes other forms of communication in organisations that flow among and between organisational units and groups (Cacciattolo, 2015). Each involves written and verbal communication with some forms of communication following vertical and horizontal linkages (Cacciattolo, 2015).

1.6.4. Internal Communication – The communication that occurs between organisations and employees that has the potential to foster communication, trust, and engagement among employees (Ewing, Men & O’Neil, 2019).

1.6.5. Vertical Communication – vertical top-down communication implies communication which flows from management to the employee, and bottom-up communication flows from the employee to management (Terzić, 2018).

1.6.6. Horizontal Communication – is related to communication between employees at the same level of business activity, with the purpose of increasing the total employee activity (Terzić, 2018).

1.6.7. Administrative Staff – referred to as blended professionals, whose identities are built on both academic and professional, non-academic domains (Ryttberg & Greschwind, 2017).

1.6.8. Academic – involves, in varying degrees, autonomy and freedom, intellectual stimulation, teaching and research, and ideas around making a difference, and a sense of calling (Rosewell & Ashwin, 2019).

1.6.9. Higher Education Institution – “The higher education institutions in the country produce, in addition to knowledge and skilled graduates, their own output and employ numerous employees in different professions and at various qualification and skills levels” (Pouris & Inglesi-Lotz, 2014, p.1).

1.7 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This thesis is laid out in the format of five chapters, each comprising of an introduction, main text, and conclusion. These five chapters are presented as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction – this chapter provides an overview of the development of the research problem and defines the scope and significance of the research. The main as well as specific research questions and objectives are briefly outlined.

Chapter Two: Literature Review – this chapter provides an evaluation of the literature and explicates the salient concepts through relevant theories and arguments. The evaluation of the literature and proposed theoretical framework culminates in the formation of research questions towards the development of the interview guide.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology – this chapter provides an account of the design of the study as well as the methodology selected for executing the empirical research. Further information is presented about the criteria applied to ensure that the research conducted is trustworthy.

Chapter Four: Results – this chapter focuses on the analysis and interpretation of the research outputs. The aim of this chapter is to examine whether the qualitative data gathered supports the rationale of the study.

Chapter Five: Discussion – this chapter consolidates the research study by summarising the results and linking them to the larger body of literature underpinning the field. Finally, the

limitations of the study are outlined and discussed and recommendations for potential avenues of future research are made.

1.8 CONCLUSION

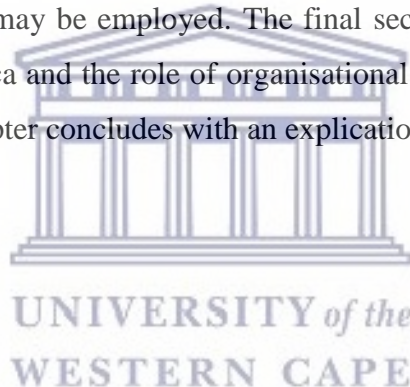
This chapter introduced the research study by outlining the communication process as a key human behavioural practice and how this process has subsequently been influenced by the introduction of social media. In particular, the migration of social media for personal to organisational use was discussed and the various applications they take in organisations. Social media and online collaboration tools hold significance in contribution to individual and team effectiveness within the workplace. A review of the literature suggests that employees' use of social media tools and online collaboration platforms in higher education institutions for work may have been under-researched. Hence, the objectives and significance of the study was discussed. The following chapter will provide an account of the literature consulted for this study accompanied by the theoretical framework that will ground the study.



CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an account of literature pertaining to the development of social media and its application in the organisational context. The intention is to explore university employees' experiences of engaging with social media platforms to participate in formal organisational communication remotely. This review seeks to define social media and explicate the nature of organisational communication. In addition, the higher education sector and its methods of communication will be discussed. The chapter begins with an overview of social media including its evolution, the social media platforms available, and its nexus with organisations. The next section discusses social media in relation to the governance structures which regulate its use. This is followed by an account of organisational communication and the various forms in which it may be employed. The final section contextualises the higher education sector in South Africa and the role of organisational communication within higher education institutions. The chapter concludes with an explication of the theoretical framework selected for this study.

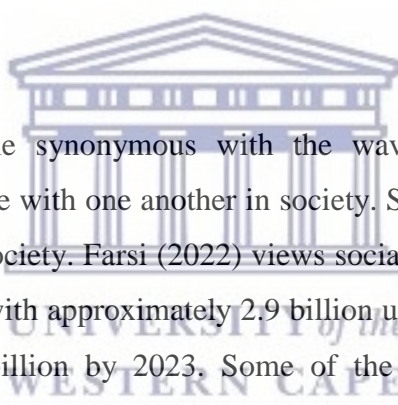


2.2 SOCIAL MEDIA

Due to growing interest in the field, researchers have taken slightly different approaches in defining social media. Kaplan and Heanlein (2010) define social media as a group of internet-based applications that are built on the ideological and technological foundation of Web 2.0 that allows the creation and change of user-generated content (UGC). Saura et al. (2022), state that research on online user behaviour and user-generated content has become an important factor for understanding issues such as people's digital actions, their opinions, and user experience. Musa, Azmi and Ismail (2016), similarly define social media as a group of internet-based applications that are built on the foundations of Web 2.0 and that allows for the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Ghaisani, Handayani and Munajat (2017), hold the same view stating that social media in its various forms are internet-based applications predicated on the foundations of Web 2.0 that put forward the creation of and deployment of

user generated content. The authors further state that social media can be classified into five groups based on user interaction namely, social networking sites, microblogging sites, wikis, online blogs, and online forums.

In a review of social media in the Information Systems (IS) literature, an alternate definition of social media was proposed, stating that it is made up of various user-driven platforms that facilitate diffusion of compelling content, dialogue, creation, and communication to a broader audience. It is essentially a digital space created by the people, for the people, and provides an environment that is conducive for interactions and networking to occur at different personal, professional, business, marketing, political and societal levels (Kapoor et al., 2018). Wong et al. (2021), describe social media as interactive social media technologies that facilitate the creation or sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. It can thus be deduced that literature conceptualises social media as being an internet based medium for the creation and dissemination of information across various platforms.



Social networking has become synonymous with the wave of technological advances transforming the way we engage with one another in society. Social media use holds positive and negative implications for society. Farsi (2022) views social media use as one of the most common web-based activities with approximately 2.9 billion users worldwide as of 2019 and projected to increase to 3.4 billion by 2023. Some of the positive aspects include that technology and the internet have provided society with increased automation, greater connectivity, and easier access to information. Furthermore, social media also enables organisations to connect with a larger client base at a lower cost (Bannister, 2020). Conversely, negative aspects of social media use include increased anxiety and depression, lack of human capacity to effectively connect, potential for organisational brand damage, defamation and increased political polarisation. In addition, social media platforms are prime channels through which fake news stories are disseminated and cybercrimes committed which threaten individuals' online presence (Bannister, 2020).

With the above definitions in mind, Treem & Leonardi (2012) identified four main affordances (uses) that are behaviourally unique to social media. The four uses are visibility, persistence, editability and association. Visibility related to users' ability to make visible to others their

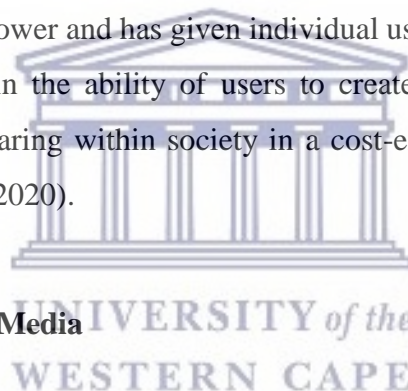
knowledge, preferences, behaviours, and communication network connections within the organisation (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). The authors noted that this feature distinguishes it from other media forms such as email which provide low visibility. Editability refers to the affordance of being able to spend sufficient time creating and re-creating a communicative act prior to being viewed by others. It also pertains to users' ability to modify and edit information already published. An illustration of this is when users of WhatsApp or Microsoft Teams can either remove messages after publication in the case of the former or edit messages after publication in the latter (WhatsApp, 2022; Microsoft, 2022). Persistence relates to social media enabling conversations to continue after the initial communicative act and the potential continued consequences long after the initial publication (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Finally, association pertains to social media enabling the establishment of connections between individuals, between individuals and content, or between an actor and presentation (Treem & Leonardi, 2012).

Although the rapid development of social media has changed the way people communicate and connect with one another, excessive exposure to social networks has been shown to have an impact on behaviour and wellbeing (Chukwuere & Chukwuere, 2017). A study conducted by De Wet & Koekemoer (2016), found that the use of ICTs had a negative influence on work-life interaction (WCI) by creating a work style of being constantly connected. However, the study found that work-life integration with the use of ICTs was manageable with boundaries put in place (De Wet & Koekemoer, 2016). Schivinski et al. (2020), substantiate this position with research conducted on Problematic Social Media Use (PMSU). It is shown that problems related to social media use are associated with dysregulated usage and consequently the study revealed that excessive social media use results in decreased psychological well-being and self-esteem (Schivinski et al., 2020). In a separate study on youth around the phenomenon of social media fatigue (SMF) behaviour, Liu, and He (2021), found the effects of social media fatigue in the sample studied included but not limited to information overload, social overload, and privacy. Literature shows that although social media has positively impacted communication in society, there are also drawbacks to its use. Regarding virtual work meetings using Zoom, it was found that employees experienced lower levels of motivation to engage behaviourally and cognitively compared to face-to-face meetings (Karl et al., 2021). Contributing factors to this included ergonomic issues, working from home, longer and more frequent meetings, whether

cameras and microphones were turned on or off, and meeting management challenges (Karl et al., 2021).

For this study, focus will be placed on social networking sites such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn as these forms of social media are being utilised in organisations. The platforms explored include web-conferencing systems as they are new forms of social networking with video conferencing ability being integrated into other social media platforms (Olson, 2013; Goodman, 2020). Platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams have allowed people to stay connected and interact while being socially distant and from an employment perspective, allowed employees to continue working virtually (Hacker et al., 2020; Karl et al., 2021).

The abovementioned definitions and conceptualisations of social media show that it has become an integral form of expression, communication, and interaction in society (Carlsson & Weibull, 2018). It has shifted power and has given individual users more influence and impact (Yan, 2021). This is evident in the ability of users to create content and exchange it for information and knowledge sharing within society in a cost-effective manner (Lutkevich & Wigmore, 2021; Lin & Wang, 2020).



2.2.1 The Evolution of Social Media

Although social media is today considered a ubiquitous feature in society and a core component of how we communicate, things have not always been simple and sophisticated. To understand how social media presently operates in society, is it noteworthy to consider how people communicated prior to its advent. In addition, looking at the historical development of social media allows for better insight into just how much, and how rapidly the world is changing. In early times, the revolution in communication occurred with the invention of the telephone and radio in 1876 and 1895 respectively (Dhingra & Mudgal, 2019). The turn of the 20th Century saw the rise of supercomputers and the advancement of networks between them leading to the subsequent invention of the internet (Dhingra & Mudgal, 2019). This allowed for the creation of the first kind of social networking – Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) in the 1970s. It allowed users to log on via computers and connect through a dial-in modem and interact with one

another much like we do today albeit at a significantly faster pace. As accessing the internet gained popularity, online services such as Prodigy and CompuServe provided the first corporate service toward accessing the internet. CompuServe in particular, the earliest form of internet, was the first to offer a chat service to its users (Shah, 2016). In 1986, Listserv was the first electronic mailing list software application, prior to which email lists were manually managed and monitored. Before all the technology that we utilise at present, there were two main forms of communication available: public broadcast media and private ‘dyadic’ communication (Miller et al, 2016). Firstly, public broadcast media such as television, newspapers and radio granted anyone access to it, making them the audience.

The broadcaster of the relative media type had no control over who constituted the audience but could only convince people to join. Secondly, private communication was between two people in one-on-one format. For group interactions, people would meet face to face, but it was uncommon to have group-based interaction via the telephone at the time (Miller et al., 2016). With the advent of the internet, the existing gap between private and public media narrowed. The use of the internet allowed for emails to be sent to a group of recipients. This resulted in the introduction of bulletin boards, forums, chat rooms and blogs. These platforms had broader appeal and generated larger audiences. As technology progressed, the subsequent development of the first social networking sites was spawned from the reduction of public media broadcasting down to the individual level being able to post to various groups. Following this, the development of text messaging via the internet took place. This further evolved with the introduction of the smartphone and the messaging platform Blackberry Messenger (BBM), prevalent on Blackberry cell phones. Its global impact was profound as it served as the precursor to instant messaging platform, WhatsApp (Cipriani, 2019).

The social interaction aspect was mainly derived from the advent of social media that occurred with the introduction of Classmates.com and SixDegrees.com in 1995 and 1997. These sites were the initial recognisable social networking sites as they allowed functionalities such as creating a profile and list, and search for a friend. In 2001, the introduction of Ryze.com, a business-g geared platform to assist in leveraging commercial networks, gave way to a new generation of social networking sites such as Friendster.com, Tribe.net and LinkedIn. This was followed by the inception of the platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn – which will be discussed further in this chapter. MySpace and Facebook followed in 2003 and 2004,

respectively (Deans & Tretola, 2018). MySpace gained popularity based on a rumour that Friendster.com was about to charge its users which resulted in the switch to MySpace as an alternative (Shah, 2016). A similar trend was observed where a previously unknown instant messaging platform, Telegram, gained overnight popularity due to changes made WhatsApp's privacy rules. The implications of the proposed changes by WhatsApp meant that platform users would be blocked from using the application if they did not agree to its terms and conditions (Shingwenyana, 2021). Users quickly found an alternative to WhatsApp, causing the Facebook owned platform to rethink its decision (Hern, 2021). These platforms were aimed at the younger generation users as social networking and dating platforms, respectively. Since then, MySpace has been phased out and Facebook has evolved into a social networking monopoly (Shah, 2016). More importantly, these platforms have paved the way for newer and more sophisticated social media platforms that we are now reliant on for communication in both personal and professional lives (Shah, 2016).

2.2.2 Social Media Platforms

Social media can be a powerful communication tool for employees, assisting them to collaborate, share ideas and solve problems (Bizzi, 2018). Using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp could affect employees' behaviour. Furthermore, changes in operations of organisations have seen a rise in the development of social networking platforms for work teams engaging with one another. These are called web-conferencing systems (WCS). These applications include Zoom, Google Hangouts and Microsoft Teams. Web-conferencing systems are general purpose systems that facilitate virtual meetings among participants over the internet and function as communication and collaboration tools that are available on desktop and mobile platforms (Hacker, vom Brocke, Handali, Otto & Schneider, 2020).

WhatsApp is an instant messaging platform used to connect with others. It is as a form of communication that has become an institution which has altered the way people communicate and how businesses function. The platform allows for the sending of text messages, exchange of images, video, and audio clips as well as location sharing functionalities (Mefolere, 2016). The research of Baishya and Maheshwari (2019) research explored the use of WhatsApp groups in the academic context among students, while research conducted by Terkan and

Celebi (2020) studied workplace WhatsApp usage and its impact on performance. In a separate study by Omar, Azmi and Sani (2020), the use of WhatsApp was evaluated for team negotiation and decision-making.

Facebook, the parent-company owner of WhatsApp, is one of the original platforms critical to the advent of the social networking phenomenon. Cilliers, Chinyamurindi and Viljoen (2017) indicate that Facebook is popular in South Africa, with over 12 million users. Literature shows the prevalence of Facebook and how it has transformed the workplace by allowing participants to send, receive and process information for use by others (Shingwenyana, 2021). Furthermore, Facebook is regarded as grassroots technology because employees utilised the technology before organisations implemented a social media strategy to define its use. This is evident in that it serves as a communication channel to discuss personal and work-related issues (Cilliers et al., 2017). Adzovie et al. (2017), argue that Facebook can be considered a valuable resource to the working class as seeing the creativity of others online allows employees to be creative and think outside the box. In a study conducted on Facebook users, it was found that its usage had a positive influence on psychological outcomes, including information sharing, relationship quality and overall social life satisfaction (Dang, 2021).

LinkedIn is a subsidiary company of Facebook. According to Koch et al., (2018) LinkedIn can be classified as a social networking site that allows users to share information about themselves often through an online profile that they have created. This platform is characterised as a formal social networking site for professionals and individuals seeking for employment. LinkedIn focuses on professional information where users are encouraged to create a concise curriculum vitae (CV) to establish networking connections. Twitter on the other hand is classified as a microblogging site that allows users to communicate messages in 140 characters (Koch et al., 2018). The application was founded in 2006 and was initially conceptualised by its creator, Jack Dorsey to be an SMS-based communication platform so that groups of friends could be updated about their respective activities based on their status updates (McArthur, 2016). The platform had experienced innovation where functionalities were added such as an increase to the character limit so users could talk more, reply directly (tweet) to other users' tweets as well as share or "retweet" other users' posts (McArthur, 2016). These additions to the platform have morphed it into the social networking giant that Twitter is today.

The first and arguably most popular application is Zoom which has rapidly formed part of the daily lives with a mission to facilitate connection for personal and work-based interactions (Peters & Krasnoff, 2020). Founded in 2011, Zoom is a cloud-based platform that provides video and audio conferencing, collaboration, chat, and webinar functionalities (Zoom Video Communications, 2020). It is compatible across desktop, mobile and telephone devices which allows for ease of use wherever the user is situated. Zoom's features include recording and transcript abilities so that evidence and a log of interactions and conversations can be kept. It has collaboration tools which include screen sharing, co-annotation and chat which allows all team members to actively make contributions to the work presented (Zoom Video Communications, 2020). The use of Zoom has grown exponentially from 10 million users at the end of 2019 to 300 million by April 2020 (Wiederhold, 2020). The higher education sector experienced an abrupt switch to video conferencing platforms, specifically Zoom, with users having to adopt asynchronous usage of the platform to ensure continuity (Lowenthal et al, 2020). In addition, adopting new technology seldom comes without issues, and Zoom use was no exception. Challenges included mechanical troubles, connectivity issues and mental health-related issues due to overuse which has been termed "Zoom fatigue" (Wiederhold, 2020). The expansion of Zoom as a social networking tool can be attributed to COVID-19 pandemic. According to Haider and Rasay (2020), Zoom added more than 183 000 enterprise customers in the first quarter of 2020, an increase of 353,7% year on year with the quarter closing with 265 400 enterprise customers. This increase can be attributed to the global transition to remote work amid the pandemic. Joia and Lorenzo (2021) add that Zoom served as the platform of choice of government agencies, universities, non-profit organisations, and individuals to facilitate technology-mediated learning (TML) in response to the emergency transition to remote operations.

The next collaboration platform is Google Meet, a cloud-based product that has experienced usage growth of 60% since January 2020 (Google, 2020). It forms part of Google's G Suite. In response to the move to online collaboration, Google rolled out dedicated Meet hardware in markets like South Africa, to ensure optimal functioning of the product (Google, 2020). Features of Google Meet include easy scheduling and recording of meetings which sync with Google Calendar, screen sharing, large meeting hosting capability of up to 100 members and 250 for premium users, the convenience of being able to join via mobile phone and control who participates in the meeting.

The final work collaboration example is Microsoft Teams which forms part of Microsoft Office, and functions in the same vein as G-Suite. This platform has also seen significant growth in usage rates of up to 75 million daily active users in the transition to working online (Microsoft, 2020). The platform allows for video conferencing, chat and calling functionalities as well as storage capabilities for team documents and work that has been co-authored by participants. Furthermore, the platform allows for real-time collaboration with other Office suite applications such as Word, PowerPoint, and Excel (Microsoft, 2020). This allows for the co-creation of documents where editing can be done in real-time in collaboration with other users.

2.2.3 Social Media and Organisations

According to Mukhtar et al. (2020), an organisation is a system of activities or forces that are purposefully coordinated by several people to achieve goals that are effective and efficient. Organisational effectiveness is the process of engaging in activities for the realisation of organisational goals through an accumulation of individual effectiveness. During the modern era and the current context organisations operate in, new ways had to be sought to remain effective. One of these methods has been the use of social networking. From an organisational design perspective, technological advancements in IT and AI technologies have given rise to new forms of organisations and new ways to model how they function. According to Billinger and Workiewicz (2019), advancements in technology are leading organisations to the change of some traditional hierarchical structures to flatter designs which accommodate increased autonomy in how employees do their work. The authors further draw on a study indicating workplace-mediated use of electronic communication by supervisors who play a role in overall work engagement. Similarly, Chen et al. (2021) contends that social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and WeChat, are increasingly being embedded into organisational activities resulting in changes in employee communication and collaboration as well as refinement in business models, organisational structures, and daily work routines. Therefore, it is significant to look at the function of social media platforms in organisations and their role in the transition to remote digitalisation occurring in organisations and the effect on employees and organisational communication processes (Gigauri, 2020).

In the context of organisational communication, social media platforms could serve as an example of electronic communication used to supervise how work is done within an organisation without the negative influence of micromanagement thereby contributing to workplace engagement. Due to the rapid way that social media has transformed communication in society (Koch et al., 2018), it is expected that it will infiltrate the organisation through its employees, thus creating some sort of footprint in modern society. To this end, the role of social media in organisations need to be explored. The perception is that the prevalence of social media in organisations can encourage conversation and involvement among people. Increasing numbers of people are making use of social networking sites to connect to colleagues, family, friends and to collaborate with others (Wushe & Shenje, 2019). Yeomans and Fitzpatrick (2017) substantiate this view that social media networks act as catalysts for co-creation, collaboration, and community within organisations. Yu et al. (2022), finds that COVID-19 had a behavioural impact on people's attitudes towards social media usage and related practices. They state that social media was relied on for connecting with others and fulfilment of their consumer needs. The study provides insight for organisations to consider how they position social media as a form of organisational communication (Yu et al., 2022).

Another perspective is provided by van Osch, Steinfield and Balogh (2020), who refers to the use of social media in organisations as Enterprise Social Media (ESM), highlighting its impact on communication-based processes such as supporting interaction, collaboration, and co-creation. These aspects are achieved through social media capabilities such as blogging, social networking and being able to post and share documents (van Osch et al., 2020). This notion is supported by a study conducted on the use of social media in the healthcare sector during the pandemic (Farsi, 2022; Ismail et al., 2021; Pizzuti et al., 2020; Chan et al., 2020). Furthermore, Liu et al. (2021) finds that the use of social media applications for work and social tasks had a positive impact on employees' degree of thriving at work. This study put forward implications for managers to consider their use of enterprise social media to influence their employees' level of work exuberance. Across the globe, the COVID-19 pandemic has been managed through social distancing measures. These have been upheld in the workplace through increased use and dependence on social media to continue work, education, and social connection on platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams which have seen exponential usage growth since the onset of the pandemic (Wong et al., 2021).

Wong et al. (2021) contend that the use of social media in the workplace should be leveraged to provide its maximum benefits to the workforce while putting interventions in place to mitigate its associated limitations. Chen et al., (2021), supports the argument of van Osch et al. (2020) and state that from an organisational behaviour perspective, social media can be categorised into Enterprise Social Media (ESM) and Public Social Media (PSM). Enterprise social media refers to web-based social media platforms which allow workers to privately direct message colleagues or broadcast messages to the entire organisation; overtly or covertly allude to employees as communication partners; share files and texts between themselves and other employees and finally, view content posted by anyone in the organisation.

Public social media refers to platforms developed and managed by service providers like Facebook and Twitter (Chen et al., 2021). Public social media can fulfil a dual service between an individual's personal and professional lives. Furthermore, public social media has become ubiquitous in society following exponential growth in usage rates (Chen et al., 2021). Kapoor et al., (2018) contend that organisations are recognising the value of social media in that it serves as a prominent indicator of equity value that improves short term performance and long-term productivity benefits. According to the authors, evidence suggests that social media creates meta-knowledge formulation when used in an organisation to know who is who and who does what in the organisation. This assists in mitigating knowledge duplication, job role overlap, and presenting opportunities to find new ways of managing work (Kapoor et al., 2018).

2.3 SOCIAL MEDIA AND ORGANISATIONAL GOVERNANCE

As the world becomes more connected by the Internet (Web 2.0), and the growing prevalence and popularity of social media platforms, there is an increasing research interest into social media user behaviour (Kujur & Singh, 2017). Social media platforms include a wide range of online media such as social networking sites, microblogs, video-sharing applications, and instant messaging applications (Ahmed et al., 2019). Based on statistics from Internet World Stats, as of 2021, there are 5168780607 internet users of which 34545165 are based in South Africa. Since its inception, social media has been popularised due to the interactivity of the various platforms and its ability to empower people to connect, share, cooperate and engage with others (Hussein et al., 2021). The personal use of social media by employees has led to

the introduction of social media usage within organisations with platforms termed either Public Social Media (PSM) or Enterprise Social Media (ESM). Research indicates that social media has infiltrated almost all types of organisations, including Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The rapid rise of social media adoption provides numerous possibilities for Higher Education Institutions to further integrate it into their teaching and learning activities and holds value for administrators, managers, learners, and teachers as well (Chugh, 2021).

Global reliance on social networking platforms like social media applications and web-conferencing systems (WCS) has increased since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. Social media has been used in personal and professional capacities and as a channel through which business continuity could be achieved. Yvonne and Jiang (2021) state that the “new normal” majorly impacted the organisational work culture and lifestyle, keeping work and other tasks on hold resulting in various losses for the organisation. To mitigate this, organisations have had to restart work to offset further losses amid the increased certainty of risk that the pandemic presented.

The increased development and widespread use of social media has also warranted the need for further regulation from a governmental perspective. It is in this regard that the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013 (POPIA) and the Cyber Crimes Act 19 of 2020 were signed into law. These pieces of legislation have a bearing on how social media can be used in the country, and have implications for individuals who use it in their personal capacity, and as employees in organisations that have a social media presence, which is within the purview of this study. The POPI Act provides for the promotion of privacy and the regulation of how personal information is obtained shared and processed. This has implications for how social media is used as it is an efficient conduit for sharing information and the misconception that people have that sharing something will only be viewed by their respective followers and thus private, is not the case. Followers may be able to share the original post and screenshot and reshare it on other platforms (Bannister, 2020). Therefore, Section 12 (2)(a) of the Act stipulates that information needs to be collected directly from the data subject unless it is on record that the data subject has made the data public by their own consent. Furthermore, the onus is on the organisation to ensure that their data processing systems are compliant with the principles outlined in Chapter 3 of the Act. According to Chapter three of the Protection of Personal Information Act 2013, there needs to be a party responsible for compliance with the

Act. There is a requirement for limitations to be placed on the kinds of information processed by organisations and outlining what will be processed. This needs to be substantiated by the fact that the organisation has a lawful right to process information. Further regulations compel organisations to maintain the quality of information processed, and to be transparent it. The stipulated principles compel individuals and organisations to have a definitive purpose for sharing and processing of personal information.

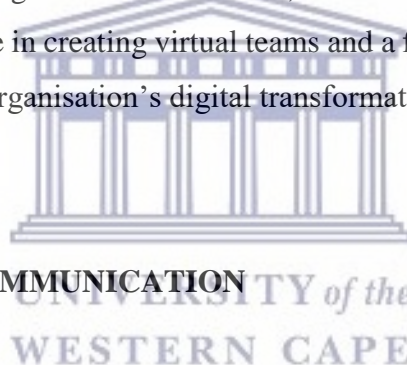
The Cybercrimes Act 19 of 2020 regulates and criminalises the interference with computer systems and data with its purpose being detecting and prosecuting crimes committed, utilising computers (Marshall, 2021). The Act has bearing on social media due to the way it is used and often abused. To this end, it has implications on both individuals and indirectly, organisations. The implications of the Act are that certain information shared on a social media platform such as WhatsApp, could result in a prison sentence. The test for this is to determine if the communication sent was done with the intent to incite damage, violence or to threaten a person or group (section 14 & 15) (Truter, 2021).

These pieces of legislation compel individuals and organisations to take a prudent approach to the content shared online via social media platforms and it is significant to consider when accounting for social media and the employer-employee relationship. The advent of social media has distorted the distinction between conduct as employees and citizens. According to Hook and Noakes (2019), organisations are increasingly seeking to regulate employee behaviour on social media as citizens to mitigate risk and protect themselves from reputational harm. Organisations have the right to expect their employees to act in good faith and act in the organisation's best interest (Coetzee, 2019). If this trust relationship is breached, the organisation is within their scope to affect appropriate disciplinary action or even dismissal if the organisation's name is brought into disrepute. This is because an employer could be held vicariously liable for an employee's actions (Coetzee, 2019). These aspects are important to consider in our increased use of social media and dependence on the Internet. The kind of information shared and the way it is shared has implications for the employer-employee relationship and how individuals conduct themselves when communicating via social media platforms.

The increased use of social media has resulted in the need for organisations to have effective communications and social media strategies underpinned by the relevant communication and social media policies in place. A social media strategy refers to the detailed plan developed to state the intent for the content created, its terms of use, and the platforms that are to be utilised (Sirohi, 2019). Mushwana and Bezuidenhout (2014) state that due to social media not only being used by the public but becoming part of business strategy, the implementation of a social media policy serves as a first step to addressing its associated risks. According to Mlambo (2020), the role of a social media policy is not to dictate what employees post on social media but rather to act as a guidance tool to create awareness of the risks and consequences of the content they post. A social media policy also allows organisations to define accepted behaviour related to social media use, such as having access to Facebook during one's lunch break (Warren & Ellem, 2015).

Another factor to consider in the adoption of social media in organisations is its Information Technology (IT) governance structure. According to Olutoyin and Flowerday (2016), IT governance refers to the processes that ensure its effective and efficient use to enable organisations to meet their goals. The IT governance structure encompasses the decision framework, rights, responsibilities, and accountability to illicit the desired behaviours to achieve the organisation's goals. It ensures that the full value is derived from investing in IT platforms and to manage any identified risks which arise from a platform's adoption (Olutoyin & Flowerday, 2016). Ako-Nai and Singh (2019) state that key decision-makers regarding IT include accountability for selection and prioritization of decision options, aligning the IT strategy with the organisational strategic decision areas, and identifying and maintaining key stakeholder relationships and participation in IT decision-making. Accountability for overall IT governance resides with the board as IT is employed across all functions within the organisation. In the Higher Education sector, IT governance structures are determined by the overarching institutional governance structure (Johl et al., 2014). Institutional oversight of IT implementation is carried out by an elected IT committee as per the code for good governance and governance indicators for councils of South African Higher Education Institutions (DHET, 2017). This makes the role of the IT governance structure an important area of the institution's overall strategy. In its 2020-2025 Strategic Plan (DHET, 2018), the Department of Higher Education identifies the development and roll-out of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure as a challenge.

When it comes to implementation of new technologies and practices towards digital transformation, the human resources (HR) function plays a critical role in facilitating digital transformation within the organisation. According to Nicolás-Agustín and Jiménez-Jiménez (2021), HR practices play a mediating role in facilitating digital transformation by ensuring that appropriate use of technologies that impact people, culture and knowledge are aligned with the appropriate technical, management and knowledge skills. The role of HR in digital transformation is to strategically align its people management practices to the selected IT infrastructure within the organisational value chain (Nicolás-Agustín & Jiménez-Jiménez, 2021). Chandrasekaran (2021) argues that as organisations acclimatise to working digitally, the onus has been placed on the HR function to lead in addressing the unexpected questions and scenarios faced by organisations. This makes HR fundamental in initiating changes in the workplace. Rasskazova et al. (2019), outline the areas of the HR strategy that influence digital transformation in organisations which include, adapting employees, change management, communication management, organisational structure, and staff training. It is evident that the HR function plays a critical role in creating virtual teams and a flexible management system in mediating the transition of an organisation's digital transformation process (Rasskazova et al., 2019).



2.4 ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION

According to Zito et al. (2021), when viewing the organisation from a communication perspective, it is considered as a complex network of communication habits where the organisation serves as the factual structure and the collective communicative habits constitute the organisation. Organisational communication also holds strategic value for the organisation. Belasen and Belasen (2019) characterise organisational communication as being able to facilitate collaboration, trust and commitment among clients, employees, and its internal and external stakeholders. Furthermore, the increased utilization of social media within organisations has moved the focus of organisational communication to aspects such as access, direction, influence, social media integration in decision-making and policy development for its sustained implementation (Belasen & Belasen, 2019). Matias and Cardoso (2019), assert that a well-designed communication network creates appropriate technical and psychological

conditions during working hours by keeping employees correctly informed. Kuhn and Kopczynski (2019) add that communication between the various components of an organisation allows their behaviour to be coordinated towards achieving its goals. Therefore, organisational communication considers the occurrence of interpersonal communication in the organisation using selected channels and resources to facilitate communication.

The distinction between formal and informal channels of communication is characterised by the size and structure of the organisation (Greiner, 1997; Marschan-Piekkari, 1999). Organisational communication relies on formal and informal channels of communication. De Nobile et al. (2013) state that messages shared vertically within hierarchical levels or horizontally among individuals of the same level occur through formal and informal channels. According to Daniel and Eze (2016), formal communication is pre-determined and can be characterised as communication about mapping of work or aspects of project plans. Informal communication on the other hand is utilised in the individual's self-interest and is characterised by the individual employee's socio-characteristics within the organisational context (Daniel & Eze, 2016; Saleem & Perveen, 2017).

2.4.1 Internal and External Communication

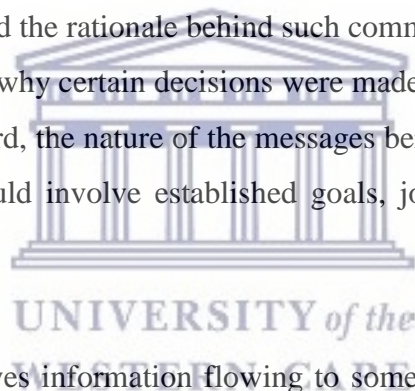
Organisational communication is comprised of internal and external organisational communication. According to de Vries et al. (2020), internal communication refers to the dissemination of information among employees. Landman and Angelopulo (2006) state that internal communication has three primary functions: strategic alignment; organisational learning, information dissemination and knowledge management; and motivation. External communication is defined as the organisation's communication management strategy for communicating with the people and entities outside of the organisation (Bucata & Rizescu, 2017). Both internal and external forms of communication work together towards organisational growth (Walters, 2019). COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the shift to remote working and this impacted internal communication processes. A study conducted by Bojadjiev and Vaneva (2021) argues that face-to-face meetings were replaced by virtual communication, increased meetings, and increased feedback from organisational leaders. Separate studies highlighted the critical role of internal communication in regulating employees' psychological wellbeing and affecting changes in organisational behaviours (Sun et al., 2021; Qin et al.,

2022). Yang et al. (2022) provide a contrasting view stating that remote work impacted levels of interconnectedness within a given department resulting in less collaboration and increased work silos across the organisational network. Literature shows benefits and drawbacks of remote work in terms of collaboration. However, the drawback of increased silos or less interconnectedness could be viewed as signs of remote working providing opportunities for increased individual concentration and focus on work.

2.4.2 Direction of communication

When engaging in communication, it can flow in various directions dependent on the sender and the receiver. In the organisational context, the flow of communication typically follows the chain of command prescribed by its organisational structure (Lunenburg, 2010).

Downward communication involves information that flows from one level to a lower level in the organisation. This information will be characterised by messages coming from upper structures like management, and the rationale behind such communication would be to inform and provide explanations as to why certain decisions were made (Robbins et al., 2016). When communication flows downward, the nature of the messages being conveyed by the sender in the organisational context would involve established goals, job instructions and providing feedback (Wrench, 2012).



Upward communication involves information flowing to someone more senior or of higher authority. In the organisation, communication will likely flow to senior management and the executive. Such communication would be used to provide feedback to superiors and inform managers of progress on projects (Wrench, 2012). Upward communication to those at senior levels would typically have to be more concise and focused with actionable items to hold their attention upon receipt. Upward communication also assists managers to become aware of how employees are feeling about their jobs and the organisation. This communication is in turn, used for downward communication to employees to relay their value to the organisation and build morale (John, 2018).

Lateral or horizontal communication is the flow of information between individuals on the same level of the organisation (Lunenburg, 2010). Such communication is used for task

coordination, conflict management and information sharing (Robbins et al., 2016). This channel of communication occurs between parallel groups in the organisation. These interactions may be characterised as those between subordinates, heads of department and supervisors and managers (John, 2018).

2.5 HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

2.5.1 Contextualising Higher Education Institutions

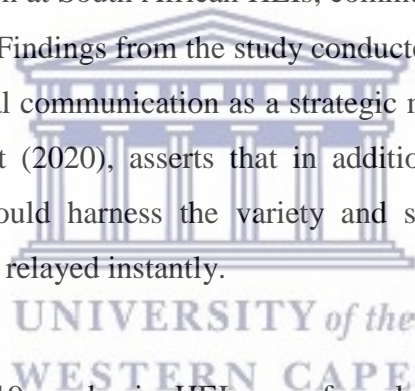
Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are characterised as bureaucratic and complex due to their organisational structures, broad vertical hierarchies, and large staff numbers (Delpont, 2020). HEIs are in a constant state of change as they serve as channels in society through which governments respond to social, political, and economic issues (Chetty & Pather, 2015). The function of HEIs provide in-depth knowledge, seek academic development, educate students, and coordinate national development demands (Chen et al., 2006; Badat, 2010).

In contextualising HEIs as organisations, Jensen (2010) postulates that universities have unique compositions compared to other organisations categorised as either self-managed or managerial. Self-managed institutions refer to those employing mainly academics or researchers who have collegial autonomy, while managerial institutions are viewed as organisations with line management and employees including administrative staff (Jensen, 2010). Within HEIs, two broad categories of staff exist namely, academic and administrative staff. The academic profession is characterised by professional autonomy from a teaching and research perspective, and collegial self-governance (Fumasoli et al., 2020). In contrast, administrative staff are characterised as professional staff who motivate, plan, manage and support various aspects of the academic programme (Yang, 2010).

2.5.2 Challenges facing Higher Education Institutions

Presently, HEIs in the South African context are faced with numerous challenges including, meeting globalization demands, decolonisation, digitalisation, transformation and contending

with socio-economic pressures including growing student enrolments and decreased funding for institutions (Singh, 2015; Tjønneland, 2017; Mlambo et al., 2021). Furthermore, academic staff are faced with increasingly strenuous job demands within HEIs (Dhanpat et al., 2019; Van Rensburg & Rothmann, 2020). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, HEIs worldwide were affected by campus closures and social distancing measures (du Plessis et al., 2022). Another challenge which faced the sector was ensuring the sustainable continuation of the academic project which included emergency remote teaching and learning, remote working arrangements for staff and alternative support measures for students (du Plessis et al., 2022). HEIs are complex institutions, and this complexity extends to their internal and external communication processes. Delpont (2020), argues that management should be evaluated on the monitoring and evaluation measures in place to gauge the effectiveness of communication processes. Internal communication has bearing on higher education because of the core importance of people to the mission and operation of the institution concerning their skills, qualities, and abilities to communicate with other staff (Delpont et al., 2014). Therefore, to improve internal communication at South African HEIs, communication should be advocated for at all organisational levels. Findings from the study conducted by Delpont (2020), indicate that HEIs do not regard internal communication as a strategic management tool but rather as an additional practice. Delpont (2020), asserts that in addition to e-mail and face-to-face communication, institutions could harness the variety and speed of social media where important information could be relayed instantly.



With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, HEIs were forced to shut down amid rising case numbers (Mncube et al., 2021; Tramati & Teferra, 2020; Kandri, 2020). The HEI sector was presented with the challenge to quickly respond with emergency remote teaching and learning as well as operational plans to ensure remote institutional continuity amid a national lockdown where only designated essential services were allowed to operate (Mncube et al., 2021). The response by HEIs was characterised by online teaching and learning, remote working arrangements for staff, increased student support and the reprioritisation of funds (du Plessis et al., 2022) According to du Plessis et al. (2022), HEIs had operational continuity plans in place because of lessons learnt during the *#Feesmustfall* protests during 2015/2016. However, it remains to be evaluated whether these plans were, and are effective in continuing the academic programme. Resultant challenges that have been identified include academic integrity (Verhoef & Coetser, 2021), increased inequality between academic institutions (Motala & Menon,

2020), low student motivation and dropouts (Aboagye et al., 2020), and increased workload amongst academic and administrative staff (Ramayah & Kumar, 2020; Flynn & Noonan, 2020). Social media acceptance within the Higher Education context has transformed ways of communication, collaboration, and education (Al-Qaysi et al., 2020). Literature shows how the sector used social media platforms for both teaching and learning in a bid to ensure the continuity of education during the COVID-19 pandemic (Khoza et al., 2021; Mthethwa & Luthuli, 2021; Adnan & Anwar, 2020).

Khoza et al., (2021) finds that although the introduction of an online teaching and learning strategy led to convenience flexibility for both institutional staff and students it had drawbacks for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The challenges for online learning include insufficient IT skillset, lack of training on online platforms, internet connectivity, load-shedding and increased workload. Conversely, advantages of the online teaching and learning include cost effectiveness, opening learning opportunities to more students per course, flexibility to work from anywhere, and saving commuting time (Khoza et al., 2021).

A study conducted by Mthethwa and Luthuli (2021), found that online platforms provided access to academics outside of conventional working hours and an opportunity to implement modern and convenient mode of communication (Mthethwa & Luthuli, 2021).

However, Adnan and Anwar (2020), highlight challenges faced by developing countries in continuing the virtual academic project. These include access to the internet to participate in course activities, adequate financial resources, insufficient digital competency, and lack of socialisation with others.

According to Murire and Cilliers (2017), social media platforms were adopted by academics for more effective communication and interaction with students. Similarly, Lubua et al. (2017), and Dzvapatsva et al. (2014), also report the use of social media to facilitate the learning process and improved overall academic performance in higher education, respectively. A systematic review conducted by Chugh et al. (2021), highlighted the use of social media by university academics and the respective benefits and drawbacks thereof. Benefits of social media use by academics include improved communication and networking with peers and students, transcendence of physical and geographical boundaries, and increased motivation to continue using social media (Chugh et al., 2021). Drawbacks include concern for uncivil chats,

security and privacy, lack of agreement on use, and inadequate skills and training or time to learn a new technology platform (Chugh et al., 2021). From a work perspective, Cilliers et al. (2017) report that academic staff use social media for communication and problem-solving purposes.

Current literature also describes studies conducted accounting for the role of non-academic staff in the facilitation of the academic project. However, Avenali et al. (2022), highlight the scarcity of literature on the role of non-academic staff in university performance compared to that of academics. Administrative staff have also experienced broad changes in their work life. Augustus and Kotera (2022), highlight challenges encountered by administrative staff including working from home, working in isolation, managing work and personal life, difficulty disconnecting from the workday and accumulated stress due to frequent online meetings. Wilson (2020) provides an account of the adjustment to remote operations from an administrative staff perspective. The author describes key challenges in providing quality service to the institution. These include role clarity, adapting to a virtual office environment, and having to develop their own plans to meet work demands. Furthermore, the author highlighted the change in business processes with administrative staff having to develop their own individual processes in line with their broader departmental processes (Wilson, 2020; Sutapa et al., 2022). The skillsets of administrative staff also evolved through utilising skills in previous roles and using new platforms at work such as Zoom, Google Meet and Microsoft Teams (Wilson, 2020). The transition to remote working had an impact on university administrative staff whose responsibility it is to continue to provide quality service notwithstanding changes in their work and personal lives.

The literature surveyed indicates the use of social media in higher education for teaching and learning purposes. However, it does not account for the use of social media as an organisational communication channel, which this study seeks to explore. While literature covers the experiences of academic staff working remotely and using social media platforms, non-academic staff is not covered to the same extent.

2.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study will be underpinned by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974)'s Uses and Gratifications Theory. According to Musa, Azmi & Ismail (2016), Uses and Gratification (U&G) theory developed from a functionalist perspective on mass communication, concentrating on individuals' motivations and associated behaviours. The theory has been useful in explaining consumers' motivations and substantiation for continued use of various media sources such as radio, television, and electronic bulletins. Thus, uses and gratifications theory seeks to outline why people use certain media and the benefits they derive from it (Musa, Azmi & Ismail, 2016). Terkan and Celebi (2020), also state that the theory analyses and explains why people use certain media outlets. Therefore, the theory suggests that media audiences participate actively in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives and interrogates why people pick specific media to fulfil their needs (Adzovie, Nyieku & Keku, 2017). Based on this notion, it can be said that people's engagement with social media platforms is goal-driven. This means people are aware of their reasons for engaging with different media choices that will help them address their specific wants and needs.

Furthermore, this framework also predicates that media is competing with other forms of needs gratification. Wariara (2017) explains how people choose media to gratify their needs by distinguishing between the notions of 'gratification sought' and 'gratification obtained'. Gratification sought is defined as the expectation that individuals have before they use a medium that accounts for the motive behind their use of it. Gratification obtained then refers to the gratification achieved from using the specific medium (Palmgreen, Wenner & Rayburn, 1980 in Wariara, 2017).

The Uses and Gratifications Framework outlines five main needs that individuals seek to have gratified namely, Cognitive, Affective, Personal Integrative, Social Integrative and Escapist needs. These encapsulate motives why individuals would engage with social media.

2.7 CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to provide an overview of the discourse pertaining to the variables investigated for this study. The chapter also sought to frame the main research objective regarding the use of social media platforms for formal internal organisational communication. This study seeks to explore the suitability of using social media platforms for organisational communication given the current context in which Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and other organisations are operating. A gap in the current literature presents itself to study the remote operations of HEIs from the perspective of academic and administrative staff who use social media platforms to facilitate communication with management and colleagues to continue business operations. The research methodology for the study will be discussed in chapter three. The aspects that will be covered include the research approach and design employed, the research method, data collection method and procedure. The chapter will conclude with a discussion on the chosen data analysis approach and ethical considerations underpinning the study.

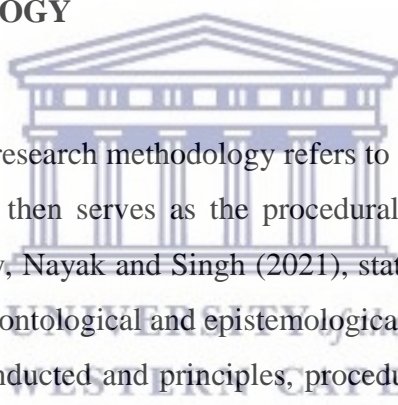


CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This study aims to understand the experiences of academic and administrative staff engaging with social media platforms for the purpose of organisational communication within a tertiary institution. To understand these experiences, an appropriate methodological approach was employed. This chapter outlines the research design and methodology utilised in the study. Furthermore, it explicates the chosen population and sample of the research as well as the data collection and analysis procedures. It also discusses the criteria for ensuring trustworthiness of qualitative data and concludes with an account of ethical matters that need to be taken into consideration when engaging in the research process.

3.2 DEFINING METHODOLOGY



According to Mohajan (2018), research methodology refers to the logic behind the process of developing theory. The theory then serves as the procedural framework within which the research is conducted. Similarly, Nayak and Singh (2021), state that methodology refers to a research strategy that translates ontological and epistemological principles into guidelines that show how research is to be conducted and principles, procedures, and practices that govern research. The authors thus refer to methodology as the framework in which the research will be conducted. This includes the steps and procedures followed in the research process to answer the research questions.

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A research philosophy refers to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). A descriptive phenomenological approach was undertaken in this study. This approach was used to identify patterns or structures of phenomena as lived experience of everyday life (Edward & Welch, 2011). The goal of the approach was to give meaning to the lived experience through studying ‘what’ was experienced

and ‘how’ it was experienced (Neubauer, Witkop & Varplo, 2019). van Manen (2017) states that phenomenology as a method offers original understanding and insights into the phenomenality of human experiences. The chosen research approach was appropriate for this study because it sought to gather data on the experiences of academic and administrators in their natural setting and their daily interactions using social media platforms to engage in organisational communication in their workplace.

3.4 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

3.4.1 Population

According to Casteel and Bridier (2021), defining a research population creates boundaries for the scope of a study and provides context for the reader. Rahi (2017), states that the population of a study can be defined as all the people or items that one wishes to understand. The population of interest is derived from the research population. Majid (2018) describes the population of interest as the research study’s target population. Casteel & Bridier (2021) put forward that the population of interest comprises of individuals, dyads, groups, organisations, or other entities one aims to understand and to which the research findings can be attributed. In the context of this study, the population was comprised of all employees of the selected tertiary institution. The population interviewed for this research study was academic and administrative staff at the selected tertiary institution. The participants in this study were identified through contacting the various faculties at the institution. As a registered student, the researcher had access to all faculties at the institution.

3.4.2 Sampling

A sample is a subset of the population under study that is used to estimate the characteristics of the entire population, making it representative of the population (Shiffman & Kanuk, 2010). Similarly, Manna and Mete (2021), state that samples are important within scientific research as it is impossible to study all members of a population for a research project from a strategic and resource perspective. As shown in Table 1, the sample for this study was eleven (11) individuals in academic and administrative support roles within three faculties at the selected

tertiary institution. The three faculties were, Economic and Management Sciences, Community and Health Sciences, and the Faculty of Arts.

Table 3.1

Breakdown of research sample

Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences		Faculty of Natural Sciences		Faculty of Arts	
Academic Staff	Administrative staff	Academic Staff	Administrative staff	Academic Staff	Administrative staff
2	3	2	0	2	2
Total Sample: 11					

3.4.3 Sampling design

Non-probability sampling design was used for this study. Non-probability sampling involves the sample population being selected in a non-systematic process that does not guarantee equal chances for the subject in the target population (Elfil & Negida, 2017). Convenience sampling method was used. It selects participants based on their availability and accessibility. This method was appropriate as the researcher was unable to meet the participants face to face to enrol them in the study. Due to the selected tertiary institution's COVID-19 pandemic protocols, and remote operations, the researcher contacted potential participants through emails and phone calls to enrol them in the study.

The characteristics of the sample design was administrative and academics staff who were office-based employees where departmental administrative functions formed part of their duties. This included liaising with other academics, administrative staff, students, colleagues, tutors, and external stakeholders. To this end, these employees formed part of the sample as they were representative of the cohort of employees who have had to adapt to remote working and communication.

3.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design can be described as a strategic framework of action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution of the research (Bryman et al., 2014). The selection of the research study depends on both the research problem and questions, respectively. The research questions were developed from the reviewed literature and allude to the most suitable methodology for solving the research problem. To this end, the purpose of the study needed to be ascertained.

An exploratory approach was selected for this study to find out how well phenomena works which in the context of this study to explore the effectiveness of an organisational process of engaging with social media platforms to facilitate formal organisational communication. Exploratory research seeks to apply new words, concepts, explanations, theories, and hypotheses to reality with the aim of offering new ways of how the described reality works or is organized (Reiter, 2017). To achieve this, a qualitative approach was employed to collect the primary data. Taking the research timeframe into consideration, a cross-sectional design was utilised since the researcher collected data on more than one participant at a particular point in time. Furthermore, a comparative analysis approach was conducted. This was done to explore a theoretically postulated relationship and to examine a small number of empirical cases to understand causal processes leading to similarities and differences (Pickvance, 2001).

The qualitative research method was found to be the most appropriate in answering the main research question for the study. Qualitative research refers to the area of scholarship which is underpinned by qualitative data and inductive theorising (Bansal, Smith & Vaara, 2018). According to Hammarberg, Kirkman and de Lacey (2016), the qualitative method is used to answer questions about experience, meaning and perspective, usually from the view of the participant and utilises techniques such as semi-structured interviews to gain insight on a focused topic or, with key informants, for background information or an institutional perspective. A critical component of qualitative research is the process of inductive theorising. It allows for the development of new insights which introduce theory in new directions and is appropriate for use in new or understudied empirical contexts where there is limited prior work (Bansal, Smith & Vaara, 2018). Rahman (2017), outlines strengths and limitations of the

qualitative research method. Some strengths of the include producing detailed descriptions of participants' feelings, opinions, experiences, and interpretations of their actions (Hageman, 2008). It provides an in-depth understanding of the human experience in specific contexts (Hageman, 2008). It serves as a mechanism for understanding people's different voices, meanings, and events (Queirós, et al, 2017). It helps to gain insight into how inner experience influences how meaning is formed through culture (Queirós, et al, 2017). It enables researchers to interact directly with their data subjects resulting in subjective and detailed data collection (Rahman, 2017). And its flexible structure allows for the research approach to be reconfigured to understand complex problems more easily (Rahman, 2017).

While there are noteworthy strengths of the qualitative method, there are also limitations to utilising this method (Rahman, 2017). It may omit contextual sensitivities and emphasise meanings and experiences (Rahman, 2017). It may have lower levels of credibility compared to the quantitative approach (Trafimow, 2014). The relatively small sizes may impact generalisability to the entire research population (Queirós, et al, 2017). And finally, data interpretation and analysis may be more complex and time consuming with limited generalisability (Queirós, et al, 2017). After the above information into consideration, the researcher employed the qualitative method. This was in line with the aim of the study to capture and describe the lived human experience of engaging with various social media platforms to participate in organisational communication amid the COVID - 19 pandemic. In addition, the qualitative method was also utilised for its more flexible approach to data collection. Support for the chosen method included consideration of the uncertainties around the pandemic and for additional findings that this method could potentially provide.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION

3.6.1 Research Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were utilised to collect the primary data for analysis. Semi-structured interviews are characterised by aspects from both structured and unstructured interviews. It comprises of a set of predetermined questions which constitute as an interview guide but with provisions for additional questions to be asked to facilitate probing or

exploration of issues raised by the interviewee during the interview (Cachia & Millward, 2011; Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

The researcher developed the interview guide using open-ended questions which allowed participants to elaborate their responses. The interview guide comprised of a biographical questionnaire requesting their gender, age category, faculty, and years of work experience. Participants were required to complete these prior to engaging in the interview. This was followed by open-ended questions developed according to the study's research objectives and questions. The questions covered issues including types of social media platforms they engaged with, experience of communicating through these platforms, and perceptions of using these amid their transition to the remote working context.

3.6.2 Pilot Study

According to Lees et al. (2022), pilot studies serve two main functions within qualitative inquiry. The first is feasibility, where researchers conduct the research on a smaller scale to evaluate the process and trialling, to evaluate processes such as data collection and analysis methods (Lees et al., 2022). Malmqvist et al. (2019), state that pilot studies allow for pre-testing of a particular research instrument to identify whether questions or procedures require modification that do not provide the desired responses or elicit rich data. The aim of conducting pilot studies is to increase research quality by improving the reliability and validity of the study (Ismail, Kinchin & Edwards, 2018). The pilot study was conducted by interviewing one academic and one administrative staff member. The responses were analysed to ascertain whether the interview questions or the interview process required modification. The analysis of the pilot study interviews indicated that certain questions required revision to ensure the desired responses are elicited. The pilot study analysis also indicated gaps for additional questions to gain more insight from different perspectives.

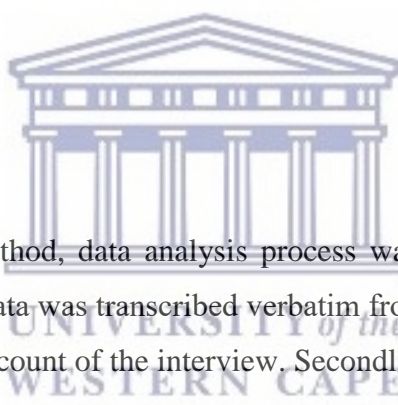
3.6.3 Data Collection Procedure

A systematic process was followed in data collection for the study. The researcher engaged in data collection upon ethical approval by the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics

Committee (HSSREC) as well as the selected tertiary institution to conduct research on their employees. Consent forms and information sheets were developed for circulation to the participants prior to the interviews. The consent forms and research information sheets were distributed to acknowledge their agreement to participate in the research study, and that they were aware of what the study entails, what would be expected of them as well what the information would be used for. During the interview, each participant was asked the same set of questions contained in the research interview guide with probing questions being asked at specific points where more information or detail was required. To record the interview, the record function was used on the selected online collaboration platform with the consent of the participant. After the interviews, the recordings were saved onto the researcher's computer in an encrypted file for subsequent transcription process. The list of questions can be found in Appendix A.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

3.7.1 Thematic analysis



In line with the qualitative method, data analysis process was conducted according to the following outline: Firstly, the data was transcribed verbatim from the respondents' recordings to produce a word-processed account of the interview. Secondly, the data was cleaned to omit any unrelated information which could have distorted the meaning of the information obtained. Thirdly, the data was coded and analysed. The transcript summaries and self-memos were used to capture salient ideas as the analysis progressed. Finally, the Thematic Analysis (TA) method was employed to interpret the data and generate themes related to identified patterns of core ideas or key concepts indicated by the data. According to Vasimoradi, Jones, Turunen and Snelgrove (2016), Thematic analysis can be defined as a technique to analyse textual data and elucidate a theme. The key feature is the systematic process of coding, examining of meaning and the provision of a description of the social reality through the creation of themes (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Thematic analysis has variations in its application and can be seen as a group of methods for interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). Reflexive thematic analysis was employed for this study. It is characterised by themes developed from codes and organised around a central conceptualised pattern of shared meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2021b). Themes

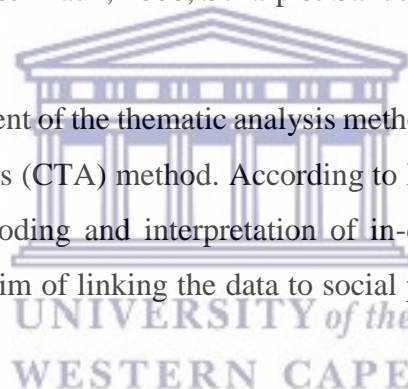
are developed through significant analytical and interpretative work done by the researcher and do not exist separate from the researcher, but rather are generated by the researcher through considerable data engagement (Braun & Clarke, 2021b). The reflexive thematic analysis process is further characterised by the coding process being unstructured and organic to allow for codes to develop by the researcher's increased insight and understanding of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021b).

Therefore, it involves coding the data to draw out patterns or themes in relation to the research question. Percy, Kostere and Kostere (2015), further state that the thematic analysis process involves analysing data as the data is collected with the generated themes changing as the analysis process unfolds until the final pattern and themes are determined. Clarke and Braun (2017) explicate that codes form the smallest units of analysis that capture salient features of the data which in turn, forms the building blocks for themes. Themes are the output for patterns of meaning which are underpinned by a core shared idea (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Kiger & Varpio, 2020). According to Kiger and Varpio (2020), themes can be identified as either semantic, which relates to overt or surface level meaning of the data, or latent, which encompasses deeper, underlying meanings, assumptions, or ideologies.

The usefulness of thematic analysis lies in its flexibility as it can be adapted across theoretical and epistemological frameworks, research questions, sample sizes, data collection methods and meaning generation approaches (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Thematic analysis can be used to identify patterns within and across data pertaining to participants' lived experience, behaviour, and practices to gain insight into what participants' think, feel, and do (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The early development of the thematic analysis method can be attributed to the work of Owen (1984) and describes the method as the lens through which everyday communication can be analysed. Owen (1984) presents three criteria for analysing texts namely, recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. Recurrence relates to salient interpretations or meaning being expressed without using the same words while repetition refers to the frequency of key words or phrases appearing within data. Forcefulness describes the importance or emphasis placed on ideas identified through language cues such as tone of voice, volume and terms used (Lawless & Chen, 2019).

However, Clark and Braun (2006), describe thematic analysis as a poorly demarcated, rarely acknowledged but widely used qualitative analytic method within the discipline of psychology. The authors outline six guidelines for conducting a thematic analysis namely, (1) familiarising yourself with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report (Clarke & Braun, 2006; Scharp & Sanders, 2019). The first aspect relates to familiarisation with the data involves transcribing data, reading the data, and noting down primary ideas. The second phase relates to generating initial codes involves coding salient features of the data across all available data and grouping the data according to each code. The third phase involves searching for themes where codes are collated into prospective themes and grouping all the data to the relevant theme. The fourth phase relates to reviewing themes where they correlate to the coded extracts and the dataset. The fifth phase involves defining and naming themes and creating specific names and clear definitions for each theme. The final phase is the production of the report where salient extracts are exemplified and analysed according to the developed research question and literature (Clarke & Braun, 2006; Scharp & Sanders, 2019).

For further scholarly development of the thematic analysis method, a case has been put forward for a Critical Thematic Analysis (CTA) method. According to Lawless and Chen (2019), this method can be used for the coding and interpretation of in-depth and detailed qualitative interview discourses with the aim of linking the data to social practices, power relations, and ideologies.



3.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND CREDIBILITY OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

When using the quantitative research method, the research rigour is evaluated according to the principles of reliability and validity ratings. These metrics do not hold for the qualitative method; therefore, a set of criteria is required to evaluate its rigour as a means of verification of the process. To this end, trustworthiness is the metric used to verify the rigour of the qualitative method. It represents a way in which the researcher can persuade and motivate that the research findings warrant attention (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). The notion of trustworthiness of qualitative research can be refined into the following criteria by Lincoln and Guba (1985) namely, credibility, transferability dependability and confirmability (Nowell et

al., 2017). Therefore, the criteria underpinning trustworthiness put forward the impact and usefulness of the research for various stakeholders. Noting the importance of this process, Amankwaa (2016) provides an account of protocols and activities for researchers to conduct to uphold trustworthiness, while Daniel (2018) puts forward a TACT framework for learning and understanding the trustworthiness criteria.

3.8.1 Credibility

Credibility is the equivalent of internal validity in quantitative research and is concerned with the matter of truth value of the research findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The credibility of the study will be ensured if the respondents' views are within the context and scope of the research being conducted. Techniques which the researcher can employ to ascertain credibility include engaging in peer debriefings to externally evaluate the research process and researcher triangulation which involves proofreading a final copy of the data and themes to validate whether the intended realities were captured for the purpose of the set study (Amankwaa, 2016; Daniel, 2018).



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3.8.2 Transferability

Transferability aligns with the concept of reliability in the quantitative method indicating that the findings in a particular context holds value in similar contexts (Daniel, 2018). To ensure transferability, detailed (thick) descriptions are required which can be achieved through developing interview questions that require detailed answers, interviewing in such a way to elicit thick, robust responses and to narratively describe the data, findings and phenomenon as detailed as possible (Amankwaa, 2016). To ensure that this can be done, the researcher provided detailed descriptions of the findings so that readers could determine the level of transferability with as much information available to them as possible. Transferability was accounted for by assessing the salient aspects gained in the data, according to the broader context framed by the literature and the significance of the study.

3.8.3 Dependability

Dependability or consistency refers to the research process being logical, traceable, and clearly documented (Nowell et al., 2017). Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that this criterion refers to evidence that the findings are consistent and could be repeated. Amankwaa (2016) indicates developing an audit trail and journaling as actions for achieving dependability. Auditing involves recording all decisions made during the research process for other researchers to understand how the study was undertaken and, the extent to which they can take away lessons from the process (Daniel, 2018).

3.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is the criterion concerned with the degree of neutrality (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This ensures that the interpretation of the data is not based on the preferences and viewpoints of the researcher but embedded in the data obtained (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Confirmability can then be seen as the achieved culmination of the criteria to confirm the trustworthiness of the study (Nowell et al., 2017). Confirmability was maintained for this study by ensuring that the interpretations and conclusions drawn were underpinned by the views of the respondents guided by the literature and context of the phenomenon being studied. A further demonstration of confirmability can be achieved through the researcher including motivations for using certain theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the study. This was done in the development of this study to provide an understanding of the decisions made in its undertaking.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics serve as an integral component of research that extends throughout the entire process from the selection of a research topic, data collection and analysis and finally, to the dissemination of the study results (Pietilä, Nurmi, Halkoaho & Kyngäs, 2020). The application of ethical principles is even more important when it comes to the management of complex human reactions and emotions that could be displayed during the interview process. However, it is important to take into consideration how COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown and social

distancing measures have impacted the way research is conducted. Therefore, Jowett (2020) suggests asking a participant whether interviewing them online would add any stress to them. This comes as most people are adapting to working remotely and the toll on an individual. Santana et al. (2021) commented on the sustainability of qualitative research during the global pandemic through accounting for the ethical considerations which include the physical and psychological challenges. The authors draw on the Belmont Report's three pillars of ethical research involving human subjects including, respect, beneficence, and justice (Yip, Han & Sing, 2016). These aspects formed the guiding principles for undertaking the study as they allude to the well-being of the participant and the researcher, promoting care and respect from person to person and finally, acting fairly towards all participants in a just and good faith manner as the researcher (Santana et al., 2021).

3.9.1 Respect for persons

Respect for persons involves two main assertions – the first being that individuals should be treated as autonomous agents, while the second asserts that individuals who do not have autonomy should be protected. Therefore, respect for persons requires acknowledgement of human agency and autonomy, and the requirement to protect individuals who have reduced levels of autonomy and agency (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research, 1979).

3.9.2 Beneficence

The concept of beneficence involves treating an individual in an ethical manner. When dealing with a human subject it requires the researcher to firstly, do not harm to the individual and secondly, to maximise all possible benefits for the individual (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research, 1979). The practical implications of this is to ensure that the research being conducted is beneficial to those participating and to broader society (Kinsinger, 2010).

3.9.3 Justice

The ethical principle of justice considers equal distribution between individuals according to either, their equal share, their respective needs, the individual efforts, the societal contribution, and according to their individual merit (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research, 1979).

3.9.4 Informed consent

This principle pertains to obtaining informed consent and ensuring that participation is voluntary (Recker, 2012). Participants should understand what is required of them and should be competent to consent through being able to comprehend what the research study is about and what is expected of them (Arifin, 2018). Therefore, in conducting the study, informed consent was obtained from the potential research subjects through providing written information on the study. They were made aware of the fact that their participation was voluntary and were free to withdraw at any stage. It was also emphasised that their information will be kept confidential which alludes to the next ethical principle.



3.9.5 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is concerned with the anonymity of the participants through not revealing their names and identity in the data collection and analysis process as well as in the reporting of findings (Arifin, 2018). Confidentiality also extends to the maintenance of privacy in all communications between the researcher and participants (Arifin, 2018). Confidentiality extended to the identity, information and responses of the participants and the information was not made available to any third party that did not have a direct contribution to the study. This was done through the transcription of the data being done in a private location away from unauthorised people. Data was stored on encrypted devices in a secure location that only the researcher had access to. Furthermore, the information and responses obtained was used for

the purpose of the undertaking of this study. The questions in the interview guide were constructed in simple, understandable English so that participants could gauge what was expected from them. The construction of the questions in the interview guide was free from bias and prejudice.

To ensure that the research study meets all ethical standards, ethics approval was sought from the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the University of the Western Cape (UWC). Once clearance was granted, the documentation permitting research being conducted was received. These documents also accompanied the information documents about the study when informed consent was sought. The forms are found in Appendix C.

3.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a detailed account of the research design and methodology underpinning the study. The chapter provided substantiation for the selected design and methodology employed in conducting the study. In addition, an explanation was provided for the research population and sample chosen for analysis as well as a discussion around ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative data to maintain its research rigour. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the data collection and analysis procedures and an account of ethical issues that require consideration when conducting research. In the next chapter, an account will be provided on the research findings.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents provides the findings of the study's research questions and objectives. It presents an account of the demographics of the research participants; their views on the research topic; and demonstrates the extent and context in which social media platforms were used for formal organisational communication. The findings also show the conditions under which social media was used to communicate for work purposes.

4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF RESPONDENTS

Respondent characteristics, although not part of the subject of the research, are critical data points. These characteristics may affect all parts of the cognitive response process (Olson et al., 2019). Education level and age of respondents are common indicators of cognitive abilities (Olson et al., 2019). Table 4.1 presents all the respondents' biographical information and further outlines the breakdown in terms of age category, job role and the university faculty in which the respondents work. The sample consisted of 90% female and 9% male.

Table 4.1: Characteristics of research participants

Respondents	Gender	Years' Experience	Age category (Years)	Role Classification	Faculty
1	F	22	61- 65	Academic	Economic and Management Sciences
2	M	9	41 – 45	Administrative	EMS Economic and Management Sciences
3	F	13	51 – 55	Administrative	Economic and Management Sciences

4	F	13	36 – 40	Academic	Economic and Management Sciences
5	F	15	36 – 40	Administrative	Arts
6	F	15	36 – 40	Administrative	Arts
7	F	9	31 – 35	Administrative	Economic and Management Sciences
8	F	3	41 - 45	Academic	Natural Science
9	F	20	36 – 40	Academic	Arts
10	F	10	41 - 45	Academic	Arts
11	F	6	36 – 40	Administrative	Economic and Management Sciences

M = Male; F = Female



4.3 THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

Four themes and various sub-themes emerged from each respondent's narrative. A theme refers to a central idea in a narrative while a sub-theme is regarded as a secondary related idea in a narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2021b). This section presents each of the four themes and sub-themes in relation to the overarching objectives set for the study as outlined in Chapter 1. The themes are organisational communication as a process; social media use; impact of social media use on organisational processes, and employee experience. Table 4.2 presents an overview of the themes and sub-themes based on the research findings.

The aim of the study was to examine how social media platforms were used to facilitate organisational communication by evaluating their efficacy through the views of administrative and academic staff in various faculties of a selected university. Linked to the main research aim, the overarching objectives for the study were as follows:

- To determine the motivations that administrative and academic staff have towards using social media in their organisation and the gratifications gained from facilitating the communication process.
- To determine whether social media usage proves more effective and efficient than traditional organisational communication methods.
- To determine the positive outcomes from the experiences of administrative and academic staff using social media platforms for organisational communication.
- To determine the negative outcomes from the experiences of administrative and academic staff using social media platforms for organisational communication.
- To determine the benefits and drawbacks of using social media platforms for organisational communication and as a tool for conducting work.
- To make recommendations on the suitability of using social media platforms for organisational communication.

Table 4.2: Themes and sub-themes of the study

Theme	Sub-theme
Organisational communication as a process	Communication with stakeholders Approaches to communication Value of communication
Social media use	Degree of use Reasons for use WhatsApp reliance Level of effectiveness User experience
Impact of social media use on organisational processes	Internal communication Organisational structure Organisational hierarchy
Employee experience	Remote work Behavioural adaptation Capacity building Boundary setting

4.4 ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION AS A PROCESS

This section discusses the first theme (organisational communication as a process) and its three sub-themes to explore respondents' perspectives. The first sub-theme deals with communication with stakeholders; while the second explores the direction of communication

within the organisational context, and the third explores the respondents' perspectives on the role of communication in the overall functioning of the organisation. This is significant to provide a foundational understanding on the subject under study based on the respondents' experiences.

4.4.1 Communication with stakeholders

The findings demonstrated that the respondents' communication network involved multiple stakeholders including students, colleagues, and other organisational staff. This sentiment was held by all the respondents in this study. In addition, respondents 5, 7, and 8 alluded to communication with external stakeholders including suppliers for events and other national and international stakeholders for collaboration purposes.

Respondent 3 stated:

"I give support related to student queries, student marks so I liaise with the academics one-on-one as well."

Respondent 6 similarly stated:

"I am a key person in the department, communicating with students and staff on a daily basis. I also set up meetings with students and staff via Google Meet and Zoom...."

The findings yielded another perspective on organisational communication where its reach may not only be internal but extend outside of the organisation as well.

Respondent 5 indicated:

"My colleagues, admin staff, academic staff, management, and sometimes external stakeholders. Part of my job is buying and events planning which involve external stakeholders."

Respondent 7 stated:

"As a Faculty Officer, I would need to communicate with various stakeholders – students, staff, external stakeholders as well."

Finally, Respondent 8 indicated:

"Daily engagement with students, with peers and fellow departmental staff. I communicate with other organisations both nationally and internationally."

The overarching perspective revealed by this sub-theme is that both administrative and academic staff communicate with multiple stakeholders including students, staff, and in certain departments, external stakeholders. This perspective alludes to the following sub-theme

“approaches to communication” where staff need to encode information based on their target audience.

4.4.2 Approaches to communication

This sub-theme was derived from literature namely, top-down, bottom-up and lateral flows of communication. Respondents indicated the dominant flow of information in the communication exchanges which were then explored. They all alluded to utilising a combination of approaches to communication within their respective job roles.

Respondent 1 stated:

“So, it’s both. I am what they call a line manager, so I communicate with the staff reporting to me, I communicate with the students, and I communicate with my line managers. So, it’s both bottom-up and top-down.”

Respondent 2 indicated:

“We will serve as a channel between the students and the various committees in terms of liaison.... In terms of the process and all the necessary things you do need to submit, I do end up communicating downwards and upwards as well because sometimes you must liaise with the Dean to get approvals and things like that. You have to liaise with the Faculty Manager, you have to liaise with the Chairpersons of the various committees so you would have to send information to them, and they would relay information to us and when I say us, I mean my colleagues, and then we would relay that information to the students.”

Respondent 7 indicated:

“I use all. For bottom-up, I would communicate to my line manager any matters that need management to be involved in, if a problem cannot be solved, or if we just need to catch up on our how matters are going within the portfolio. With top-down, I would communicate to administrators what to do, what processes to follow, when submitting things to faculty, or to make sure all marks are captured correctly and laterally, we would communicate with each

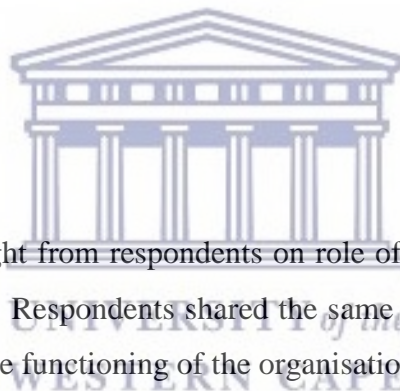
other to help improve one another, and work across faculties, as we share programmes so to make sure matters are done on time and that documentation is signed.”

Finally, Respondent 8 indicated:

“There are elements of all of those. We work in smaller teams, with team specific discussions which we feed into bigger meetings with the rest of the team. I guess there is an element of top down when things come from the university management that needs to be filtered down. Within our department, there are elements of all of those.”

From the respondents’ experiences in their respective job roles, the perspective held is that the communication they participate in reaches multiple levels of stakeholders within the organisation. The respondents highlighted that recipients of the information are situated within a specific level of the organisation ranging from student level through to university management.

4.4.3 Value of communication



Finally, perspectives were sought from respondents on role of communication in the overall functioning of the organisation. Respondents shared the same sentiment that communication serves as a key component to the functioning of the organisation.

Respondent 8 stated:

“Organisational communication is key to the successful running of any organisation whether it’s top down or bottom up. Effective communication is vital for the successful functioning of all levels within the organisation.”

Respondent 10 similarly stated:

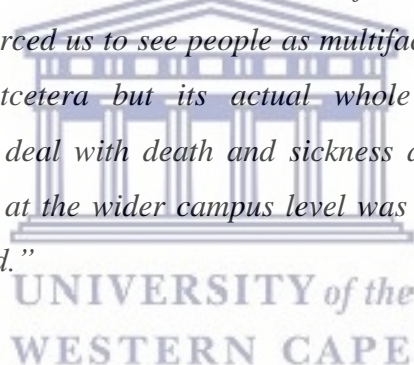
“We could not function without it during COVID-19. We all had to find better ways to communicate.”

Elaborating on the role of communication, respondent 9 gave a detailed account of communicating with students and colleagues remotely during the COVID-19 period, and the role it played in ensuring continuity of the academic project. The continuation of

communication allowed individuals to be perceived in a new way that was not experienced before.

Respondent 9 stated:

“Well, I have to say the students became a lot more - because the communication was on their phones rather than on their laptops via email. I think the relationship you know the formality of the relationship between the lecturers and the students, the lecturers and their colleagues decreased rapidly so there was a lot more rapid communication and more informal communication - and I think that was good because actually a lot of students felt isolated, a lot of colleagues felt completely out of it because they were dealing with COVID ... so I think it was beneficial to some degree because students felt that we actually cared because we were more in contact with them and we relaxed our attitude towards etiquette a lot because we understood that they didn't know and that they were under their own immense pressure because we had students whose parents and grandparents were dying all the time so we took on a sort of social therapeutic role which wasn't the case before. I think it's very important and COVID was good because it forced us to see people as multifaceted and not just see them as colleagues and academics etcetera but its actual whole people with children and responsibilities and having to deal with death and sickness and fear. So, I think that the organisational communication at the wider campus level was more positively affected than what we would have anticipated.”



Furthermore, respondents alluded to the role of communication in the day-to-day operations of the organisation. This relates to keeping employees informed, and its influence on organisational processes.

Respondent 7 indicated:

“It's important because it keeps staff informed of new processes and due dates.”

Respondent 5 supported respondent 7's sentiments stating:

“I get very frustrated when your main means of communication is social media and people do not respond. I would experience bottle necks with my process because of people not responding.”

A view held in the minority but nonetheless noteworthy was that by respondent 2 who noted that while it plays a key role for information sharing, POPIA legislation restricts the type of the information that can be shared.

Respondent 2 stated:

“... now with the POPIA Act you can't even put a list up anymore so you ... cannot disclose that kind of information to the students ... so a lot of things have changed for various reasons because of POPIA and a few other things. So, communication has become quite a key role and how you communicate has become a key role.”

Finally, the sub-theme “value of communication” showed that respondents regarded organisational communication as important in terms of the overall functioning of the organisation. The influence of legislation on the organisational communication process was raised as it governs the kind of information that can be communicated. Examples of such legislation include Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013 (POPIA) and the Cyber Crimes Act 19 of 2020.

This section gave an overview of the respondents' perspective on the impact of organisational communication on the functioning of the organisation. Responses by both administrative and academic staff illustrate that they not only communicate with a broad network of internal and external stakeholders, but also employ multiple approaches of communication (top-down, bottom-up, and lateral) within their respective job roles.

The second theme (social media use) and its five subsequent sub-themes of degree of use, reasons for use, WhatsApp reliance, level of effectiveness, and user experience, will be discussed next. It demonstrates university administrative and academic staff's experience of engagement with social media platforms, provides insight into their motivations for use of these platforms, and what they get out of engaging with these, respectively.

4.5 SOCIAL MEDIA USE

This section outlines the findings of the second main theme – social media use and its five sub-themes degree of use; reasons for use; WhatsApp reliance; level of effectiveness; and user

experience. This theme and sub-themes relate to the findings of the respondents' experiences in engaging with social media platforms and their associated areas of application.

4.5.1 Degree of use

This sub-theme captured the respondents' social media usage rates. A large majority of respondents (1, 2, 4, 5,6,7, 8, 10, and 11) reported that the time spent on social media increased compared to the COVID-19 lockdown period. Respondents 3 and 9 reported an overall decrease in their personal social media usage rates. However, all respondents attributed the increased time spent on social media platforms for work-related activities. And respondent 9 observed that WhatsApp was hardly used before the COVID-19 pandemic but is now widely used to communicate with academic tutors among others.

Respondent 7 illustrated the increased use of social media for organisational communication and how this has resulted in their job role evolving to include interaction on various platforms. The respondent stated that:

“Personally, I would only use it in the evening or on weekends when I have time, but now the social media role has been assigned to me, so I will have more interactions. We use Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Tiktok so I spend about an hour a day on these platforms.”

Respondent 6 further indicated that their increased use of social media particularly WhatsApp, was influenced by the fact that most staff and students utilise it to make calls and send messages. Where individuals are not accessible via a contact number, Facebook was used to connect with the department.

Respondent 6 indicated:

“It definitely increased particularly on WhatsApp. Most staff and students use that platform to make calls and send messages, so yes, it has increased especially with some students on Facebook. When contact numbers are not available, then students would use messenger on Facebook. I have been using these platforms more than previously including Zoom and Google Meet platforms.”

Similarly, respondent 2 also reported an increased use in social media for work and supported the perspective held by respondent 6 regarding the use of WhatsApp:

“Since WhatsApp calls have come in, we are spending a lot of time on WhatsApp call. Most of the staff are working remotely and to make normal calls from cell phone to cell phone is very expensive whereas the university provides students and staff with free data at university, so you end up calling”

The findings attribute the increased social media usage to remote working and the need to remain accessible and connected with relevant stakeholders as discussed earlier.

4.5.2 Reasons for use

One of the key features of social media is its ability to create user generated content for dissemination within the social network of the platform. Therefore, it affords users the ability to serve as a communication channel. The findings indicated two main perspectives - use of social media platforms that helped respondents communicate more effectively, and assisting respondents to carry out tasks in their daily lives. All respondents indicated that they use social media platforms to communicate effectively. Respondent 1 indicated using WhatsApp to share information and notify others of activities that need to be done. The platform is also used for crisis communication to relay urgent information. The respondent sums their use of social media platforms as a follow-up tool for information sharing, sending notifications and reminders.

Respondent 1 indicated:

“Definitely for notifications so if we have to get a report ready or if something happens. So definitely also to inform if something happens and there’s a crisis. Also for meetings - sometimes we had WhatsApp meetings because we are a small team. When I want to remind staff - if I am waiting for comments from staff, I use it as a reminder function. WhatsApp became one of our meeting tools, and email correspondence reminders. After a big meeting and we want to discuss something or take something further then we would discuss further on WhatsApp or if we got assigned something to do we would talk about it on WhatsApp.”

Respondent 2 shared a similar view that the use of social media platforms assists them to communicate more effectively by utilising the feature of broadcast messaging to reach large audiences to coordinate plans and activities.

Respondent 2 indicated:

“In terms of WhatsApp we have like in most social activities - we like a group of fellow colleagues - maybe friends so we’ve got this group going. So Friday’s there’s practice and Saturday’s there’s matches taking place or things that we need to organise and things like that so we would then indulge in WhatsApp because like I said you can’t just pick up the phone and phone everyone you know - so in the WhatsApp you send out a message and say guys who’s all available to pick up Jared from Mitchell’s Plain for this Saturday or whatever and somebody would respond and say okay who’s bringing the water and things like that so in there we communicate a lot.”

Linked to the perspective of communicating more effectively, respondent 3 indicated their use of social media platforms as an easy way to communicate with others as it proved to be quick and cost effective. Respondent 4 uses social media to stay connected with others and to share content like photos, memes and posting content for work. Respondent 5 links both perspectives of effective communication and conducting tasks. The respondent indicated using social media for obtaining information and sharing documents on WhatsApp groups. The respondent also reported using social media as a stakeholder management tool to track progress and manage external stakeholders.

Respondent 5 indicated:

“With events, I would need people’s dietary or transport requirements. I found it much easier to share a document with the participants. You would receive instant information instead of sending emails. I create WhatsApp groups as a means of instant communication since I found that people take forever with emails. On a WhatsApp group or even with Telegram, people will react more effectively.”

Respondent 6 shared a similar view of using social media for work purposes as they do not engage with it in their personal capacity. Respondent 7 also uses social media for information sharing, communication, and content creation. The respondent cited quick turnaround and

response rate on WhatsApp for work purposes. Google Meet and Zoom platforms are used for the face-to-face engagement, meetings and webinars.

Respondent 8 supported respondent 7's sentiments on using social media platforms for maintaining contact and sharing information through WhatsApp groups and Facebook. Respondents 9, 10, and 11 shared similar perspectives regarding staying connected and updated in their personal and professional capacities.

This sub-theme (reasons for use) puts forward the motivations for using social media platforms. The responses can be synthesised as social and pragmatic motivations. Social motivations included staying connected with others and using social media as a means of communication to create and share content. Pragmatic reasons included using it as a tool to get work done, and as a follow-up tool or for information sharing purposes. The responses showed that some platforms were used more than others which will be discussed in the following sub-theme.

4.5.3 WhatsApp reliance

This sub-theme is considered salient as it is one social media platform frequently mentioned by most respondents. An interesting perspective revealed by the narratives was that although no specific reference was made to WhatsApp in the interview questions, respondents referred to the platform when speaking broadly about social media platforms. This is indicative of the prevalence of WhatsApp amongst the sample under study. From a professional perspective, it plays a key role in how respondents structure and carry out their work.

For example, respondents reported using WhatsApp as a follow-up mechanism to remind colleagues or management to respond to emails (Respondent 1, 2, 7, 10).

Respondent 7 stated:

“Ok. So, specifically WhatsApp. To me it's more for things that should happen immediately. If you WhatsApp me, I will look at it immediately and will action it immediately. WhatsApp is more like for urgent matters. Also, if you WhatsApp for help it's a great idea.”

Other responses indicate varied use of the features of WhatsApp which help facilitate work related processes. For example, five respondents (1, 2, 3, 5, 10) reported using the WhatsApp

call and group call function to have team meetings or follow-up discussions post large formal meetings.

Respondent 10 indicated:

“Pre-COVID I hardly used WhatsApp, so it was minimal. With lockdown, boundaries became blurred. I have WhatsApp groups for my tutors ... To make work easier because we are at home. Let’s say if we had instructions, I would post it on Ikamva and waiting for them to respond. Going to WhatsApp, things were done faster.”

Another perspective provided was that WhatsApp was used to communicate with students by either private messaging or through WhatsApp groups (Respondents 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10).

Respondent 6 indicated:

“It definitely increased, especially on WhatsApp. Most staff and students use that platform to make calls and send messages.”

Similarly, all respondents indicated using WhatsApp to chat, and share information with colleagues and management either through private messaging or via WhatsApp groups. Some indicated that communicating via WhatsApp proved a useful way of bypassing email inboxes (Respondents 3, 5, 7, 9).

Respondent 3 stated:

“I would say my WhatsApp communication is much more – that is much more with my colleagues, and more all-round... I think everyone is on WhatsApp so it’s just quicker. Everyone seems to respond quicker on WhatsApp and take longer to respond on email so if they don’t answer my email then I will say please check my email.”

The findings thus indicated that although WhatsApp is not regarded formally as an institutional mode of communication, it plays a key role in how both academic and administrative staff conduct their work. The findings indicate that the use of WhatsApp helps facilitate organisational communication to get work done, have meetings, exchange information, and continue the academic project as part of teaching and learning processes.

4.5.4 Level of effectiveness

In terms of the subject under study, the significance thereof is whether the use of social media platforms for organisational communication proves more effective compared to traditional methods of organisational communication. This sub-theme explores the findings that emerged from the respondents' narratives relating to their experience of the level of effectiveness using social media platforms as modes of organisational communication.

All the respondents had positive reports on the level of effectiveness when communicating via social media platforms as opposed to solely using traditional forms of organisational communication.

Respondent 1 stated:

“As I indicated, I think it is more effective because you get quicker turnaround times and response times. More people are also more accessible and easier to reach.”

Respondent 10 provided another perspective stating:

“They are useful – it’s something that I intend on continuing. For example, supervising master’s student and PhD students. When we are there, we might see them once in a while. When I become available on a platform, they tend to work better because they can ask questions and show me work that they have done or quickly ask for a consultation. We agree on a time at once on WhatsApp. It is quite effective in getting things done quicker.”

Respondents 4, 8 and 9 commented on the social aspect of communicating with colleagues at work.

Respondent 4 indicated:

“I think the hybrid format is effective for working with my colleagues”

Respondent 8 said:

“I think it has some advantages over the conventional methods of communication especially if there are time constraints. To some extent, people tend to talk more than what they do in person. We are a big department and half of the people we do not have communication with but when engaging with the online group, they talk.”

Respondent 9 added:

“Absolutely, I think it’s so much more effective because it opens up another avenue for understanding our identity in relation to others ... so I think there’s a whole other world out there that you cannot possibly access using emails.”

Respondents 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 11 shared similar sentiments of increased communication effectiveness through social media platforms. Areas where effectiveness was experienced included feedback, response times, sociability, and completing tasks.

Another area of effectiveness probed was to explore how the individual features of the respective social media platforms were used to streamline individual work processes. Examples of social media platform features include chat functions, video calling, group calling, attaching documents to chats and voice notes.

Respondents 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, and 11, confirmed using the chat function to send and receive messages related to work processes. Respondents 2, 5, 9, 10 and 11 found using voice notes valuable in their work processes. For example, respondents 2 and 5 used voice notes to communicate privately with a colleague, and with an academic while overseas, respectively. From another perspective, respondents 9 and 10 use voice notes to liaise with students when communicating instructions and dealing with student queries.

Another feature of social media is the ability to attach and share documents within online conversations. Respondents 3, 9, and 10 indicated utilising this feature to disseminate information as an alternative to sending via email.

Respondent 11 highlighted making use of all the functions of social media platforms and summarises similar sentiments held by other respondents:

“All of the above assist me in engaging more effectively with my fellow colleagues. It definitely makes the response time quicker than the traditional email. Having a smart phone assists in the process as you can access basically anything at any time.”

Problem solving is another key area of work that requires communication. Thus, the effectiveness of the medium through which it is communicated is explored. The findings indicated common positions held in the approach to problem solving. The findings indicated that if problems are not of a serious nature and require a quick answer, using WhatsApp would be sufficient. However, if the problem is more complex, then documenting it on email would be more appropriate for it to be solved. Respondents referred to the requirement of a paper trail which is served by email an official organisational mode of communication. For example, respondent 9 would address a problem in its initial stages via voice notes on WhatsApp but would then instruct the student to record the problem and subsequent engagement on email for organisational compliance. Respondents 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 10 indicated a similar approach to

problem solving. In the minority, respondents 9 and 11 indicated a preference for using social media platforms for solving problems as these are checked more frequently and allow for better access to information.

This sub-theme indicated an overall positive response to the levels of effectiveness experienced using social media platforms as an alternative to traditional methods. The areas of impact were on communication, work processes, sociability, and problem solving. The following sub-theme on user experience looks at the benefits and drawbacks of using social media platforms for organisational communication from an overall user experience perspective.

4.5.5 User experience

The use of social media platforms may be regarded as something new to both university academic and administrative staff. Thus, this sub-theme captures the views of respondents regarding their lived experience of engaging with social media platforms for work-related purposes. The findings cover four aspects. The first aspect considers the context of the COVID-19 lockdown period in terms of the organisational communication platforms that were introduced to continue operations of the organisation. All respondents indicated that apart from the resources available such as email and the internal learning management system, Google Meet and Zoom were introduced to continue operations. These platforms were used for facilitating lectures, staff meetings, webinars, seminars, and consultation with students. Although not through an official directive, the findings indicate that WhatsApp was utilised.

Respondent 8 stated:

“Ikamva (internal online learning management system) was a big thing. The functionality of Ikamva was problematic for big groups e.g. the Big Blue Button did not work so well. I resorted to making PowerPoint slide recordings which were uploaded to Ikamva. In addition, Google Meet was employed which turned out to be easier for the students to use...Smaller classes were done on Zoom since group size is limited to about 100. Google Meet was used for departmental communication as well as emails and WhatsApp... Email is primarily used but for quick responses social platforms provided convenience.”

However, respondents 3 and 5 reported that no directive was given on platforms to use for remote work, and it was left to them to navigate an appropriate approach and continue working. The second aspect focuses on the social media platforms used by respondents in their daily work routine. Apart from the existing communication methods namely, email and the internal learning management system, most respondents (1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11) indicated using the same combination of social media platforms - WhatsApp, Zoom, and Google Meet, while 5 and 8 used a combination of WhatsApp and Google Meet. Furthermore, respondents 4, 6 and 7 indicated the use of Facebook in their job roles as well.

Respondent 4 stated:

“During 2020, I started a Facebook page for my module, for students. It was mainly personal and to a lesser extent with my students.”

Respondent 6 stated:

“... It has increased with some students on Facebook. When contact numbers are not available, then students would use Messenger (Facebook chat platform).”

The findings show that a similar approach of using a combination of platforms was employed for organisational communication across the faculties and departments under study.

The third aspect focuses on benefits experienced from using social media platforms for organisational communication at work. Respondents 1, 2, and 3 outlined the benefits of using social media platforms such as being cost-effective, familiar to others, quick way of exchanging information, making and receiving calls, and scheduling time with others and the ability to join meetings from anywhere.

Respondent 1 stated:

“The fact that its inexpensive, people are used to it, you get responses instantly and, you can have a chat communication going on WhatsApp so as soon as you ask a question or make a suggestion, the person responds... Even with Google Meet, if you want to schedule a meeting you don't have to drive to campus and wait, I can quickly send a WhatsApp and say can we please meet for 30mins, and the person will say yes...In that sense it's easier and quicker.”

Respondent 3 stated:

“It is an easy way to communicate, it's quick and cost effective and that's what it's there for...”

Respondent 6 experienced benefits of streamlined communication, and sharing information quickly. Some of the benefits experienced by respondents 7, 8, and 10 included faster completion of processes and recipients being more responsive.

Respondent 8 highlighted an additional benefit of social media in enhancing morale, celebrating achievements, thus capitalising on the ability to share information with others. Respondent 9 shared the same view, adding that social media enabled flexibility and allowed people to be viewed as multifaceted, which also served as a morale booster by letting others feel supported.

Finally, the fourth aspect focuses on the drawbacks or negative experiences attached to using social media platforms for organisational communication. Salient experiences highlighted in the respondents' narratives included it being time consuming (respondents 6, 8, 11), the impact of connectivity issues on working effectively (respondents 1, 6, 7), difficulty in creating a balance between work and home life because students and colleagues communicate anytime during the day (respondents 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11), without observing boundaries.

Respondent 8 indicated:

“In a way, it created more work and in some cases was more time consuming. There were times when I felt overwhelmed and I wished I could just switch my phone off to be left alone for a while. At times I actually just switched my phone off.”

Respondent 11 indicated:

“Just a lot of my time being impacted as there seems to be no boundary especially from students on when they could communicate with you and expect a response.”

This sub-theme provided an account of the respondents' overall user experience on using social media platforms for work purposes. Most respondents received directives from the organisation regarding the platforms that would be made available to continue working. The respondents implemented their preferred combination of social media platforms to use in their respective job roles. The lived experience of respondents indicated both benefits and drawbacks of using social media platforms at work. Respondents found social media to be cost effective, it could reach a huge number of recipients, provided flexibility, and enabled them to send and receive information quickly. Salient drawbacks of using social media platforms for work were that it was time consuming because of the extra work required, delays in completion of tasks because of connectivity issues, and lack of clear boundaries between work and home life due to ease of accessibility. Both staff and students expected responses to their issue regardless of the time of day.

Both positive and negative aspects of social media may have a potential impact on the flow of information through a department's organisational structure and hierarchy. These aspects are addressed in the following theme below.

4.6 IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ORGANISATIONAL PROCESSES

Another salient theme which emerged from the respondents' narratives was the impact of social media on organisational processes. Its three sub-themes of internal communication, organisational structure, and organisational hierarchy will be discussed below:

4.6.1 Internal communication

Internal communication emphasises the flow of information within the organisation. It is therefore important to consider the potential impact of social media platforms to the overall functioning of the organisation. The sub-theme considers the findings from the respondents' narratives relating to internal communication in terms of the subject under study.

The findings revealed that most respondents (1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11) found it easier to reach their colleagues via a social media platform.

Respondent 4 indicated:

"It made it easier to reach them. The flip side of the coin was that it was easier for them to reach me as well. There was no balance with home and work hours. On the one hand, it made it easier to reach people but on the flip side people could contact you at unreasonable hours."

Respondent 8 added:

"Easier, I think. It definitely made it easier because people could choose not to answer their emails. I think more people have their emails on their phones. The WhatsApp group thing ... I did not have my colleagues on my phone before COVID. It sped up the flow of information."

Finally, respondent 11 indicated:

"It made them easier to reach, the experience was positive."

Most respondents reported that some of their colleagues were difficult to reach because they were not on social media and had to communicate with them via email, leading to longer response times. According to respondent 5, it was harder to reach colleagues as they took longer

to respond to emails resulting in more pressure to meet deadlines. Respondent 6 similarly reported challenges in reaching staff who were not on social media, and had to schedule in-person meetings to complete tasks.

Thus far, respondents provided insight into their experience of reaching out to their colleagues, with an overall positive user experience in this regard. This section contemplates the flow of information within respondents' respective departments.

Most of the respondents (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11) agreed that social media platforms improved the flow of information within their departments. Respondent 5 observed that before Google Meet and Zoom, meetings and duties were communicated via email and staff only came to the office once or twice a week, but through social media platforms, all staff were available for meetings.

Respondent 5 stated:

“Yes. With emails when we need to perform certain duties and it comes from our HOD, he will copy in everybody. Everyone will receive the email at the same time. When we were at the office, some staff would come in maybe only twice a week, and he had to call a staff meeting to get everyone at the office at the same time. With a Google Meet or Zoom and even an email, 99% of the time everybody is there and available.”

Respondent 6 also noted improvements in internal communication, sharing that colleagues have learnt to understand working from home and how to communicate with their staff. This has resulted in staff meetings being scheduled once every three months instead of monthly as previously done.

Respondent 6 indicated:

“I think communication is better. I think people have learnt to understand this working from home and how to communicate with their staff. Where we had staff meetings every month, it is now scheduled for every three months.”

Similarly, respondent 9 reported a positive influence on internal communication stating that information is channeled directly to their departmental group chat with a standing arrangement that meetings will continue virtually to adopt the blended communication approach.

Respondent 9 indicated:

“I think it’s much more effective now to be honest with you because now we go straight to the group chat where before people would say let me pop in by this office, now you have to wait and see when is this person here - now we have explicitly agreed in our staff meetings that we are going to keep the blended communication approach so we’re still going to having all our meetings online. So next year, I’m actually coming in as HOD next year and I’m allowing everyone to log in virtually if they want but I will be on campus in the boardroom and anyone who’s there can meet with us, so we still keep that flexibility for our colleagues because not everyone wants to drive in for an hour you know”.

In summary, this sub-theme highlighted the impact of social media platform-based communication within faculty departments. Two aspects were focused on, being able reach colleagues at work and the smooth flow of information within departments. In relation to both aspects, the majority of respondents stated that they found it easier to reach their colleagues through social media, which improved the flow of internal information.

The following sub-theme explores the impact of social media on organisational communication in relation to the organisational structure.

4.6.2 Organisational structure



Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, work was structured around physical presence in an office environment five days a week. This meant staff had to be in their respective offices and not as accessible as might have been needed. This sub-theme discusses the findings on the impact of social media platforms on the organisational structure.

Most respondents reported the positive impact of social media platforms on organisational structure. They added that while the organisational structure was maintained, the added benefit staff accessibility. According to respondents 1, 2, 3, 7 and 11, the organisational structure within their department was maintained when communicating remotely because reporting lines were still in place.

Respondent 7 stated:

“A tricky one. Hierarchy is going to be there no matter what in all honesty because of the governance structure the University has. So you have to follow process with certain things.

Hierarchy you can't take away...It depends on the type of person. There are those who will respond quickly and then those who won't. Then you have to understand whether you can send a WhatsApp – for example I deal with certain academics who when I send an email to now will take two to three weeks to respond. And if it was urgent ... That is the just type of person that they are.”

Additionally, respondent 11 noted that although there was limited impact on the structure itself, the lines of communication opened more.

Respondent 11 stated:

“It has had limited impact. We all still keep the lines of communication open. Even though we do not see each other physically, we still have set meets to be kept in the loop.”

This is a view held by other respondents 5, 8, 9, and 10, who reported that staff were more accessible and contactable online through social media than through traditional communication methods. Respondent 10 highlighted that the social distance in terms of status and relationship, was positively reduced because the key people they needed to communicate with were accessible on social media. The respondent held that they engaged with other staff in a way they would not have done had they been physically present in the office environment.

Respondent 10 stated:

“I would say it did – I will share my experience with you. The administrators in our Faculty who I see when I go to the office – when I had to see the manager or the Dean, I had to go to their offices but now I have them on WhatsApp. I would usually only see them in meetings or when I urgently needed something. It limited communication and by having them on WhatsApp – during COVID I learnt more about their roles. The social distance gap in terms of status and relationship has been positively reduced in way to get things done. I interacted with them effectively in a way I wouldn't have if I was on campus. She trained me to do a review process as she was stepping down...The communication became flexible in a way we couldn't do at campus.”

Respondent 8 held a similar view indicating that staff were more contactable and accessible via social media, adding that they had access to the Dean of Faculty on social media as well.

Respondents 5 and 9 substantiated these views adding that staff who were only contactable via formal communication modes were more difficult to engage with than those available on social

media. However, respondents 4 and 6 shared negative impact of social media to the organisational structure. Respondent 4 indicated that the combination of social media-based communication and remote work resulted in leadership being less engaging and visible in their department while respondent 6 held that the shift in communication mode resulted in more responsibility and workload in their respective job role.

The findings indicate that overall, communicating via social media platforms has a positive impact on the organisational structure, with staff more accessible and contactable. The next sub-theme outlines the impact of social media platform use for organisational communication on the chain of command.

4.6.3 Organisational hierarchy

This sub-theme explores the impact of social media platform-based communication on the overall internal chain of command. It seeks to understand whether reporting lines may be blurred when moving organisational communication to an online format.

All respondents reported that there were no changes to the organisational hierarchy and that reporting lines and structure were maintained. Some respondents noted improved effectiveness in the overall functioning of the hierarchy.

Respondent 1 indicated:

“I would not say so. I feel like it has remained the same because the staff still knows who’s the line manager and who’s in control, so when I communicate with my line management or the management of the faculty, I don’t think it made an impact or difference anyway, not for me. I know when I communicate it’s professional so even on those platforms, I would not go by first name or especially when I communicate with management. Even when I communicate with my staff, they call me Prof and don’t call me by my name – so I think it didn’t change the way we communicate in our unit.”

Respondents 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 11 also reported that there were no fundamental changes to the organisational hierarchy.

Respondent 5 commented on the effective functioning of the hierarchy:

“Yes, definitely. Sometimes I get the sense that management is still trying to control things. I think working remotely not any of us can be micromanaged. This almost three years of working remotely has proven that we do not have to be micromanaged. The outputs have become more effective and efficient.”

Respondent 10 also highlighted improvements in the functioning of the organisational hierarchy:

“I would say it did in a positive way. It is still there but more effective functioning of the hierarchy helped during COVID. With the Chairperson in my department, it was easy to reach them instead of email.”

Similarly, respondent 9 also observed improved staff efficiency.

This sub-theme revealed that organisational hierarchy, level of professionalism and reporting lines were not negatively impacted by use of social media platforms for organisational communication.

4.7 EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

This section discusses the final main theme of employee experience. According to respondents' narratives, remote working and use of social media platforms required some adjustment. Four emerging sub-themes relating to respondents' lived experiences will be discussed, and these are: remote work, behavioural adaptation, capacity building, and boundary setting.

4.7.1 Remote work

This sub-theme outlines the experience of academic and administrative staff in transitioning to remote working. Although most respondents (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11) found the change to remote working challenging, they reported its benefits as well. Remote work challenges included increased work-load, working longer hours, struggling to separate work and home life, resource constraints, and childcare.

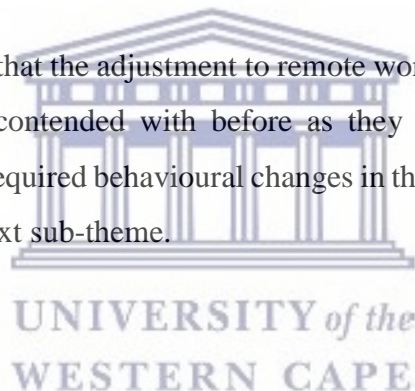
According to respondent 1, the abrupt transition to remote working was challenging during the initial stages because of the uncertainty of the situation. While this resulted in increased workload, the respondent reported flexibility as an added benefit, a view shared by respondents 6, 8 and 10. On the other hand, respondents 2, 6, and 7 reported challenges of separating work and home life, and preferred the office environment.

Although respondent 4 found the transition to remote work not challenging, the separation between work and home life, especially childcare, presented its own problems. For respondents 3 and 5, their transition to remote work was challenging because of lack of clear directive or plan on how work should be structured in the new environment. However, once the structure was in place, they were able to continue working.

Another challenge reported by respondents 3, 6, and 10 was lack of adequate resources such as computer equipment and office supplies required for work.

For respondent 11, it was the rate at which one had to adapt and equip themselves with new knowledge that they found stressful and challenging.

The overall perspective held is that the adjustment to remote work proved challenging because it brought new demands not contended with before as they tried to continue working in uncertain circumstances. This required behavioural changes in their lifestyle and work routines, which forms the basis of the next sub-theme.



4.7.2 Behavioural adaptation

This sub-theme considered the adaptations made by respondents to perform their duties effectively while working remotely.

The findings indicated two main behavioural changes where some respondents were (1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, and 11) reported working longer hours and at night to maintain their work routine; and others (5, 6, 7, and 10) focused on structure and time management.

Related to the first aspect of working longer hours and working at night,

Respondent 4 reported that:

“It was difficult to do my work during the day since I had my daughter with me. Sometimes I would work at night when she was asleep. My meetings and online classes I would schedule

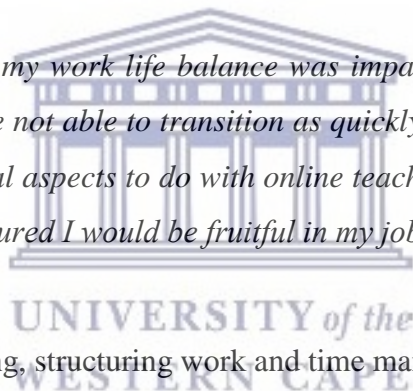
when someone could keep her entertained. I had to record my lectures after hours. People were also understanding when my daughter joined during the meetings which made it easier to not consider working from home a problem.”

Respondent 9 added that:

“Yip, so I started working at 4:30 every morning until 6:00. 6:00 my daughter gets up and we do the school run till 8:00. 8:00 till 9:00 I have a coffee with my husband and then at 9:00, I start officially with whatever. But emails people get that from me at 4:30 in the morning because that’s the time I’m up. I slowly because of a lack of sleep - I moved to 5:00 to 6:00 so I still have that same routine. So that’s an extreme way that I had to modify my behaviour otherwise there was no way I was going to cope with all the work and I took on a new position as Chair of one of the biggest committees on our campus so that required more time management from me and I had to speak to my husband and he had to take on more responsibility at home with the kids so that I could work.”

Respondent 11 asserted:

“I had to work a lot more, so my work life balance was impacted. I also had to be patient especially with others that were not able to transition as quickly or easily. I also had to learn more about online and technical aspects to do with online teaching and learning and various other tools that would have ensured I would be fruitful in my job”.



On the second aspect of planning, structuring work and time management, respondents 5, 6, 7, and 10 provided various perspectives on adapting their behaviour and said the following:

Respondent 6:

“I set my alarm with the aim to stick to my working hours. Checking emails was part of starting the day to assess whether there were any urgent requirements. I had to remind people of things that were previously sent out e.g., timetables, exam question papers and deadlines. We had staff WhatsApp group which I also used to send reminders. I have a small board at home which I used to highlight weekly things to be done.”

Respondent 7 indicated:

“Just about time management, knowing that’s the time you make food, that’s the time you do washing, that’s the time you do washing for example. At the time, I was also studying so at night it was study time. So, you had to make changes and time-management to balance out each of it. So, behaviour to me was more about time management and sacrifice obviously.

Can't just go out and do these things because we had deadlines whether it was work or study related. It still boils down to time management."

Respondent 10 stated:

"It had to be structured. I had to figure out times for lectures, tuts and admin. I took the same structure and changed the platform. I had to discipline myself. When I wake up in the morning, I checked my emails. I was fully accessible on email and social media that would burden my timetable."

The above perspectives demonstrate that behavioural changes were required for respondents to manage their work routines as they transitioned from the office environment to remote working. The respondents highlighted that they had to work longer hours to contend with an increased workload. In addition, they shared how they had to be deliberate about planning to ensure they fulfilled their duties and responsibilities of their respective job roles.

The next sub-theme focuses on the degree to which respondents were capacitated to deal with the change of communicating via social media platforms at work.

4.7.3 Capacity building



This sub-theme was identified as a salient idea as the level of capacity building or training undertaken is an important aspect to consider when exploring the level of effectiveness gained from using social media platforms for organisational communication. It also considers the degree to which competencies were developed as an output from undergoing capacity building. According to respondents 1, 3, 4, 6 and 10, internal training was made available for staff to learn about the social media platforms introduced by the organisation. Respondent 1 indicated that the training sessions aimed at learning about the Google Suite, specifically Google Meet.

Respondent 1 indicated:

"Both CIECT and the library offer nice training workshops for Zoom and Google Meet so we went for those and I am still going... and they focus a lot on Google. So the last time they showed us breakout room sessions and the chat and stuff like that for our lectures on Google."

Training was focused on using the platforms to ensure they are as interactive as possible for users. Respondent 3 asserted that internal training was available when needed and would utilise

it when necessary. Similarly, respondent 4 made use of online learning courses when the need arose for a specific skill.

Respondent 4 indicated:

“I joined courses that were offered on E-learning. Prior to COVID, I attended a lot of these sessions. They were offered free and often. I do not think that during COVID I required training. When encountering something I needed assistance with I would contact E-learning. I selectively attended training courses depending on what I needed to learn. So training sessions were freely available.”

Both respondents 6 and 10 indicated participating in training specifically related to Google Meet and Zoom with focus on navigating the platforms and understanding their various functions.

Respondents 2, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 11 indicated that although they did not make use of the internal training provided, they engaged in self-teaching through experiential learning. They added that they navigated the platforms using resources such as Google and YouTube and asked colleagues for on-the-job tips related to using the respective platforms. According to respondent 2, no rigorous training was needed as they were familiar with IT and therefore, learnt from others and made use of YouTube. Respondent 7 similarly used a self-taught approach and ultimately developed resources as training material for other staff.

Respondent 8 emphasised the information sharing aspect between colleagues and asserted that they utilised more experienced colleagues’ tacit and institutional knowledge to navigate the respective platforms in conjunction with YouTube as a resource.

Respondent 8 indicated:

“We had to decide on our own. Everyone was testing their own little thing. I think it was worse in other departments. One of our lecturers was using YouTube videos...Since Ikamva and YouTube worked well for this lecturer, he would share his experiences with everybody which turned out to be helpful. Information sharing amongst colleagues helped a lot because some older colleagues may be considered technophobes and their knowledge and experience turned out to be an advantage to the department.”

Respondents 9 and 11 shared similar views of learning about the functionalities of the various platforms by themselves as the need arose.

The next aspect linked to this sub-theme was to explore whether the respective capacity building activity resulted in respondents using the platforms effectively. The majority of respondents confirmed that their chosen learning approach was beneficial as it enabled them to use various platforms effectively.

The final aspect identified within this sub-theme was the notion of the acquisition or development of competencies within respondents' professional roles. All respondents indicated that they learnt new skills on using various social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Google Meet and Zoom. Their responses showed that the new skills changed their approach to job tasks. For example, respondent 2 previously using a recorder for capturing minutes and now uses an online meeting recording for the same purpose. Another example is respondent 3's account of utilising WhatsApp group calls for team meetings and discussions.

This sub-theme demonstrated that respondents had the same aim to become competent in using the social media platforms and employed various approaches to achieve it. Both formal and experiential learning approaches yielded sentiments that respondents got the most effective use of the platforms. The capacity building initiatives proved effective as respondents acquired new skills and technical competency.



4.7.4 Boundary setting

The final sub-theme identified was the boundaries for working hours. This sub-theme is important to explore as it links to the challenges of work life balance and the notion of separation of work and home life within the remote working context. The use of social media platforms also suggests that boundaries have been blurred in accessing people during and outside working hours. Hence, this sub-theme is significant to explore as it contributes to the overall level of satisfaction derived from using social media platforms for organisational communication.

Most respondents (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11) indicated that they have a flexible approach to setting boundaries and that the determining factor was the urgency or seriousness of the situation. In instances where issues are not serious, feedback would be deferred to the following

day. However, if the situation was serious or additional tasks needed to be done, these would be accommodated. The substantiating factor mentioned by respondents was open lines of communication and effective relationships with colleagues and line managers.

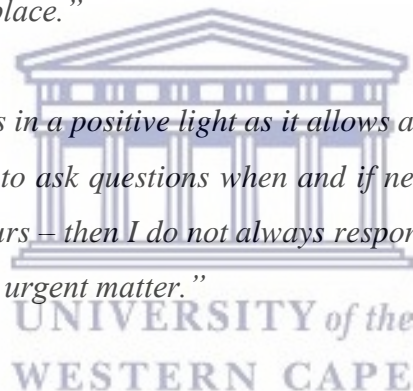
The respondents' overarching view is the flexibility of work boundaries. They maintained that open lines of communication including on social media, and a clear understanding of the urgency of issues assisted them to maintain flexibility in boundary setting.

Respondent 6 indicated:

"I do not mind doing extra work or going the extra mile for staff or students. I think they found that they could communicate with me any time of day. That however stopped this year since I left a message on the group stating what working hours apply and requesting that they would first send a message before calling. If I do not take a call it creates the impression that I am the bad one. This year I made it clear what my working hours are and any emails sent after that will be responded to by the next day. I spoke to my line manager about it and he was ok with the arrangements puts in place."

Respondent 11 indicated:

"Yes, it has. However, I see this in a positive light as it allows an open flow of communication and also allows me to be able to ask questions when and if needed. But, I do draw the line, especially if it is after work hours – then I do not always respond immediately but wait for an appropriate time unless it is an urgent matter."



4.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the various responses regarding the use of social media platforms for formal organisational communication.

Based on the objectives set for the study, four main themes were identified namely: organisational communication as a process, social media use, the impact of social media on organisational processes, and employee experience.

The sub-themes underpinning organisational communication as a process revealed that it served a key role in both academic and administrative staff's roles. It also indicated that both categories of staff communicate with multiple internal and external stakeholders and

acknowledged the key role played by organisational communication in the overall functioning of the organisation.

The sub-themes linked to social media use theme showed that both academic and administrative staff spent more time on social media platforms for work related tasks. The data also indicated that the social media platform WhatsApp, was used extensively across the departments under study. Both academic and administrative staff experienced increased effectiveness and efficiency in the internal work processes because of the introduction of social media platforms. Although social media platforms yielded positive results, some expressed concern that it was time consuming and created additional layers of work.

In accounting for the organisational processes, the study found that the use of social media platforms for organisational communication had a positive impact on the flow of information related to internal departmental communication. Furthermore, allaying fears of the formality of social media platforms, the study found that no significant impact was made to the organisational structure and hierarchy of the departments included in this study.

Finally, the context of this study was grounded in the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown period and therefore, it was significant to gain insight into the experiences of both academic and administrative staff. The findings of the study showed that most respondents found the transition to remote working challenging for various reasons. Both academic and administrative staff had to make behavioural changes to their work routines to maintain the same structure as the office environment. The salient aspects were increased workload, and working longer hours and at night, to cope with demands of their respective roles.

Along with behavioural adaptations, the study found that both academic and administrative staff underwent some form of capacity building. The study found that respondents either made use of internal training initiatives or upskilled themselves using the internet and on-the-job learning to gain insight into the new communication platforms. These methods proved sufficient respondents reported developing new skills in the process.

The final sub-theme showed that both academic and administrative staff used their discretion for requests outside of working hours, thus managing boundaries.

The following chapter will provide an interpretation of the findings, discussion of the recommendations, limitations of the study, and concluding remarks.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a discussion of the research findings according to the research objectives defined in chapter one. Discussion of findings refers to the stage in the research process where interpretations are made from the analysed data. According to Kothari (2004), interpretation involves the task of drawing inferences from the collected data after an analytical or experimental study. Interpretation is significant because it puts forward the usefulness and utility of the research findings (Kothari, 2004). This study explored the use of social media platforms for organisational communication through the lived experiences of administrative and academic staff. Against the backdrop of the surveyed literature, this chapter is presented in four main sections. The first section provides an account of the research findings related to the respondents' perspectives on organisational communication as a process. The second section discusses findings around the use of social media, while the third section addresses its impact on organisational processes. The fourth and final section addresses the findings related to the overall employee experience regarding the subject under study. Following this, the chapter presents an account of limitations identified in conducting the respective study. The chapter ends with recommendations and concluding remarks.

5.2 DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.2.1 Organisational communication as a process

The first point of departure was to gain perspectives of the function of organisational communication in the respective job roles of university administrative staff and academics. Furthermore, perspectives were sought on the value of organisational communication related to the overall functioning of the organisation. The findings indicated that both administrative and academic staff exchange information with a broad range of internal and external

stakeholders. This view agrees with Belasen and Belasen (2019)'s description of organisational communication as a facilitator of collaboration, trust and commitment among employees, internal and external stakeholders. Furthermore, towards understanding the communication networks of administrative and academic staff, it was found that they utilise top-down, bottom-up and lateral forms of organisational communication. The perspectives relayed agree with the assertions made regarding the flow of communication by Lunenberg (2010); Robbins et al. (2016); Wrench (2012); and John (2018). Examples provided by academics and administrative staff of top-down communication includes from line management down to other staff and from academics and administrative staff to students and/or academic tutors. The intent of these communication is reflective of the assertions made by Wrench (2012) and Robbins et al. (2016), that downward information flows from one organisational level to a lower level with the intent of information sharing such as goals, instructions, providing feedback, and providing reasons for why certain decisions are made.

Related to bottom-up or upward communication, the perspectives provided by the research respondents agree with Wrench's (2012) characterisation that the intent of such communication is to get input from a superior within the organisation or to provide them with feedback on progress related to projects or processes. Finally, the findings indicated that lateral communication was also utilised to relay information and coordinate tasks between individuals of the same level in the organisation including subordinates, supervisors, and line managers (Lunenberg, 2010; Robbins et al., 2016; John, 2018). This was reflected by respondents as academics communicating with their colleagues or fellow academics regarding teaching and learning activities. Similarly, administrative staff communicate with one another to coordinate tasks, conduct processes, and share information. The insights provided echoes Zito et al. (2021)'s view of communication within an organisation as a complex network of communicative habits which constitute the organisation. This idea proves salient as the operations of the university moved to remote mode with business continuing, nonetheless.

The value of communication to administrative and academic staff was also explored. The findings revealed that communication within the organisation was a critical component towards the continuity of the academic project from both a pedagogical and operational perspective. The context of the study highlights Matias and Cardoso's (2019) assertion that a well-designed communication provides ground for the necessary technical and psychological conditions

during working hours through keeping employees appropriately informed. Therefore, the findings indicate that communication in the organisational context is a critical component to the continued functioning of the organisation as it coordinates behaviours towards achieving the organisation's goals (Kuhn & Kopczynski, 2019). The findings related to the use of social media in the context of communication as a process links to the assertion of the Uses and Gratification theory that the use of media is goal-directed. This means that users of media know what information they are looking for and how to obtain it.

5.2.2 Social media use

The study yielded five distinct perspectives related to the use of social media. The first aspect is degree of use. Fais (2022) asserts social media use as being one of the most common web-based activities with its use set to increase to 3.4 billion users by 2023. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, perspectives were sought from respondents as to whether their use of social media increased compared to pre-COVID times. The findings showed an increase in use by all respondents. This view is supported in the literature as Yu et al. (2022) found that COVID-19 had a behavioural impact on people's attitudes towards social media use and its associated practices.

The next aspect the study sought to gain insight into are the reasons for social media use. As described by Saura et al. (2022), gaining insight into online user behaviour and user-generated content is important for understanding issues like people's digital actions, their opinions, and their user experience. The study highlighted that social media is used as a channel to communicate more effectively as it was described as cost effective and efficient. Additional reasons for use include sharing information, content creation and sharing, connecting with others, and work related purposes. Wong et al. (2021) characterises the various uses through the description of social media as being interactive technologies which facilitate the creation or sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. The findings show that the various uses of social media empower individuals to have more influence and impact in how they interact with one another in society (Carlsson & Weibull, 2018; Yan, 2021). In addition, it demonstrates the ability of individuals

to create content and exchange it for information and knowledge sharing amongst one another in a cost-effective manner (Lutkevich & Wigmore, 2021; Lin & Wang, 2020).

Although data was collected on various social media platforms used by respondents in the study, WhatsApp was a salient platform. Although regarded as an informal channel of organisational communication, there was no formal directive from the organisation regarding its use but rather used in the individual's self-interest and their socio-characteristic within the organisation (Daniel & Eze, 2016; Saleem & Perveen, 2017). The use of WhatsApp included sending text messaging to colleagues and students, exchanging content such as images and voice notes, and sharing information through group chats and calls with both students and team members. The study revealed that the use of WhatsApp proved to be a useful follow-up tool within teams, and an effective communication tool for information sharing, providing updates and issuing reminders. These insights echo assessments conducted and studied the use of WhatsApp groups within the practice of teaching and learning (Baishya & Maheshwari, 2019), the impact of WhatsApp use on workplace performance (Terkan & Celebi, 2020), and the use of WhatsApp as a channel for team negotiation and decision-making (Omar, Azmi, & Sani, 2020). The research findings of the research participants reveal that even though the organisation had not formally recognised WhatsApp as an official organisational communication platform, because people are familiar with it in their individual capacities, they gravitated towards using it for organisational communication purposes.

The third aspect identified in the study findings was the level of effectiveness for using social media for organisational communication at work. The level of effectiveness experienced is benchmarked against the traditional methods of organisational communication such as email, memos, and traditional telephone calls (Robbins et al., 2016). Findings from both academic and administrative staff reported that internal and external stakeholders were easier to reach through social media platforms and staff also reported quicker response and turnaround times which improved efficiency in their work processes. When exploring the individual features of social media used to streamline work processes, it was found that using chats, attachments, voice notes, group chats, group calls, and image sharing all contributed to streamlining work. This agrees with van Osch et al. (2020)'s assessment that social media capabilities supported communication-based processes such as interaction, collaboration, and co-creation. The study

revealed an overall positive response in the level of effectiveness achieved from using social media for organisational communication.

The final aspect explored to understand the effectiveness of social media platforms was its suitability as a problem-solving channel. The study found that due to compliance and governance conditions, email remains as the official method to communicate and resolve work-related issues. However, the overarching perspective is that problems which require quick solutions are best dealt with via a social media platform given the quicker response and turnaround times. Cilliers et al. (2017) support this finding stating that from a work perspective, academic staff utilise social media for both communication and problem-solving purposes.

Based on the various needs that users of media seek to gratify as outlined by Blumler, Katz, and Guarevitch (1974) in their Uses and Gratifications Theory, the findings related to social media use indicate that academic and administrative staff use social media to gratify their cognitive needs related to obtaining information as well as their personal integrative needs which relates to need to socialise with others.

When considering the behavioural uses of social media outlined by Treem and Leonardi (2012), being able to communicate with colleagues and students to facilitate operational and teaching and learning processes more effectively speaks to the first use of visibility, which refers to the ability to make visible to others, knowledge, preferences, behaviours, and communication network connections in the organisation. This is compared to email which offers low visibility (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Related to the second use, is Editability which refers to being able to revise a communicative act prior to being viewed by others. And the findings showed academic and administrative staff being able to create posts to send to students and fellow staff on platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp before dissemination. The next use reflected by the study findings relates to Persistence, which is the ability for conversations to continue for long periods of time after the initial communication has been sent (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). This is illustrated by the reported use of social media chats and group chats where information is shared and updated on a continuous basis. The final use outlined by Treem & Leonardi (2012) is Association, which is the ability to establish connections between individuals and content is found in the research findings. Associations can be made between

owners of content on social media and the recipients, such as the interactions between academics and students, and line managers and staff on WhatsApp groups, for example. These people can associate receiving or sending certain types of content with a given individual on the respective social media platform.

Gigauri (2020) maintains that the function of social media platforms in organisations and their role in the shift to remote digitisation need has to be considered to understand its impact on employees and organisational communication processes. Therefore, the final aspect explored under this theme is the overall user experience of administrative and academic staff in terms of their lived experiences in the workplace conducting work and communicative acts via social media platforms. The links made between the research findings and Treem and Leonardi (2012)'s framework for understanding the behavioural uses of social media is significant because as Chen et al. (2021) state, social media platforms continue to be embedded into organisational activities resulting in changes to employee communication, collaboration, business models, organisational structures, and day-to-day work routines.

The study found that the platforms made available to university administrative and academic staff included the use of email, its internal learning management system as well as the introduction of Zoom and Google Meet to continue operations. However, over and above this, administrative and academic staff mainly use WhatsApp, Zoom and Google Meet with individual responses including the use of Facebook. These platforms made it possible for university staff to continue working virtually (Hacker et al., 2020; Karl et al., 2021). The positive user experiences extracted from the study included social media being a quick and cost-effective method of communication, the ability to obtain instant responses and the introduction of flexibility in how and from where they communicate at work. This finding is in line with Yeomans and Fitzpatrick (2017)'s view that social media platforms act as catalysts for co-creation, collaboration, and community within organisations as staff positively engaged with social media platforms to continue operations virtually. In contrast, the negative experiences mainly centred around connectivity issues, lack of boundaries, the time-consuming nature of social media and load shedding which impacts work. This finding relates to Liu and He (2021)'s characterisation of social media fatigue which can be attributed to information overload, social overload, and lack of privacy. These negative experiences can be remedied by putting boundaries in place and regulating the use of social media intentionally to mitigate

fatigue, self-esteem, and overall psychological wellbeing (de Wet & Koekemoer, 2016; Schivinski et al., 2020).

5.2.3 Impact of Social Media Use On Organisational Processes

The study sought to explore the perceived impact on organisational processes from three aspects: internal communication, organisational structure, and organisational hierarchy. The study found that using social media platforms improved the internal communication process. This is attributed to the fact that staff members were easier to reach and the flow of information within the department structure was improved leading to more effective communication and work outputs. This finding speaks to the premise of internal communication which de Vries et al. (2020), state is the dissemination of information among employees. The study also revealed that the organisational structure was positively impacted as staff members along the chain of command became more accessible and contactable compared to the pre-pandemic office environment. According to the findings, formal reporting lines and management structure remained in place and were not affected by the introduction of social media platforms. Accounting for organisational hierarchy, the study revealed no fundamental changes and improvements were noticed in the effectiveness of its functioning within the broader organisation. These findings agree with Billinger and Workiewicz (2019) who argue that advancements in technology are influencing traditional hierarchies to make changes to their designs to allow for more autonomy in how work is done. As illustrated in this study, autonomy extends to being able to reach out to the necessary internal or external stakeholders which may not have been possible before.

5.2.4 Employee Experience

The final theme identified in this study sheds light on the overall employee experience. The transition to remote working was a large-scale experiment in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as organisations needed to find a way to continue doing business. The perspectives gained from the study showed that the transition to remote working proved challenging because of increased workload and working hours, disparities between home and work life as well as resource constraints. According to du Plessis et al. (2022), the transition to remote working

was exacerbated by the fact that change was introduced rapidly in line with the emergency remote teaching, learning, and working arrangements. de Wet (2016) supports the finding related to disparities between work and home life stating that ICTs like social media, had a negative impact on work-life interaction by creating a work style of always being connected. Furthermore, the challenges experienced regarding increased workloads and long working hours by administrative and academic staff are highlighted as challenges facing the HEI sector (Ramayah & Kumar, 2020; Flynn & Noonan, 2020).

To contend with the increased job demands placed on academic and administrative staff, adaptations were required to maintain the set pace of work. Behavioural changes reported included working longer hours and working at night. In addition, more rigorous planning was required to create structure and time management was prioritised to cope. Administrative staff were required to also make themselves available online. Their key challenges included adapting to the virtual office environment, developing their own plans to meet work demands, and stress due to frequent meetings (Wilson, 2020; Kotera, 2022; Sutapa et al., 2022). In the case of academics, the finding is supported by Mthethwa and Luthuli (2021) that they were accessible through online platforms outside of conventional working hours.

The introduction of the social media platforms into operations of the organisation required capacity building for both administrative and academic staff. Two approaches of capacity building were done through formal internal training and experiential learning through individuals teaching themselves. The study found that although two different approaches were used, staff reported satisfaction from the social media platforms of choice. Furthermore, the study found that both administrative and academic staff acquired new skills in their job roles related to digital competency as they adopted social media platforms for use in their job roles (Murire & Cilliers, 2017; Wilson, 2020).

The final aspect explored was the setting of boundaries. The study found that both administrative and academic staff exercise their discretion and flexibility in setting boundaries as remote working and the use of social media platforms allows for working flexible hours. However, due to concerns expressed around lack of separation between work and home life, and subsequent impact on work-life interaction, the maintenance of boundaries and the avoidance of dysregulated usage of social media could assist for their effective use (Schivinski

et al. 2020). This is because excessive use has been reported to have an impact on individual behaviour and wellbeing (Chukwuere & Chukwuere, 2017). The findings related to employee experience support the assertion made by the Uses and Gratifications

5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although the research was conducted in line with its aims and objectives, some limitations were identified.

The interviews were initially designed to be face-to-face conversations but due to the COVID-19 social distancing protocols implemented in South Africa at the time, social media platforms such as Zoom, and Google Meet were used to conduct the interviews. Due to constraints related to electricity supply in the country and connectivity issues, interviews had to be rescheduled impacting on the researcher's timelines.

Another limitation was data collection. Consistent with the COVID-19 regulations in place, approaching individuals to participate in the study was also impacted. This meant that there was limited access to participants as they were mostly approachable via email only. The response rate to emails determined who the researcher could enrol as participants to the study. Hence, the Convenience Sampling method was utilised related to those available to the researcher at the respective point in time. Approaching participants in this way negatively impacted on the accessibility to participants and the working timelines of the researcher.

Related to the research method used, some limitations of the qualitative research method exist. The first limitation identified relates to the sample size. This study employed the qualitative research method. As opposed to the quantitative research method where the sample size may be used to draw broad conclusions and generalisations on the suitability of the use of social media platforms for organisational communication, the sample size underpinning this study is insufficient to do so. The second limitation pertains to the quality of the research questions and interpretation. All research questions posed to respondents and the interpretation thereof are subjective. Consequently, the researcher in certain instances had to ask additional probing questions to understand the respondents' particular perspectives. The final limitation identified in this study is bias. Respondents may have felt compelled to give responses they thought

would satisfy the interviewer rather than their genuine experiences or feelings. This may have a negative impact on the research findings.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and in line with the conclusions drawn from the study, the following recommendations were made:

5.4.1 Recommendations for future research

The first recommendation for future research would be to have a larger sample size for improved yields of rich data to gain further understanding of the use of social media and the role of organisational communication in the higher education sector. Secondly, to mitigate the impact of bias which forms part of the subjective nature of the qualitative research method, a mixed-method approach combining both qualitative and quantitative methods could be employed. This will allow for further improved rigour in the data collection and analysis process which will in turn improve the quality of the responses obtained.

Thirdly, although the present study was conducted at a selected university in the Western Cape province, the scope of the study could be increased to allow for further perspectives across the higher education sector in terms of how social media may be employed for organisational communication at other universities. Furthermore, alternative approaches to how organisational communication is undertaken may be revealed. Furthermore, other categories of staff could be included in the sample size to be able to make generalised inferences on the study findings.

Another consideration for future research, due to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent restrictions, a longitudinal study could be employed to gauge the impact of the use of social media for organisational communication in the long-term. Finally, the same approach could be employed to assess the quality of responses obtained and the response rate achieved without the hinderance of the COVID-19 pandemic related restrictions

which hindered access to potential participants and the length of time spent with research participants.

5.4.2. Recommendations to the organisation

According to Nisar et al., (2019), the uptake of social media use within society has formally and informally permeated organisations which creates challenges and opportunities as it integrates into the organisational landscape over time. In the context of remote working, there is a need for further research on social media to understand its value to the organisation so that its capabilities can be understood and applied in the appropriate organisational applications. A longitudinal study together with focus groups would add value towards understanding the impact to the organisation over a prolonged period of use.

There is a need for the Higher Education Sector to assess the strategic value of organisational communication in relation to their organisational strategies citing the insights provided by the COVID-19 pandemic period. The pandemic emphasised the critical nature of communication with internal and external stakeholders which in the higher education spotlight highlighted the adaptability of communication approaches (Calonge et al., 2021). The findings of the study indicate that firstly, the critical importance of communicating with university stakeholders via social media. Secondly, the study finds that communicating complex issues to diverse audiences is proving to be more complex (Calonge et al., 2021).

There is a need for the organisation to conduct a review of its communications policy to reflect the current practices of the organisation from a stakeholder communication perspective. Furthermore, there is a need for a defined social media policy as it would assist in the regulation of its use in the organisational context to provide safe parameters to use the platforms to their full capability. Ter Hoeven and van Zoonen (2023) highlights the importance of communication control in that it assists in using technology for communication in an effective way and facilitates helping behaviour and work engagement, respectively. With this in mind, communications policies are important as they provide a framework for how the organisation engages with its stakeholders. In relation to university department effectiveness, there should be a department level effectiveness survey done to gain insight into the level of efficiency being

experienced within the respective faculty departments. This is important as different university departments vary in their ability to convert inputs into outputs which impact their overall performance (Tauer et al., 2007). Finally, due to similar social media platforms being used in different departments across the organisation, from a process driven perspective, it would be useful to develop communities of practice within departments and document those practices gaining the most effective use out of social media platforms in the workplace. This would aid in further understanding the suitability of social media platforms for organisational communication. This could be shared with other departments across the university from a best practice perspective to create an evidence-based business case for its continued use (Brown, 2020).

5.5 CONCLUSION

This study has produced insights into the suitability of the use of social media platforms for organisational communication at a university in the Western Cape. Through conducting a thematic analysis of narratives from the respondents, several themes, and subthemes emerged. The research themes include organisational communication as a process; social media use; impact of social media use on organisational processes; and employee experience.

The study explored the respondents' views on organisational communication in relation to their roles and the broader functioning of the organisation which revealed three subthemes. The first theme is that university administrative and academic staff communicate with a range of internal and external stakeholders. The second identified that both administrative and academic staff employ a combination of approaches to direct their communications including top-down, bottom-up, and lateral. It was also highlighted that communication is a valued component in terms of the overall effective functioning of the organisation.

The study concluded that although social media platforms are not recognised as official channels of organisational communication, it may seem that there is merit to their inclusion as recognised platforms for organisational communication. Based on the study conducted, the results reveal that some of the factors which impact the use of social media for organisational

context also highlight other challenges faced by administrative and academic staff at the organisation under study.

The study conducted sheds light on the critical role of communication within the organisation and the technologies used to achieve effective communication with both internal and external stakeholders. The research indicates that social media has played a key role in achieving this effectiveness. The context of higher education and higher education institutions has highlighted the key function of sound communication approaches and processes in the continuation of the academic project during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. It will be useful to further research the implications of the changes made during this period in terms of the overall organisational behaviour of the higher education institution going forward.



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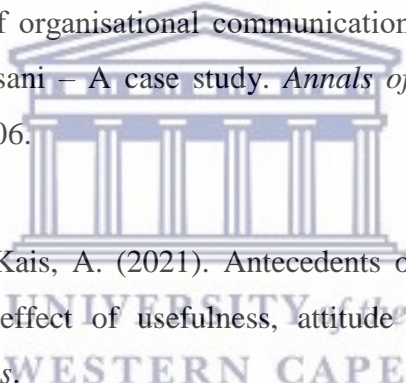
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