



Hacettepe University Graduate School Of Social Sciences

Department of Communication Sciences

Cultural Studies and Media Program

**THE EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE BY UNIVERSITY
STUDENTS IN BULAWAYO FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES**

Tafadzwa MUSEKIWA

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2020

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ABSTRACT

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It is beyond any reasonable doubt that the introduction of social media, has impacted immensely on the lives of the university students. Realizing that most of today`s university students spend much of their time on various social media platforms, several universities (especially in the developed countries) have embraced social media in their education system. However, it must be pointed out that the same cannot be said in most developing countries such as my country, Zimbabwe because very little has been done by the universities in ensuring that students fully benefit from social media usage academically. Therefore, this research study explored how the university students at one of Zimbabwe`s universities, NUST make use of social media for their academic purposes. Essentially, the thesis outlined and discussed the benefits and challenges that the NUST students face in their social media usage for academic purposes as well as offered some recommendations aimed at addressing this matter. The target population for this research study was mainly the NUST students who were randomly selected regardless of their sex, age, social status or faculty. The methods used in the collection of data were questionnaire surveys and interviews (qualitative methods). A total of 285 NUST students participated in the questionnaire surveys and 7 educators were interviewed. The research findings showed that indeed the NUST students were aware of social media existence and usage for academic purposes. However, the current economic crisis in Zimbabwe and poor ICT infrastructure were among the main challenges that hindered the NUST students from fully benefiting from social media academically. On the other hand, the findings also established that there were benefits gained from using social media for academic purposes which included; easy sharing of information, collaborative learning and improvement of the students` digital and communication skills.

Key Words:

NUST students, social media, academic purposes, digital skills, social networking sites, facilitator, distractor.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NUST	: National University of Science and Technology
UZ	: University of Zimbabwe
IUB	: Islamia University of Bahawalpur
UCT	: University of Cape Town
UCLES	: University Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate
ZIMSEC	: Zimbabwe School Examination Council
ZGCE-O	: Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education Ordinary level
ECD	: Early Childhood Development
MBBS	: Medicinae Baccalaureus Baccalaureus Chirurgiae (Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery)
CEIT	: Computer Education and Instructional Technology
ICT	: Information and Communication Technologies
SNS	: Social Networking Sites
UGT	: Uses and Gratifications Theory
STUH	: Student Technology Use Hierarchical
RBM	: Room Bound Male
MOOC	: Massive Open Online Course
VLE	: Virtual Learning Environment
DIY	: Do It Yourself
YTB	: Yurt Dışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı
UNESCO	: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
CBD	: Central Business District
IRC	: Internet Relay Chats
SMT	: Social Media Technologies
DVD	: Digital Video Disc/Digital Versatile Disc
CD	: Compact Disc

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INTRODUCTION

Before an attempt is made at trying to explore social media and academic purposes (which is what this thesis is all about), it is of paramount importance to first of all give a quick synopsis of new media in general because it is new media that brought about social media. To begin with, in ancient times, before the advent of new media, it is well known that people relied mainly on face to face conversations as a way of conveying or sharing information (Dijk, 2006, p.156). As such, this meant that, a person had to be at a particular place physically in order for them to get information. This scenario was popularly explained by one of the important figures of Sociology, Anthony Giddens (1991) in his famous concept of “time-space distantiation”. However, with the passage of time, this outdated and time-consuming way of communication began to witness some changes, thanks to the introduction of various new media platforms. In other words, modern societies now rely heavily on these new media platforms to get or share information and as a result, it is no longer necessary to be at a particular place physically so as to get information. As such, scholars such as Cairncoss (2001) have summed up how people in modern societies communicate by coming up with a concept called “death of distance” and others such as Castells (1996) came up with “timeless time”. These two previously mentioned concepts prove to one that the world is becoming a “global village” and as Mulgan (1997) points it out, “The world may never have been freer, but it has also never been so interdependent and interconnected” (p.1). As a result, prior concepts such as “time-space distantiation” are becoming irrelevant especially as far as the new media landscape in the developed countries is concerned.

Therefore, in relation to the 21st century university students, new media (particularly social media) has played a pivotal role in making their academic lives easier and simpler compared to their predecessors who had

to do it the hard way because during those times social media hadn't burst into the scenes. Generally, young people (university students included) are the main users of social media and this is also the reason that made me to embark on this research study as a way of exploring what it is about social media which makes the youth to be obsessed about it. As such, the first chapter of this thesis will discuss in detail how my academic journey, personal experiences and the widespread of social media influenced me into embarking on this research study.

CHAPTER 1: MY ACADEMIC JOURNEY AND RESEARCH RATIONALE

I have always been interested in the Media Studies and social media in general since high school, thus, I decided to embark on a social media related topic. I graduated from an Australian university, Monash University with a bachelor's degree in Criminology and Media & Communication (double major). However, realizing that social media has become ingrained in the people's lives (especially, the young people's, which I am also part of) worldwide, I then decided and felt obliged to venture into a research study involving social media which has become a trending issue across the globe. Therefore, in order to conduct my research study on this subject I needed to further my education by at least doing a master's degree in the field of Media Studies. However, the only stumbling block to my dream was undoubtedly the bad economic situation in Zimbabwe which meant that my parents wouldn't be able to pay for the exorbitant university fees. Nonetheless, I did not give up on my dream, I continued applying for master's Scholarships and fortunately, I was awarded one in Turkey (YTB Scholarships) to study at Hacettepe University in 2016. I was given a master's degree scholarship in the field of Cultural Studies and Media, which also offered me a chance to study in accordance with my interest.

Basically, the general assumption is that most university students use social media mainly for interaction and entertainment purposes. That is, there isn't much research studies about social media being used for academic purposes, especially in the developing countries (Zimbabwe in particular). Therefore, since I am also a university student, thus I wanted to come up with a research study focusing on my fellow university colleagues in Zimbabwe, Bulawayo to be precise (my home city) and explore how the students use social media for their academic purposes, rather than focusing on unproductive social media activities, for example,

entertainment which won't benefit the students academically. Additionally, I also wanted to understand better the impact or what social media really means to them as far as using it for their academic purposes is concerned. Last but not least, I also wanted to get a clear understanding of the challenges they face thereof. Personally, I have never done my tertiary education in Zimbabwe, it has always been outside Zimbabwe and I can actually count myself very lucky because at the universities that I attended, the education system was more modernized and with brilliant ICT resources that make education enjoyable. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about my fellow colleagues who attended their tertiary education in Zimbabwe. What struck me most is that, even up to now, I still have friends at various universities in Zimbabwe who still find it difficult to access the internet so as to conduct their research or do their assignments. As a result, I still receive messages from friends in Zimbabwe who want me to help them with their assignments since they know that I am at a university where internet access and general access to electronic academic materials is not a problem. All this and other touching stories on how difficult tertiary education life is in Zimbabwe for the majority of the university students, also prompted me to carry out a research study on this subject because I didn't want to assume or to be told how tough the situation is in Zimbabwe, thus I needed to have first-hand information by being physically present on the ground.

Therefore, the main focus of my thesis is the experiences of the university students in Zimbabwe, Bulawayo to be precise, which is the second largest city and where I originate from. I will also unpack how these students make use of social media for academic purposes as well as outline the benefits and challenges that students face in their usage of social media in that regard. Unfortunately, it must be pointed out that Bulawayo has one major local university, National University of Science and Technology (NUST). Other universities found in Bulawayo such as Solusi University and Lupane State University are not originally from Bulawayo, they have their

headquarters outside Bulawayo and for that reason, they don't fit my categorization of Bulawayo universities. To avoid research confusion, dilemma and doubt on which university is originally from Bulawayo and which one is not, I will solely focus on National University of Science and Technology which is undeniable an original Bulawayo university.

NUST was founded in 1991 and it is the second largest and most popular university in Zimbabwe after the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) which is located in the capital city, Harare. NUST students are not limited to the local ones (Bulawayo) alone, other students come from cities outside Bulawayo and it must be pointed out also that NUST has a considerable number of foreign or international students (students from outside Zimbabwe). Since the research study is all about exploration, thus qualitative research techniques were implored in the data collection and the whole process until the findings of the research study will be explained in detail later during the course of the thesis.

1.1 SOCIAL MEDIA, DIGITAL CULTURE AND ACADEMIC PURPOSE

Having discussed briefly how my academic journey influenced me into coming up with this research study, I will now discuss how social media has impacted the lives of the youths (especially their academic lives), led to digital culture and what I mean by academic purpose. As mentioned already above, social media is one key element of new media and it is undeniable that we are currently living in the information age or age of technology whereby the majority of people spend the bulk of their time on social media technologies (SMT) (Dlamini, et al, p.101). Social media scholars such as Hinton and Hjorth (2013) emphasize that the rampant widespread of various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Myspace and online gaming as well, have gone a long way in changing people's lives. This is so because most people, especially the youths spend

much of their time glued to these different social media platforms. Due to the young people's insatiable appetite for social media, different scholars have come up with different names that describe the 21st century young people. For example, Gary (2008) calls them the "digital natives" whereas Elmore (2011) calls them the "screenagers". Both these mentioned names simply prove to one the huge extent of how today's generation of youths heavily rely on social media in their daily activities. For instance, Sheldon (2008) estimated that over 50 percent of tertiary education students visit social media sites countless times a day. In addition, several researches have shown that Facebook constitutes about 1.6 billion active users and it is also among the main social media platforms that the young people frequently use (Bohl, 2005; Al-Rahmi et al, 2016; Bicen & Cavus, 2011; Hinton & Hjorth, 2013; Mastrodicassa & Metellus, 2013). Therefore, this has made the study of social media not to be ignored as evidenced by the fact that social media has become a huge part of people's lives.

In addition, Hinton and Hjorth (2013) argued that what makes social media to be influential to its users is that, it creates an online platform for individuals to produce and share various materials with each other (p.2). By so doing, this also reveals the interactive and flexible nature of social media whereby it does not only allow users to consume media, but it also allows them to be producers of it as well, thus the term coined by Jenkins (2006), "produser" best describes the case. In simpler terms, unlike Web 1.0 which was one direction, Jenkins states that new media devices brought about the social and autonomous aspect of the media. With that being said, this then leads to the popularity of the term which was coined by Tim O'Reilly (2005), "Web 2.0" which refers to all the social media platforms which allow users to comment, post, download and share materials with each other. In essence, Web 2.0 is literally social media according to the perceptions of a couple of scholars.

The fact that social media has become heavily embedded in our lives as it has been mentioned already above, Dijk (2006) in his book, *The Network Society*, introduces another fascinating concept of “digital culture”. Based on this concept, Dijk (2006) contends that “digital culture refers to ways of thinking and doing that are embodied within technology” (p.190). Thus, digitalization plays an integral part in improving the quality and quantity of culture as it makes people to be able to fully express themselves in more than one way. Hence, it is beyond any reasonable doubt that we are living in a “digital age”, because of the various new media advancements. As a result, this has led to the influence of digitalization on culture not to be downplayed because people from various cultures are now hugely dependent on these social networking sites since they have become part and parcel of their culture. Therefore, linking digital culture and my thesis’s main premise (social media and education), one can assert that since education is part of one’s culture, thus it must not be left out when mentioning aspects of a culture that have become dependent on new technological innovations.

Nowadays, the educational culture by most students in different societies across the globe have endorsed new media into their mainstream educational system because its usage has become inevitable (Dijk, 2006, p.198). Thus, one can argue that new media technologies have made the academic lives of the students to be simpler and easier. This is so because students can now access educational information on the Internet and from quite a number of social media platforms, regardless of their physical location. That is, in recent times, students only need Internet connection in order for them to access educational information (for example, electronic books) unlike was the case before the advent of social media where students had to physically go to the library to get a book for their academic purposes. In essence, the “pre-digitalization age” meant that print media was the only source of information for the students for their academic purposes. However, this has changed due to digital culture since the

emphasis is now more on electronic material rather than hard copies. In short, Dijk (2006) claims that “the new media enrich our culture with a huge increase of information and communication” (p.200).

Generally, the youths, especially the university students in most developed countries have welcomed the benefits of social media usage and thus, they are now not only using social media for interaction and entertainment, but for their academic purposes as well. This was noted by Pollara and Zhu (2011) who asserted that various social media groups that students belong to, are both educational and social, thus they viewed such social media platforms as “Edusocial space”. As a result, most universities in the developed countries have ensured that their students benefit academically by embracing social media into their formal education set up. This has made the education life of most university students in the developed countries to be simpler, convenient and enjoyable, because of the wider social media use.

When it comes to how university students make use of social media for their academic purposes and what I mean by “academic purposes”, I will refer to scholars like Weller, et al, (2014); Dijk, (2006); Bohl, (2005); Guo, et al, (2012); Pollara and Zhu, (2011) who spoke about numerous ways in which social media platforms benefit the students academically. According to the above-mentioned scholars, these benefits or academic purposes include and are not limited to; the ability for the students to assist each other on assignments, research, group projects and share important educational information easier via various social media groups, usually Facebook and WhatsApp groups are the most commonly used ones. Essentially, Armstrong and Franklin (2008) postulated that “Universities will lose their privileged role as a primary producer of knowledge, and a gatekeeper to it, as knowledge becomes more widely accessible through other sources and is produced by more people in more ways” (p.27).

On the other hand, whilst the use of social media by students for academic purposes is beneficial or advantageous, one must not be blinkered into believing that there are no disadvantages associated with its use thereof. Although some teachers and parents raised some concerns about the use of social media by their children, one must not take for granted the positive impact that social media has done to the lives of the university students as far as their education is concerned (Boyd, 2014; O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Miller, et al, 2016). Basically, it has become literally impossible for the 21st century university students to go on with their academic life without the aid of social media. As a result, due to the fact that these 21st century university students were born in the digital age, scholars like Schwartz, et al (2014) have referred to them as “digital natives” and the argument usually raised by such scholars is that, since these digital natives were born in the digital age, therefore, they can multi-task and they are very good in positively or productively making use of ICTs. However, Kirschner and Bruyckere (2017) in their article, “The Myths of the Digital Native”, maintain that it is not always the case that since the digital natives were born in the digital age therefore, they have the digital skills. The two authors further contend that there is great need to decolonize the minds of the people into rethinking how digital native students can be taught in this digital age, rather than just taking things for granted. Thus, as a starting point, Guo, et al (2012) in their theory of “Student Technology Use Hierarchical”, which will also be explained further in due course, suggest that it is of paramount importance for the educators to first of all understand and know the reasons why students choose or reject certain social media platforms so as to be able to know how best they can assist the students in their academic lives via the use of social media platforms (p.221).

1.2 DIGITAL DIVIDE AND THE ZIMBABWEAN ICT SITUATION

Meanwhile, when one is to pay specific attention to the comparison between social media usage by the university students in the developed and developing countries, it is evident that whilst most universities and several tertiary institutions in the developed countries have embraced social media into their mainstream education system, the same cannot be said about the universities in the developing countries. Thus, this brings us to a popular term “digital divide” which best describes a situation whereby there is massive gap between regions and demographics as far as the issue of access to information and communication technology (ICT) is concerned (Dijk, 2006, p.178). In other words, those with access to computers and the internet (mainly developed countries) seem to benefit more than those without access (mainly developing countries). It must be pointed out that there are a myriad of factors that contribute to digital divide and Dijk summarized them into three main categories which are; personal inequalities, uneven distribution of resources and positional inequalities. However, Dijk also warned that it is being myopic to believe that digital divide will only be dealt with by giving people access to the internet and computers, because what is of great significance is the fact that even after giving people access to computers or the internet, are they able to fully make use of it in a way that would empower them. Thus, having access to the computer and internet is one thing and the ability to fully make use of it is another, as such, the main argument is that for as long as people who have access to the internet or computers don't fully make use of it, reducing digital divide will remain a mammoth task. In other words, the ability for one to use a computer or any other digital device for productive purposes (digital literacy) also contributes to the reduction of digital divide.

As far as Zimbabwe is concerned, it is still lagging behind as far as the issue of advanced or new media technology is concerned. As a result, the

use of social media by universities or other tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe, still remains a futile exercise. While social media is increasingly becoming more widespread in most universities in the developed countries which is in line with the UNESCO's policies that emphasizes that tertiary institutions and universities must take advantage of ICTs in their mainstream education systems so as to improve the education lives of their students, unfortunately, Zimbabwe is clearly struggling in that aspect at the present moment (Chitanana, et al, 2008).

In addition, Biriwasha (2011) with reference to the World Bank statistics pointed out that only 12 percent (approximately 1.8million) of the total population, which is approximately 17 million, in Zimbabwe have some form of internet access. In other words, in Zimbabwe there are more people without internet access than those who have. Therefore, in Zimbabwe there is massive "digital inequality" and this term shall be further discussed in due course. It must also be pointed out that the people with access to the internet in Zimbabwe, the majority of them stay in the urban areas (urban dwellers) and this goes on to show one that in the rural areas of Zimbabwe, getting internet access is close to impossible. The main contributing factor for this terrible phenomenon in Zimbabwe can be attributed to the government's lack of competency and failure to adopt viable measures or policies that ensure that Zimbabwe also fits in and benefit from the increasingly becoming digital age or information society (Zanamwe, et al, 2013). Unless and until such measures are implemented by the government, Zimbabwe will always be left behind whilst other countries are developing their ICT infrastructures. It is undeniable that the country's ICT sector is really in a bad condition and as a result, it has become very difficult for university students in Zimbabwe to carry out their studies in an increasingly becoming e-learning world (Dlamini, et al, 2015). In addition to government's lack of competency, two other factors (ignorance and lack of new media technologies or resources) can also be attributed to this dire

situation as far as the use of ICTs in Zimbabwean education system is concerned.

On the other hand, even though Zimbabwe is currently facing a lot of economic hardships, education still remains the backbone and main hope for most Zimbabweans to make it in life or to be prosperous. That is, despite the fact that Zimbabwe is still lagging behind as far as e-learning in universities is concerned, it still boasts of a robust education system and a high literacy rate. For instance, according to the UNESCO's Institute for Statistics (2014), Zimbabwe's youth literacy rate (15 to 24 years) has a total of 90,43%, with male youths having 87,59% whereas female youths having a slightly higher percentage of 93,19%. Additionally, according to the United Nations Development Program (2003), Zimbabwe has the highest male literacy rate in the whole of southern Africa (its number 1) and its number 2 when it comes to the female literacy rate, as such, when it comes to the total or overall literacy rate in southern Africa, Zimbabwe occupies the first position. In essence, the UNESCO's Institute for Statistics (2014) estimates that the total literacy rate for adults in Zimbabwe (15 years and older) is at 88,69%, males have a total of 89,19% whilst females have a total of 88,28%. One can attribute this achievement to the fact that education is one of the most valued assets in my country and despite the harsh economic conditions, most parents still strive to send their children to universities. Nonetheless, due to the fact that most universities in Zimbabwe cannot provide e-learning for their students, this has led to most university students to resort to social media so as to get additional academic information and as a way of helping one another in their assignments. When it comes to the quality of the educational system, Zimbabwe is ranked 42 out of 148 countries in the world and it occupies the second position in Africa (World Economic Forum, 2014, p.286). In addition, the quality of Math and Science sees Zimbabwe being ranked 63 out of 148 countries on a global scale and occupying the 5th position in Africa (World Economic Forum, 2014, p.287).

Moreover, it is undeniable that the use of social media by university students for academic purposes is a relatively new phenomenon in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole. This is mainly due to the fact that there is lack of adequate ICTs in the developing countries and also it is still a heated debate especially in Zimbabwe whether the use of social media by students would lead to improvement on students` academic performances or it will be detrimental to their performances (Zanamwe, et al, 2013, p.8). Thus, leading to an on-going debate in the field of Media Studies where theorists, scholars, researchers and other interested groups argue whether the adoption or use of ICTs will lead to negative or positive outcomes (utopian vs dystopian views). As such, The theories of Castells (1996); Hansen (2006); Kittler, (1999), Stiegler,(1998) and McLuhan, (2001) will be used in trying to understand the impact (negative or positive) of ICTs in people`s lives as it shall be seen during the course of the thesis.

Furthermore, Zanamwe, et al (2013) also stressed that some universities in Zimbabwe have actually banned the use of social media by students on campus, whilst some have put strict measures on the use of social media on campus. The strict measures include; reducing the number of hours that a student is supposed to be engaged on these social media platforms as well as allowing the usage of social media by students only after business hours. Despite all these restrictions put in place for the students on their usage of social media, one unassailable truth is that, social media can go a long way in helping the university students improve their academic performances.

1.3 RESEARCH PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS

In essence, the research study seeks to explore or get a better understanding on how the NUST students make use of social media for academic purposes by paying attention to the aspects such as; the

challenges they face in the use of social media for academic purposes, the impact social media has on their academic life, the benefits of using social media for their academic purposes and most importantly, what social media really means to them as far as their academic life is concerned. Also, the research study seeks to add to the body of knowledge by bridging the research gap as well as provide possible solutions aimed at improving the academic lives of the students through their use of social media.

The three main fundamental research questions for this thesis were hugely engraved around three key aspects (awareness, impact and feasibility) and there are as follows;-

- i. **Awareness** - First and foremost, are the NUST students aware or making use of social media for their academic purposes?
- ii. **Impact** - To what extent has the use of social media for academic purposes by NUST students impacted their academic life as far as benefits and challenges are concerned?
- iii. **Feasibility** - How feasible is to integrate social media into the mainstream education system at NUST for academic purposes?

1.4 RESEARCH AIMS AND HYPOTHESIS

The main aim of this study is to explore the use of social media for academic purposes by NUST students in Bulawayo as well as to identify the major social media platforms that these students use in that regard. Most importantly as well, the research will also seek to cast more light on how far social media has gone in helping the NUST students carry out their academic activities. This study will also highlight the benefits and possible challenges faced by students from the use of social media for their academic purposes. In short, the research is aimed at providing a clear

picture of how social media has been used by NUST students for their academic purposes since there isn't much that is known about this subject.

When it comes to the hypothesis of the research, the basic assumption is that the university students at NUST are aware of the existence of social media and its usage for their academic purposes. However, what still remains a problem is that the majority of the NUST students are not fully benefiting from the use of social media for academic purposes mainly due to social and economic reasons. On the other hand, the university authorities and educators at NUST are not providing a conducive platform for the university students to make use of social media for their academic purposes. Therefore, it is hoped that if the educators and the relevant university authorities cooperate with the students in embracing social media in education, this will go a long way in making the academic lives of the students easier and enjoyable.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The nature of this research study seeks to explore NUST students' social media usage for their academic purposes, thus an interpretive research approach becomes more relevant. As such, this approach will then lead to qualitative research methods which help in explaining the research methodology. However, I chose two qualitative research techniques that I used in carrying out my research study and these are; questionnaire surveys and interviews. The unit of analysis was mainly the NUST university students who were randomly selected regardless of their age, sex, educational department/faculty and social or economic status. However, only 7 educators were also interviewed just as a way of striking a balance in the interviews and getting to know their side of the story since they also play an integral part in ensuring that students fully benefit from the use of social media for the academic purposes.

1.6 RESEARCH ETHICS AND SIGNIFICANCE

It must be pointed out that it is the duty of the researchers to follow the code of ethics each time they are conducting a research so as to come up with a credible research study (Bryman, 2014, p.130). There are quite a number of ethical considerations to be adhered to when conducting a research study. However, Diener and Crandall (1978) narrowed them down to four main areas and these are;- informed consent, trustworthiness, right to privacy and not harming the participants.

Therefore, with regards to this particular research study, I ensured that I stuck to all of the above mentioned ethical considerations because they were all equally important in helping me come up with a credible research study. As such, due to the fact that I directly engaged with the research participants on the ground via the use of questionnaires and interviews, hence there was great need for adhering to all of the above mentioned ethical considerations. To begin with, before I engaged with the research participants on the ground, it was very important for me to first of all get permission (letter of approval) from the relevant NUST authorities. Having acquired the letter of approval, I also had to seek for informed consent to the research participants before I started distributing questionnaires or conducting interviews with them. This is so because the participants need to be firstly briefed about the research in general and their participation as well as making it clear to them that they have the right to withdraw from the research study when they feel that they can no longer proceed with it.

Furthermore, once informed consent was guaranteed, this opened a way for other ethical considerations to follow suit, for example trustworthiness. I tried by all means to gain trust from the research participants by respecting their needs or opinions, not telling lies, not being judgmental, not being

biased, not invading their privacy and conducting the research in a manner that did not harm them in any way.

When it comes to the significance of this research study, it is hoped that the study will help in reducing the research gap and providing some knowledge about this subject, since very little is known about it in Africa, especially in my country, Zimbabwe. Thus, this research study will contribute by adding more knowledge about such research subjects. Most importantly, the world is becoming a global village and the use of social media is inevitable especially on the university students who seem to be the main users. However, instead of just using social media for entertainment purposes, this research study will also play a fulcrum role in highlighting how social media can also be used for academic purposes by the university students. As a result, this knowledge will be essential in helping not only the university students alone but also the relevant university authorities, lecturers, parents, researchers and software designers in equipping them with adequate knowledge on how best they can embark on online learning via the use of social media in a manner that would benefit the students academically.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is essential in locating the research study as far the broader context of the existing knowledge is concerned. Gay and Airasian (2000) insist that literature review plays an important role in notifying the researcher of what has been done on their research study they would want to embark on (p.46). By so doing, it also helps the researcher in gaining more insight about his research study and this goes a long way in helping them to logically develop a framework which suits or matches their topic. Most importantly, literature review does not only tell one what has already been done, but it also proposes what is yet to be done.

In this section, I first provide and briefly discuss the preferred theories (theoretical framework) that best suits my research topic. Secondly, review the literature in general or briefly talk about new media and social media. Thirdly, I then get into the crux of literature review thereby revealing the existing knowledge on how social media has been used by university students for their academic purposes across the globe. However, it must be noted that much of the literature on social media in Zimbabwe and how university students in Bulawayo have used it for academic purposes is revealed in chapter 3.

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I chose three main new media theories that will help me back up my research study and these theories are;- Media Equation Theory (Reeves & Nass, 1996), Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) propounded by (Blumler & Katz, 1974) and Student Technology Use Hierarchical (STUH) put forward by (Guo, Li & Steven, 2012). However, suffice it to say that these three theories are not the only ones that will be discussed throughout

the duration of this thesis, other theories will be added as back up as well to support these three core ones.

2.1.1 Media Equation Theory

Media equation theory founded by Reeves and Nass (1996) is ideal for formulating the background of this research study and it will be the starting point for understanding the general rationale behind the main argument of the research study. The theory basically entails that the media has become heavily ingrained into the people`s lives to an extent that people now relate to media (television, computers and new media technologies) in the same way they would relate to human beings and places in real life. In other words, people cannot live without media and they now have a strong attachment to media leading to them treating media as something that equates to real human beings.

In relation to the study, the applicability of the media equation theory is seen in the sense that most of the young people, especially the university students have become so attached to the various media technologies, particularly the social media. University students have formed strong bonds with their media devices and applications in a manner that is similar to how they make bonds with human beings. For instance, Dijk (2006) on his opinion about media equation theory, stated that, "People consider contact with a computer to be a dialogue, and technically mediated interaction with and through other media to be full human communication" (p.233). In essence, university students find it hard to live without their media devices as evidenced by the fact that even in class during lectures or at home doing their homeworks, they still remain online on social media (Mastrodicassa & Metellus, 2013, p.26).

2.1.2 Uses And Gratification Theory

The second theory to be adopted in this study is the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) put forward by Blumler and Katz (1974). The UGT will play a pivotal role in this study as it moves from a more general standing point of the media equation theory to a more specific point, which also happens to be the pith of the research study. Basically, this theory states that people use media in various ways that best suits or satisfies their needs, feelings or gratifications. In other words, Blumler and Katz were more interested in how people influence or use media instead of how the media influences or uses people as is the case in the “Magic Bullet” theory or “Hypodermic Needle” theory. As such, unlike the Magic Bullet theory which views the audience as passive, the UGT views the audience or media user as active and playing an active role in the media usage (Blumler & Katz, 1974, p.138). Blumler and Katz (1974) summarised the various uses or needs (gratifications) which make people use media into 5 categories namely; cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative and tension release needs (p.279-282). It must also be pointed out that the UGT is to a greater extent related to the famous and renowned psychologist, Abraham Maslow’s theory, “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs”. However, Maslow’s theory will not be discussed in this case because the main focus is the UGT and the 5 categories of the UGT to be discussed briefly below.

1. Personal integrative needs

Personal integrative needs have to do with how one creates his or her own identity through the use of the media. In this case, people use media to identify who they are or what they want to be associated with (taste). For example, people may watch certain programmes on the media which have their role models or favorite celebrities or in some cases buy certain products they see on the media as a way of associating themselves with

such. Therefore, in that manner, people use the media to formulate their personal identities.

2. Social integrative needs

Social integrative needs are various ways in which people use media, especially social media like WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter or MySpace to interact and stay connected with other users. Social media allows users to share and comment on different issues, thus people use social media to socialize with others, join in debates or discussions and to be part of an online social group. By so doing, this goes a long way in improving their social interaction skills.

3. Affective needs

Affective needs have to do with emotions. That is, people watch certain television programmes, series or movies as a way of expressing their emotions (pleasure or sorrow). For example, what they are watching on the media is likely to affect their emotions and they take whatever they watch on the media serious. In other words, while watching TV, people may laugh, smile or cry depending on what is happening on the T.V program, series or film at that particular moment.

4. Tension release needs

Tension release needs are all about various ways in which people use the media to release stress, boredom or general life hardships. In other words, people use media to escape from negative life situations and they may do this through listening to music, playing online games or watching videos. Therefore, in this case, people use media as a “stress reliever”.

5. *Cognitive needs*

The cognitive needs are covered in different ways, in which people use the media to gain knowledge, wisdom and understanding about particular issues or matters they might be interested in. Thus, cognitive needs are all about wanting to be an intellectual or simply seeking to be educated or well informed via the use of the media. For example, people may do this through listening to or watching news, following certain media programs, doing online quizzes, watching “how-to videos” (DIYs) or watching documentaries. Certainly, one must acknowledge the role that the Internet is playing in fulfilling or satisfying the cognitive needs of individuals.

Since my research study is about exploring how NUST students make use of social media for their academic purposes, thus cognitive needs become more relevant to my research study but that is not to say that other needs mentioned above are useless. As such, in relation to the research study, it is hoped that NUST students are making use of social media to satisfy their cognitive needs. In other words, social media plays an integral part in helping the NUST students acquire more academic knowledge. As it has been mentioned already in the introduction, most universities in Zimbabwe lack adequate academic material. As such, university students resort to social media so as to gain more cognitive needs that the universities cannot provide.

2.1.3 Student Technology Use Hierarchical Framework

The Student Technology Use Hierarchical (STUH) framework was coined by Guo, Li and Steven (2012) and these scholars wanted to identify the motivations behind the particular technology use by students. As a result, this makes this framework to be ideal for this research study as it takes from where UGT left and goes straight to the unit of analysis which happens

to be the students. Basically, the STUH framework talks about why students prefer to use certain types of technologies and what motivates them to arrive at their decisions. In addition, the STUH is also interested in knowing what the students seek to benefit from the usage of a particular ICT device (gratification). Furthermore, Guo and colleagues also realized that there was a hierarchy of gratifications as to why students use particular ICTs. According to them, at the apex of this hierarchy was “interaction”, that is, the need to interact with others motivates the students to use social media and other ICTs.

Essentially, Guo and crew reiterated that it is of paramount importance for students to first of all be in a position to be able to use these ICTs (digital literacy) and to be able to interact well with others via these ICTs. They go on and say that, if the students` ability to interact well with others is achieved, such a skill can then be easily transferred to benefit them academically. Equally important as well, Guo and colleagues are of the idea that understanding the technological preferences of students and their usage makes it easier for educators to chip-in in helping the students benefit from them academically. Therefore, the first goal is for the students to learn how to use ICTs for basic purpose like interaction and then later channel that skill to academics. Thus, these three scholars concluded that three key aspects are critical in understanding this phenomenon and these three are:

1. *Means* (self-disclosure, managing contents, accessibility, course management, communication mode, access and content control),

2. *Consequences* (interaction)

3. *Ends* (communication efficiency, communication quality, information seeking and learning capability).

2.2 WHAT IS NEW MEDIA?

As mentioned earlier in the introduction, I have the idea that before an attempt is made at understanding what social media is, there is great need to firstly understand what new media is because it is new media which brought about social media. Basically, new media is interactive in nature and it includes all the forms of media that make use of the computers and the Internet, such as websites and blogs, online communities, emails, social media, mobile applications, computer games, digital cameras, streaming audios and videos, CD and DVD Media, web advertising and Internet telephony, only to mention but a few (Siapera, 2012). Therefore, based on the different forms of new media, it becomes clear to one that new media is not only two-sided (allows feedback) but it also allows its users to generate or produce their own content. In essence, Manovich (2001) strongly believes that the introduction of the computer in the middle of the twenty century paved the way for the genesis of new media and this went a long way in shifting or changing the cultural dimensions of people, especially as far as communication is concerned. As such, the forthcoming titles dwell much on how new media influenced or is influencing the lives of the people by referring to the arguments or ideologies of some of the world's famous media theorists.

2.2.1 New Media And Society

Siapera (2012) wrote a fascinating book, *Understanding New Media*, which sought to explain why it is necessary for people to understand new media and this book is mainly used as a point of reference for this section. In addition, what makes this book to be very helpful and informative is that Siapera also made use of a couple of well renowned theorists so as to support his arguments. Basically, Siapera argues that the new media plays a fulcrum role in human history and people's daily lives since it has

become part and parcel of their society. As such, this makes it relevant to understand the impact or role of new media on the people's lives. Essentially, the book seeks to highlight how the new media integrates with various social, economic, political, psychological and cultural aspects of the society (Siapera, 2012, p.2). Before going into the nitty gritty of how the term "new media" came about, Siapera also mentioned two alternative terms that can be used to complement the term "new media" and these are "digital media" and "online media". In simpler terms, these two alternative terms show one how the new media is digital in nature and how it places greater emphasis on connectivity, especially via the use of the Internet.

Siapera also cautions that not all new media are entirely new as evidenced by the fact that some of the characteristics found in new media are also present in old media. As a result, this makes the understanding of the characteristics of new media to be complex and a bit complicated. Therefore, given such complexity, it becomes ideal to adopt Lev Manovich's views on new media who argues that the digital or the online nature of the new media is not enough to define the characteristics of the new media. As such, just like Jenkins (2006), Manovich also places much emphasis on "convergence" as the ideal characteristic that defines new media. In other words, the media allows users to do a lot of different activities at the same time and this makes the new media to be unique when compared to the other media which doesn't have such a characteristic. On the contrary, scholars like Hansen (2006) argue that attention must not be given to the characteristics of the new media but rather to the "transcendental" nature of the new media. According to him, the transcendental nature of the new media means that new media exists and it is able to do activities that are way beyond its intended use.

2.2.2 McLuhan`s Views On New Media And Society

Marshal McLuhan (1964) was one of the first media theorists to do some noticeable work on new media. He is well known for his famous statement, “the media is the message”. In this statement, McLuhan argued that the contents or what is being conveyed by the media is not of essential value but what is important is the media itself. Having said that, when it comes to his views on new media and society, McLuhan insists that the new media are, “extensions of human senses”. In this case, he argued that the media makes the lives of people to be more easier, faster and less mobile in the sense that there is less physical movement since the bulk of the activities can be done “just by the touch of a button”. In short, McLuhan believes that technology and the new media play a vital role in shaping and influencing the society.

2.2.3 Kittler`s Views On New Media And Society

It must be noted that there isn`t much distinction between McLuhan`s views on new media and society and Kittler`s. Kittler (1991) is of the idea that, there is nothing wrong in focusing on the various languages expressed in the media. However, it is equally important to also focus on the media with which these languages are conveyed. Additionally, the new media helps people not only to understand themselves in their particular society, but also in understanding other people`s societies. In short, Kittler maintains that how people are and the type of societies they belong to or are associated with is all influenced by the new media.

2.2.4 Stiegler`s Views On New Media And Society

Unlike McLuhan and Kittler who believe that the new media is the one that determines or influences human society, the French philosopher of

technology, Stiegler (1998) argues that there is no such thing as one element being powerful over the other. Instead, Stiegler believes that media and human society co-exist, they have a mutual relationship and they need each other to function well. Thus, they are both equally important and they influence each other. Stiegler also came up with the concept of “technics” whereby he believed that technology plays a pivotal role in the lives of humans and without technology there are no humans and vice-versa. In other words, Stiegler acknowledged that people can have their history and culture, but they need technological artefacts to pass on their history and culture to the next generation. He also stated that this transfer of history and culture has to continue even way beyond their death and that is where the role of the technological artefacts comes into play. Conclusively, Stiegler`s views on new media and society are helpful in helping one understand that the relationship between new media and society is a mutual one.

2.2.5 Castells`s Views On New Media And Society

On his views on new media and society, Manuel Castells (1996) took a diplomatic and slightly different approach in explaining the relationship between new media and society. Having realized that the three previously mentioned theorists` arguments were mainly based on identifying or highlighting which one takes the first priority over the other between new media and society, Castells was mainly interested in the sociological explanation of the influence of new media on society. However, some of his critics argue that his ideas were bent towards supporting Stiegler`s ideology. Despite all these criticisms, Castells remained defiant as witnessed by his diplomatic stances in explaining the whole concept of “technological determinism”. He emphasized that the new media technologies brought about a new social order that it is no longer based on individualism but on the coming together of all the elements in society to

form a “network society”. Castells’s ideology of network society also corroborates with Dijk’s who in his book, *The Network Society*, asserted that “At the level of society and on a global scale we can see that media networks, social networks and economic networks reach into the farthest corners and edges of the world. With little exaggeration, we may call the 21st century the age of networks” (Dijk, 2006, p.2). In essence, Castells and Dijk view the world as increasingly becoming more connected into forming a social network that can only exist because of the availability of new media.

2.3 WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

Certainly, one cannot talk of the field of New Media Studies without mentioning the role of social media because it has arguably become part and parcel of people’s lives in the twenty first century. Due to the fact that new media with its various innovations that it comes along with such as social media (which has become a common place for people to interact), this has made the study of social media to be relevant and too visible to be ignored or taken for granted. As a result, quite a number of studies have been done on social media across the globe with the aim of wanting to know what really is attractive about social media that makes a lot of people find it hard to live without. As such, several scholars have tried to define what social media is. For example, Shirky (2008) defined social media as “tools that increase our ability to share, to co-operate with another and to take collective action, all outside the framework of traditional institutional institutions and organizations” (p.20). On the other hand, Boyd (2009) defined social media as “the collection of software that enables individuals and communities to gather, communicate, share, and in some cases collaborate or play” (p.7). However, in defining social media, some scholars like Mandiberg (2012), Jenkins (2006), Jay Rosen (1999) and Tim O’Reilly (2005), focused on the main characteristic aspect of the social media and

from that, they were able to come up with their own concepts of what social media is. For example, Jenkins is well known for “convergence culture”, Mandiberg for “user-generated content”, Rosen for “participatory media” and O`Reilly for “web 2.0”. Therefore, all these key concepts by these scholars sum up what social media is as far as its characteristics and nature are concerned. Having defined what social media is, it is also equally important to also provide a history of how social media emerged. As such, the following subtitle below will dwell much on that.

2.3.1 The History Of Social Media

In discussing the history of social media, I will start by referring to the work done by Hendricks (2013) who published an article entitled, “Complete History of Social Media: Then and Now”. Basically, it is common knowledge that human beings have always been social animals and they always find various ways to communicate with each other so as to strengthen and maintain their relationships. However, the communication becomes difficult when they are far away from each other as was the case before the advent of advanced social media technologies. Therefore, it is for this reason that people worked tirelessly to create platforms that were aimed at making communication easier when face to face conversation was impossible. Hendricks (2013) cautions that social media is not a new phenomenon although most people seem to view it as a new trend. In fact, the social media roots go way beyond what people might actually think or imagine. As such, I will now provide the history of social media starting from before 1900 up to the present moment.

2.3.2 Social Media Prior To 1900

As mentioned in the introduction of the thesis, the earliest form of communication among people was face to face conversation and over long

distances, it was through a hand written letter. In other words, Hendricks (2013) mentioned that when people could not communicate face to face because of the long distance in-between them, they used letters that were delivered physically from the writer or sender to the recipient. In addition, Hendricks went on to say that there was also the postal service that can be traced back to 550 B.C, and little did people know that this type of service will still be relevant even up to now. According to Terrel (2015) the year 1792 saw the invention of the semaphore which was then followed by the electric telegraph (in the period between 1830s to 1840s), invented by Samuel Morse. Without any doubt, this was a better improvement of the letter because it meant that information would be sent to people faster and without having to send someone physically to deliver the letters. In addition, Hendricks (2013) stated that the year 1865 marked the development of the pneumatic post which was also another easy and fast way of conveying news or information to people. By far, the most noticeable and essential inventions that occurred before 1900 as far as communication was concerned, are the telephone and the radio which were invented in 1876 by Alexander Graham Bell and 1896 by Guglielmo Marconi, respectively (Edosomwan et al, 2011, p.2). Even up to now, telephones and radios are still used by people to communicate. However, today's telephones and radios are more advanced and sophisticated than the previous ones. Nonetheless, their goal is still the same, that is, to spread messages to a wider audience faster over long distances.

2.3.3 Social Media Post 1900 And The Rapid Changes

Hendricks (2013) pointed out that , social media began to record some very rapid changes in the 20th century and between the period 1936 and 1938, the mother of all inventions was developed, that is, the first programmable computer (Z1) was invented by the German, Konrad Zuse. Following the invention of the computer, engineers and scientists worked towards

creating networks on computers that would enable information to be sent from one computer to the other. As a result, this led to the creation of the internet and the first forms of internet were *APARNET* and *CompuServe* which were developed around the 1960s (Edosomwan et al, 2011, p.3). Additionally, it was also during this period when old forms of emails were created. With the passage of time, especially around the period of 1970s, there was some improvement in networking technology. For instance, in 1979, people were able to communicate via virtual letters through the use of *UseNet* (McIntyre, 2014, p.15)

According to Hendricks (2013), in the 1980s, the computers began to gain more dominance as there was also the introduction of home computers which further added on the sophistication of the social media. In 1988, *IRCs* (Internet relay chats) were also introduced and they gained popularity right up to the 1990s (Edosomwan et al, 2011, p.4). In 1997, *SixDegrees*, the first noticeable social media platform was developed and it allowed people to upload profiles and create friendships with other users as well (Terrel, 2015). Terrel further goes on to say that *SixDegrees* was followed by *Friendster* in 2002, which offered a stiff competition to *SixDegrees*. Furthermore, blogging sites were also popularised around the year 1999 and this became a fashionable way for people to reach each other via social media (Dijck, 2013, p7). It must also be emphasized that blogs are still in existence even up to now, although their roots can be traced way back to 1994.

2.3.4 Social Media Today

Basically, the invention of blogging sites paved the way for the popularity of social media as evidenced by more and more social media platforms that emerged after that. For example, in the early years of the 21st century (from 2001 to 2006), quite a number of social networking sites such as *Wikipedia*

(2001), *MySpace* (2003), *Flickr* (2004) *Facebook* (2004), *YouTube* (2005) and *Twitter* (2006), burst onto the social media scene (Dijck, 2013, p.7). In essence, all these above mentioned SNS were created as a way of making people communicate and also share their videos or photos over long distances. However, among all these SNS, it must be noted that *Facebook* became one of the most common social media site by the year 2006, surpassing Myspace which was dominant before the advent of Facebook (McIntyre, 2014, p.17). In addition, as a supplementary tool for *Facebook* and *Twitter*, Hendricks (2013) suggested that social media sites such as *Foursquare* (2009), *Tumblr* (2007), *Pinterest* (2010) and *Instagram* (2010) also began to gain prominence with the passage of time.

Today, we have numerous social media platforms at our disposal which allow us to do various activities such as posting our photos, videos, statuses, download and upload different materials. These social media sites have also contributed immensely in keeping us in touch with our families and friends (loved ones) as well as making us meet new people regardless of our physical locations. In short, social media has played a pivotal role in being a substitute for face to face conversation and making people reach places they would never thought they would reach physically. As such, it seems as if social media is here to stay in our lives and one can only assume how the future will look like as far as social networking is concerned. However, what is salient is that as long as human beings still exist, social media will also exist. Therefore, this now brings me to the main debates and studies conducted on social media which will be discussed shortly.

2.3.5 Debates And Studies On Social media

Without any doubt, it goes without saying that several debates have been wrapped around “social media” and different schools of thought seem to

have both conflicting and corresponding views on how social media has impacted or influenced the general public. As a starting point, one book that I found very useful and ideal to have a general understanding or background of social media is Hinton and Hjorth's 2013 book titled *Understanding Social Media*. In this book, these two scholars gave a clear explanation of what social media is all about, its various applications and they also touched on various key concepts that go along with social media. According to Hinton and Hjorth (2013) "social media bleeds across platforms (desktop computers, mobile phones, tablets and on modern network-capable televisions), across social and media contexts, and creates various forms of presence" (p.1). As such, there are a lot of different technological devices that people can use to interact on social media. The scholars also spoke about social networking sites (SNS) as the various platforms where people interact and these sites include Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, gaming sites and others as well. Suffice is to say that, the interaction on SNS is not only for the youths but also the older generation has also followed suit.

Hinton and Hjorth also spoke about the heated debates surrounding the use of social media, whether it is being used as a tool for emancipation or for power and control by governments, rich individuals or media moguls. These two came to the conclusion that social media can be used for both purposes (empowerment and control). They gave an example of a scenario where social media can be used for empowerment whereby the users can actively participate on these social media platforms for their commercial benefits. In addition to empowerment, social media can also be used as a tool for emancipation as witnessed by the fact that citizens can actively participate in politics and help remove despotic governments as witnessed by what happened during the "Arab Spring" in countries like Tunisia and Egypt. On the other hand, other countries like Iraq use social media as a tool for control (dictatorship), maintaining their dominance (hegemony) and spreading their propaganda. As such, Hinton and Hjorth's book is ideal for

making one understand the fact that social media does not only bring about positive outcomes, there are negative outcomes as well. Therefore, there is need for extensive or critical understanding of the social media just like how Christian Fuchs (2014) would reiterate.

Conclusively, Hinton and Hjorth strongly emphasize that it is never an easy thing to do to attempt to understand social media because it is ever-changing and accompanied by various problematic questions in our modern societies. For instance, the technology one uses also has a bearing on one`s cultural taste. As such, “to understand social media, it is not enough to simple log in to Facebook and start participating; we have to look more deeply at the economic, political and social dimensions of the changes that seem to be associated with social media” (Hinton & Hjorth, 2013, p.137). These two authors also warn people not to be short-sighted and just view social media as positively changing people`s lives or the society in general, and in the same way, people are not supposed to view social media as a bad thing neither. However, they reiterate that it is ideal to, “look at social media from a number of different angles to examine the ways that social media is both changing society as well as responding to and reflecting changes in the society” (Hinton & Hjorth, 2013, p.136). In other words, the authors` ideas on social media can be linked to Stiegler`s ideas that the relationship between media and society is a mutual one. Basically, Hinton and Hjorth (2013) in their book postulate that,

[u]nderstanding Social Media is about comprehending the way in which this new medium is both affecting and reflecting social developments more broadly, and as a result of understanding social media, we will come to develop a better understanding of the world in which we live in (p.139).

Furthermore, Siapera (2012) also spoke about social media in her book, *Understanding New Media* and she came to the realization that in defining social media, researchers mainly focused on social media aspects like

connectivity, openness, participatory, communicative and community creation nature. She further goes on to say that it is undeniable that social media has become so popular in the lives of people and several studies have proven that more people are becoming heavily dependent on social media for various purposes. For example, in a study conducted by Nielsen (2009), his findings showed that in every three people who are online, two of them make use of SNS. He also reported that during that period, Facebook alone had over 400million users and other social media platforms such as Twitter and LinkedIn also recorded an increment in the percentages of their users. However, the bone of contention raised by Siapera is based on whether or not social media will lead to the coming together of people in a society or it will lead to the division or isolation of people. In his assessment of social media and its influence on people, Siapera tried by all means to be impartial as evidenced by the fact that she did not only mention the pros of social media, but she also mentioned the cons as well. On another perspective, while theorists like Tönnies (2001) caution people on the possible damage likely to be caused by social media in creating isolated communities, others like Rheingold (1993) strongly believe that social media will play an integral part in bringing people of different communities together.

Additionally, Fuchs (2014) tried to understand what social media really is about whilst taking a critical stance. According to him, there are four main aspects that qualifies a particular media to be seen as “social” and these are; information and cognition, communicating, community and collaboration as well as collaborative work. Thus, he insists that these four mentioned key aspects play a fundamental role in understanding the sociality of social media. However, Fuchs (2014) also acknowledges that, “social media is a complex term with multi-layered meanings” (p.10). Therefore, “understanding social media critically means, among other things, to engage with the different forms of sociality on the Internet in the context of society” (Fuchs, 2014, p.10). Fuchs also spoke about social

media in relation to web 2.0 as he tried to unpack how the advent of web 2.0 has made it possible for new media users to be constantly connected as an online community so as to satisfy their various needs online. In addition, Dijk in his 2006 book, *The Network Society*, also spoke about two different types of communities namely; virtual and organic communities. He stated that, the physical communities where people meet face-to-face are referred to as “organic communities” but due to social media a second type of community has been created, that is, “virtual or online community”. Virtual communities or “communities of interest” according to Dijk have become so widespread and they have contributed to the eroding of organic communities as people nowadays, especially the digital natives or the “net generation” like how Marc Prensky (2001) would call them, spend more time interacting with others online. Therefore, scholars like Nie and Erbring (2000) and Kraut, Kiesler, Mukhopadhyay, Scherlis and Patterson (1998) argue that online communities through the use of social media have led to the deteriorating and replacement of genuine physical communities (organic) with weak and temporary communities (virtual).

Moreover, another book that I found useful in understanding social media impact or influence on people, especially the youths who are the major users, is Danah Boyd’s 2014 book, *It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*. In this book, Danah Boyd gave an expedition of how youths, teenagers in particular use social media and why it is so important to them. In addition, Boyd also mentioned the dangers associated with the teenagers’ use of social media such as bullying. According to Boyd, due to the fact that the teenagers feel controlled by their parents at home, thus they resort to social media where they can be free and exercise their autonomy without the interference of their parents. Therefore, social media is a place of freedom for teenagers and they can fully express who they are (identity). However, Boyd also pointed out that it’s not easy for these teenagers to fully exercise their autonomy even on these social media sites

because their parents also follow them online and they start to monitor their activities online, thus Boyd came with the title, *Its Complicated*.

Conclusively, one would strongly agree that Boyd's book is fascinating and smartly layered as witnessed by the fact that she convincingly addresses various issues associated with teens' activities online in all the chapters of her book. Boyd describes how the teenagers use social media and she also tries to explain why the teens' parents show a great deal of concern on their teens' usage of social media. As a result, since Boyd is very much aware of the parents' concerns or worries on how their teens use social media, she offers a more realistic and positive solution for them. She is of the idea that although social media can be dangerous or detrimental to the teenagers, banning the teens from using it won't necessarily solve the problem. As such, there is great need for the parents, teachers and all the stake holders involved to come up with lasting solutions that will help the teenagers improve their digital habits (Boyd, 2014, pp.212-213). Despite the fact that Boyd didn't dwell much on the capitalist set-up of the American culture, in all fairness, she did an excellent job in describing and explaining why the teens' lives are complicated in a networked society. Therefore, Boyd's book is ideal and comes highly recommended to anyone who would want to understand the teens' lives in a networked society.

Moving on, I also had the privilege to read about social media in industrial China thanks to Wang's 2016 book, *Social Media in Industrial China*. Wang carried out an ethnographic study in industrial China in a quest to understand how rural migrants use social media in China. When the Chinese de facto leader, Deng Xiao Ping decided to abandon the Cultural Revolution and embark more on industrial or economic revolution, this led to massive rural to urban migration. Most rural residents migrated to the cities in search of greener pastures and it is for this reason that Wang decided to conduct a research on social media usage by Chinese rural

migrants as she believed that they were going to definitely rely on social media to keep in touch with their families back in the village. However, Wang's assumptions did not come exactly the way she would have anticipated because these rural migrants used social media for other various reasons as well. The chief reason why these rural migrants used social media was as a way of finding a place where they can escape from the harsh conditions of life and moving to a place where they can hang out and fantasize. Therefore, Wang discovered that social media played a huge role in helping the rural migrants relax and forget a bit about the sad realities of life. Having said that, Wang's research study helps us understand that social media cannot only be used for communicative purposes per se but also for the creation of a "second home" whereby people can relax and switch off their minds from the hardships of life as was the case for the Chinese rural migrants.

Moreover, for more than 3 years, University of California researcher, Mizuko Ito (2008) and his colleagues also conducted a research on social media in their article titled, "Living and Learning with new media: Summary of Findings from the Digital Youth Project". They discovered that social media networking sites and online gaming have become part and parcel of today's youth culture. This is so because today's youths are struggling to identify who they are, how to be autonomous and how to establish relationships. As such, just like how Danah Boyd and Wang in their respective researches reiterated, youths end up resorting to social media in a quest to solve the above-mentioned problems. Due to the various brilliant platforms and opportunities offered by social media, youths have found it difficult not to engage themselves with the social media.

As a result, this has made their parents to worry about them because they are now spending a lot of time online, hence becoming antisocial. The major findings brought up by Ito and his team were that, youths generally

use social media to interact with other peers, for entertainment purposes and to establish friendships. The social media sites that these youths usually use are Facebook and Myspace. Therefore, according to their research, social media has created a platform for youths to “hang out” and create relationships. However, a smaller group of these youths use social media for other reasons that go beyond what they get from school or in their local communities. These reasons include video editing, creative writing or other artistic endeavors. In addition, “they also find opportunities to publicize and distribute their work to online audiences, and to gain new forms of visibility and reputation” (Ito et al, 2008, p.802). As such, social media has played a fulcrum role in helping the youths learn more technical skills and showcase their talents online. For example, via these social media sites, youths can be in a position to create their own online games or videos and post them online to other online users so as to get feedback. By so doing, they will be able to know the progress as far as their creativity is concerned. Suffice is to say that, social media has also allowed the youths to be free and autonomous. That is, online youths are free to express their feelings or ideas without the interference from their parents or teachers and that is why there is so much love for the social media because of its autonomous nature.

In short, Ito and his team seem to have quite a number of similarities with Boyd’s research findings. This is also witnessed by the fact that they all acknowledge that social media has become the common activity for most youths. Therefore, these researchers urge parents and educators to not only focus on negative effects caused by social media on the youths, but to also take advantage of the situation and provide online education for the youths. In essence, one cannot ignore the fact that youth culture is heavily composed of online experience; hence there is need for parents and educators to find ways to make use of online media for educational purposes for their youths. When all has been said and done, it becomes undeniable that social media has become part of people’s lives, especially

for the youths. For example, in a recent study conducted by Smith and Anderson (2018) for *Pew Internet Organization*, two thirds of the American population use Facebook and YouTube, but youths between the ages of 18 to 24 years use Snapchat and Instagram mainly. However, all the studies conducted by different researchers above highlighted that social media usage has advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, there is need for the users to be cautious when using these social media platforms. Having said that, the forthcoming paragraphs will focus specifically on the literature about social media and how it has been used for education or for academic purposes by the students across the globe.

2.3.6 Social Media For Academic Purposes Across The Globe

Generally, as mentioned so far in the course of this thesis, social media has been heavily used by most people for interaction and entertainment purposes. However, I will now shift my attention to the main focus of his research study which seeks to explore the use of social media by students for their academic purposes. For now, the literature to be discussed in this section is from across the globe (except for Africa), which shall be discussed separately in the next sub-title and a couple of research studies that have been done in this subject will be discussed as well.

To begin with, a couple of arguments have been raised by several researchers on whether allowing students to use mobile devices at schools will lead to possible benefits or disadvantages as far as their academic lives are concerned. To help tackle this debate, Gikas and Grant (2013) carried out a research that was aimed at exploring teaching and learning when mobile devices and smart phones are included in the students` studies. In addition, the research also touched on the role of social media in education. The researchers conducted their study in 3 of USA`s universities through the collection of student focus group interviews. The findings were that,

there were a lot of advantages and opportunities created by learning via mobile devices and social media. These benefits included the increased opportunities for collaboration and student interaction. The students also contributed in content creation and communication using web 2.0 and various social media platforms. However, Gikas and Grant (2013) stated that there are also some frustrations that arise from the use of mobile devices and social media in education especially when there is a lack of institutional support or training. In other words, in order for this initiative to be a success there is need for all the parties involved (teachers, parents and other relevant authorities) to work together.

Furthermore, O`Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) in their research on, "The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents and Families" noted that social media is arguably the most common activity amongst the youths of this present-day generation. Although there are some disadvantages associated with the use of social media such as cyber bullying, online harassment, Facebook depression, *sexting* and others as well, social media has played a fulcrum role in creating learning opportunities for students. This is evidenced by the fact that social media has made it possible for the students to be connected online and help each other with assignments and group projects. The scholars gave an example of Facebook, where the students gather outside the classroom and help each other through sharing ideas on Facebook so as to solve their assignments or group projects. In addition, some schools have actually adopted the use of Blogs as teaching tools, which is beneficial in the reinforcement of skills in English, creativity and written expression (O`Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011, p.12).

Moving on, Miller, Costa, Haynes, McDonald, Nicolescu, Sinanan, Spyer, Venkatraman and Wang (2016) conducted some extensive and excellent research studies in various countries across the globe on how the world

has changed social media, going against the general assumption of how social media changes the world. In essence, Miller and his team do agree that social media has impacted immensely in the people's lives, however, they are mainly concerned about how the people act when they are using these social media platforms. Thus, they conducted extensive ethnographic studies in countries such as England, Chile, Brazil, China and south east Turkey so as to understand how different countries make use of social media. For example, Miller and his crew conducted a survey in a village in England which included 2 496 students and the findings were that most students use 5 to 6 different social media sites starting from a very young age. Basically, they came to the realization that pupils use different social media platforms for different purposes, and it has become an integral part of their lives. Having said that, the upcoming paragraphs will now focus on social media being used specifically for educational purposes by students according to the findings of Miller and his team.

The researchers started by focusing on social media in relation to education and young people. Basically, there are mixed feelings when it comes to the use of social media by young people for academic purposes. Some believe that social media will impact negatively on the lives of the students and lead to poor academic grades (Miller et al, 2016, p.70). Therefore, such people are of the opinion that there is need for social media to be banned at schools. On the other hand, others who are technological determinists believe that social media will go a long way in making the learning environment more convenient, exciting and easier for the students. As such, there is need for social media to be formalized thereby including it as well in the mainstream educational curriculum.

Throughout their research, Miller and his team also found out that parents in the less economically developed countries like Brazil and rural China are actually welcoming the move or idea of their children using social media for

educational purposes. This is so because these parents believe that formal schools have failed to provide adequate educational material to their students. As a result, parents in these less developed countries have now resorted to informal learning sites such as social media in order to assist their children get more educational information which the formal schools cannot provide or are failing to provide (Miller et al, 2016, p.72). Another example, some students in Brazil emphasized that social media has helped them a lot in improving their writing and reading skills.

Essentially, Miller and his team also pointed out that the issue of inequality in terms of one's social class is also a contributing factor to one's perception about social media being used for educational purposes. For example, in India, parents who come from high class status send their children to private schools that have advanced ICTs. However, these parents complain that social media is not helping their children improve academically, if anything, it is actually contributing to their children's poor performance at school. This is due to the fact that these students don't really make use of social media for academic purposes, instead they prefer using it for other purposes such as entertainment. Thus, by so doing because of their failure to utilize social media for academic purposes, this will then lead them to scoring poor marks in their academic results. To back up the previous point, Dijk (2006) also spoke about this issue whereby indeed students or people in general can have access to ICTs but fail to utilize them productively and thus he came up with two central aspects (skills access and usage access) to help explain this phenomenon. Under skills access, Dijk divided them into three categories, and these are;-

Operational skills: are skills used to operate computer and network hardware and software.

Informational skills: are the skills needed to search, select and process information in computer and network sources.

Strategic skills: are the capacities to use these sources as the means for specific goals and for the general goal of

improving one`s position in society (in labor market, in education, in households, and in social relationships) (p.181).

Therefore, the lack of any of the above-mentioned skills can be a contributory factor which can help to explain why students with access to ICTs fail to utilize them productively. In addition, according to Dijk, usage access is also a contributing factor that can help us understand this scenario. In this case, students can have ICTs but feel not motivated or not obliged at all to make use of these ICTs. Thus, Dijk (2006) contends that, “having a computer and Internet connection does not have to mean that they are used” (p.182).

On the other hand, parents who come from lower social class in India send their children to government schools that don't have adequate ICTs and for this reason, they encourage their children to use social media so that they gain extra academic materials or knowledge from it. Therefore, social media in this scenario is being used for bridging the gap between formal and informal school as far as the lower social class students are concerned. However, the situation is different altogether in industrial China. According to the research done by Wang on social media in industrial China, rural migrants don't really care how their children use social media for educational purposes because at the end of the day, there is a huge possibility there will not finish school since manual labor is inevitable. Wang also noted that parents in rural China were more concerned about formal learning and they discouraged their children to use social media for educational purposes as they believed that it was detrimental to their academic performances. In addition, the students also shared the same sentiments with their parents as they believed that spending lot of hours on social media makes one to lose focus of their academic tasks. As such, social media was viewed as having negative impact on one`s academic performance.

Moreover, economic status is a huge factor that differentiates attitudes towards social media as well in Trinidad as noted by Miller and his team. For example, prosperous families send their children to affluent schools and they also send them to after-school lessons where they get exposed to ICTs and, hence improving their academic skills. Thus, in Trinidad rich families believe that social media is necessary in helping to improve their children academically. On the other hand, lower class families seem to put a lot of faith in formal learning and they view social media as distractive to one`s academic performance. In addition, Miller and his team also discovered that social media platforms such as Twitter are being used to communicate school related activities in England. Therefore, one can argue that socio-economic status plays a big role in parents` perceptions about social media being used as a tool for educational purposes as seen in the various mentioned case studies of different countries. As a result, the issue of “digital inequality” comes into play in this case whereby rich families have access to ICTs and the poor families don`t have (haves VS have-nots). This then leads us to the “Matthew effect” by Robert Merton (1968), a concept which states that individuals who have privileges (usually, material) will continue to gain more whereas those who don`t have will continue to remain in their less privileged position.

Furthermore, Miller and his team also touched on the relationships amongst students on social media in trying to see whether or not they benefit them academically. For example, in rural China, social media is used by students to establish closer relationships that go beyond the physical confines of the school. In addition, class groups were opened on QQ (a social media platform in China that resembles WhatsApp) so as to organize reunions of former classmates in future. On the other hand, university students used social media to find intimate partners on campus. It must also be pointed out that Miller and his team also discovered some challenges of social media that students face which mainly constitute of cyber bullying.

Most importantly, the researchers also discussed about the relationships between teachers and their students on these social media platforms. Quite frankly, the teacher-student relationship on social media is a very controversial issue as some believe that it is inappropriate for teachers to be friends with their students online whereas others believe that there is nothing wrong with that. Fortunately, Miller and his team came to the rescue and they tried to elaborate more on this issue by providing different case studies of different countries. They began with a case study of one city in south India, Venkatraman as they tried to unpack how the teacher-student relationship is portrayed on social media. The findings proved that there are two sides to the situation, one side believes that it is a right thing to do and the other believes otherwise.

In Venkatraman, students between the ages of 11 to 15 years old are the ones very keen to be friends with their teachers on social media. This was also approved by their teachers who also wanted to play the role of “protector” of these students by constantly checking their online activities to see if they were not indulging in harmful online activities. However, students between the ages of 16 to 18 years old due to the fact that they believe that they are now mature, and they want their autonomy; they showed some reluctance on being friends with their teachers. These students felt that their teachers might invade their privacy. In addition, even the teachers as well didn’t want to be friends with their students as they felt that it was inappropriate, and the students will end up seeing the teachers’ privacy.

In China, teachers seemed to be reluctant to use social media as well as being friends with their students. However, those that did use social media and befriended their students, helped their students a lot in providing homework and other educational material. In Trinidad, friendship on social media between the teachers and students was really beneficial for the

students. For example, those students who cannot speak English fluently in class, social media opened a channel for them to ask questions directly to their teachers without being shy or having to worry about being mocked by other students in class. In this manner, these students were able to fully engage with their teachers and hence, benefit in their schoolwork as well.

In short, “social media has redefined student-teacher relationships by providing stronger on-going links outside of the school space, new modes of visibility and monitoring has become possible, creating concerns for both students and teachers alike. Conversely these new social media have created new avenues of communication, modes of engagement and in some cases, more egalitarian student-teacher relations than existed previously” (Miller et al, 2016, p.81).

2.3.7 Social Media And University Students Across The Globe

I begin my literature review on social media and university students by referring to a research study that was conducted by Bohl (2005) at three of China`s top universities namely; Renmin University of China, Zhejiang University and Lanzhou University, in a quest to understand how the university students of China made use of social media for their academic purposes. China was preferred to be the starting point for this research study because it is well known that it has the world`s highest percentage of social media users and this is supported by Chiu, et al (2012) who state that, “As a subcontinent where over 513 million people use the Internet and 300 million are using social media sites, China has the most active Internet users in the world” (p.1). On the other hand, Wang (2016) claims that the Chinese active social media base is actually 649 million (which is 91 percent of the total online population) compared to the USA`s 67 percent. Thus, apart from China, United States of America (USA) is also another

country that has a huge percentage of social media users, however, in this case the focus will be solely on China.

It must be pointed out that although the Chinese “authoritarian” government embarked on the “Great Firewall” system whereby it blocked four of the world’s leading social media sites (Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and Google), this hasn’t stopped the Chinese “netizens” (social media users) to be part of an online community (Wang, 2016). Ironically, it is actually, the Chinese government itself which also played a vital role in the growth of ICT infrastructure and it came up with native social media platforms to replace the banned ones so as to ensure that their citizens don’t feel neglected as far as the use of social media is concerned. As such, China has its own local social media platforms which also resemble the four banned ones that were mentioned above. For example, China has Weibo (resembles Twitter), QQ (resembles WhatsApp), and WeChat (resembles Facebook). In relation to Bohl’s research study, he noted that the university students in China seem to make use of social media and the major social media platforms that they use are QQ, WeChat, Sina Weibo and RenRen. However, WeChat seems to be the widely used social networking site by the majority of the Chinese university students.

When it comes to social media being used for academic purposes by the university students in China, Bohl (2005) noted that the lecturers and the students indeed use social media to communicate about academic information (p.42). However, the lecturers and the students do not only use social media for academic transfer of information, but they also use it for other activities that are outside academics. Most importantly, Bohl (2005) also noted that although the students and lecturers are making use of social media for their academic purposes, social media is yet to be incorporated into the educational curriculum of China (p.49) . In fact, the incorporation of social media into the mainstream educational system of China has

proved to be mammoth task because quite a number of negative concerns were raised. According to Bohl (2005), these concerns include; “it is considered a distraction by many, it is not mainstream education, it is not widely established to improve educational atmosphere, and in some cases, it may require major revamping of the curriculum” (p.40).

In addition, scholars such as Wu, et al (2011) realized that due to the rampant use of SNS by university students in China, this has led to unprecedented higher levels of addiction among the Chinese university students. Therefore, a new term, “Chai-nai” which refers to someone who spends the bulk of his time online but not necessarily doing any academic work, emerged. Suffice to it that in Taiwan they also have a term that they use to describe such people, “room-bound male” or “RBM”. Probably, the reason that makes the *RBM*s or the *Chai-nais* to be heavily glued on these SNS can be attributed to the fact that electronic gadgets are relatively cheaper in China and also most universities in China offer free Internet for their students. Additionally, Bohl also noted that the students` priorities when using social media are different from those of their lecturers. Conclusively, Bohl (2005) recommended that, “Research on social media could help educators and students interact in the new media world by integrating social media into academia and steering conversations online” (p.50).

Furthermore, Hamid, et al (2013) conducted a similar research study to the previously mentioned one, but the only difference was that this one was done in the universities in Malaysia. Realizing that the adoption of new media in Malaysia was gradually increasing, especially in the first quarter of 2009 were Malaysia recorded about 16 million active social media users, Hamid and crew decided to conduct a research study that was aimed at understanding the impact of social media on the university students as far as their academic life was concerned. Therefore, the authors conducted a

research study involving 405 Malaysian undergraduate students. They realized that indeed the university students in Malaysia make use of social media for various purposes which include; interacting with families or friends, entertainment, searching for information and for writing their assignments. However, when Guo, et al (2012)'s Student Technology Use Hierarchical framework is applied to this scenario, the most social media use by the Malaysian university students is interaction and the least one on the hierarchy is academic related. Thus, it becomes a cause for concern because based on this research study, university students in Malaysia are not fully making use of social media for their academic purposes. To a larger extent as well, Hamid and colleagues didn't really dwell much on how university students in Malaysia make use of social media for their academic purposes and also, they didn't point out whether social media has been incorporated into the Malaysian education system. As a result, Hamid and colleagues don't help me much on what I want to explore in my thesis because they tended to focus more on social media's impact on personality of the users.

On the other hand, Al-Rahmi and Othman (2016) conducted a far much better research study than the previously mentioned one. Although the setting remained in Malaysia, but the university was different, that is, *Universiti Teknologi Malaysia*. As a starting point for their research study, the authors insist that the use of social media among students is not a new phenomenon, but the implementation of the social media into the mainstream education system is yet to be fully unpacked by most researchers. Al-Rahmi and Othman (2016) also cautioned that this scenario of social media usage by students for their academic purposes is not as easy as people assume it to be because there are various factors that need to be taken into consideration before the full implementation is made (p.2). They further went on to give examples of factors to be taken into account and these include; research must be done first on the students so that it can be known which social media platforms they prefer to use so

as to aid in the implementation process (just like how Guo and colleagues in the STUH framework suggested), the best SNS and new technologies have to be chosen as well and they have to be affordable to all the students to benefit from (regardless of their socio-economic status).

In relation to the literature review that the authors embarked on for this particular research study, they also realized that there were some challenges that arise from the use of social media by the university students for their academic purposes. In accordance with the research study that was conducted in some universities in the United Kingdom, the study highlighted that due to the fact that most of the teachers don't belong to the digital age or they are simply "digital immigrants" just like how Marc Prensky will put it, therefore, they are reluctant to integrate social media into their lessons. On the other hand, some educators lack skills to fully make use of these SNS or technological devices, thus the concept of "skills access" by Dijk (2006) comes into play once again. The other challenge has to do with copyright and originality issues, especially on the part of the students as evidenced by the fact that some students via the use of social media end up plagiarizing. In addition, lack of technological resources or lack of a good and sustainable ICT infrastructure also hinder the full implementation of social media into the mainstream education system. In essence, all the challenges were bent towards how to effectively adopt social media into the mainstream education system in a way that would benefit all the students equally.

On a more positive note, Al-Rahmi and Othman (2016) also maintain that the use of social media by the university students for their academic purposes has a lot of advantages or benefits for the students. For instance, SNS encourage collaborative learning and through the use of blogs or other internet sites, this makes it possible for students to create their profiles and send information to each other easier and faster. In addition, online

discussions are also encouraged via the use of social media platforms such as Wikipedia since they allow students to also have discussions outside the normal or formal school setting with their educators. Therefore, in this way, the educational platform is broadened since it won't be just limited to the physical school setting. Such interactive and collaborative SNS create room for feedback between students and their lecturers. Additionally, lecturers are also able to post their educational material to the students via these SNS. For example, lecture notes, quizzes, course syllabus, information about assignments (students can also submit their assignment online) as well as information about examinations or tests. The authors also emphasized that online communities create a sense of togetherness for the students and they encourage them to actively participate, thus also making them realize the value of teamwork and if such ability is carried on their academics, it will go a long way in improving their academic life. Thus, "social networking activities have the possibility of enhancing student contact and is used to improve their participation in class, particularly where introverted students are involved" (Al-Rahmi & Othman, 2016, p.1). Furthermore, SNS for academic purposes also equip students with other skills such as editing, ability to create their own content (production skills), publishing and other social media related skills that help to ease their learning experience or academic life. "However, using social networking to boost learning solutions remains at the earlier phase and really should be further investigated" warned Al-Rahmi and Othman (2016, p.3). This then leads to the discussion of the effects of social media on students as it shall be highlighted shortly.

Initially, the authors draw attention to people by reminding them that before, social media was not really taken seriously as it was just used for communication or interactive purposes among a few individuals. However, with passage of time, it became used for numerous purposes by people across the globe. That is why the Al-Rahmi and Othman (2016) assert that, "What began out as being a hobby for several computer literate people has

converted to a social norm and existence-style for individuals from around the globe” (p.3). Among the chief negative effects of social media on students, addiction and poor performance were the dominant ones. For example, according to the research conducted by the authors on Facebook, some students ended up being addicted to Facebook so much to an extent that it became tantamount to their poor academic performance or low GPA. It must be stressed also that the authors left room for correction as evidenced by the fact that they stated that it is still debatable whether the overuse of social media has a relationship with poor academic performance of the students. In summation, although the authors raised some negative effects of social media on the students` part, but if collaborative learning is implemented (that is, between students and their educators), this can actually go a long way in improving the students` academic life. In addition, as a way of dealing with addiction and poor academic performance, the authors recommended that it is of paramount importance for the students to manage and control their time they spend on these SNS doing non-academic activities.

Moving on, Shafique, et al (2010) conducted a research study at one of Pakistan`s university, Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB) as they tried to understand the trends of using social media by the IUB students. They realized that social media is increasingly becoming part of the lives of people across the globe and this has led to universities especially in the developed countries to adopt it into their mainstream educational set up. Unfortunately, nothing has been done with regards to this matter in Pakistan and it is for this reason that Shafique and others decided to embark on such a research study in Pakistan. However, it must be noted that the participants of this research study were only taken from the Geography department, which the authors also agree that the research population was small and thus the weakness or limitation of their research study. Nonetheless, the authors managed to gather some useful information which can help one understand or have an idea of how the

university students in Pakistan use social media for their various purposes. In general, the purposes that the university students in Pakistan used social media for include; purchasing, advertising, communicating with friends, entertainment, sharing links and for researching. Just like in Hamid, et al (2013)'s research study findings, Shafique, et al (2010)'s research study findings are also similar as witnessed by the fact that in both research studies, students seem to use social media more for recreational purposes rather than for their academic purposes. It is equally important to highlight the challenges that Shafique and crew raised in their research study as they may help to improve the situation in universities in Pakistan. Some of the key challenges that the authors mentioned include; lack of security or privacy, available information may be unauthentic, slow internet connection, lack of advanced ICT skills and some websites may be difficult to understand or use.

In addition to Shafique, et al (2010), Hussain (2012) also conducted a research study in his native country, Pakistan, at the similar university (IUB). In all fairness, although these two set of researchers wanted to achieve the same research purpose, however, Hussain's research study appears to be more convincing, broader and much detailed compared to the one done by Shafique and his colleagues. Like any other researcher, Hussain also realized that the use of social media has been rampant across the globe and universities had started embracing it, thus he decided to conduct a study in his native country so as to try and understand this phenomenon. However, Hussain also noted two vital elements that can either assist or deter the full implementation of social media into the mainstream education set up and these are; the country's profile as far as its economic status is concerned and availability of a good ICT infrastructure (just like how Al-Rahmi and Othman also stated). When it comes to social media usage for academic purposes, Hussain observed an interesting online platform that students are making use of for their academic purposes. He noted that students create virtual communities (as

also mentioned by Dijk) and this has led to the creation of “virtual learning environments”, also known as “VLEs”. These VLEs enable students to share academic information with each other, research projects, study experiences as well as job opportunities. As such, universities are becoming heavily dependent on these social media platforms and this has shifted the model of learning from physical to virtual.

To back up the previous statement, Armstrong and Franklin (2008)’s assertion (available in the introduction of this thesis) becomes ideal and sensible for explaining the immense contribution that social media has done on the lives of the university students. Nonetheless, Hussain also stated that in addition to a good ICT infrastructure, social media users (that is, students and educators alike) must be computer literate or have a social media skill so as to fully benefit from social media academically. The author also noted that even high school students also use social media for their academic purposes, their usage indeed can’t be compared to the university students who have become insanely obsessed by social media. In essence, social media at universities is mainly used as a communication “facilitator” between the students and their educators or other relevant university authorities as well. On the other hand, just like in Shafique, et al (2010)’s research findings, Hussain also noted some challenges that emanate from the use of social media by the university students. An example of the challenges noted by Hussain is the issue of moral concerns, which is also an issue that was raised by scholars such as Miller and his colleagues. In this case, some parents seem to be against the whole idea of students using social media at schools because they believe that these SNS might be harmful to their children. In addition, other challenges raised by Hussain include; load shedding or power cuts, leakage of privacy, poor internet connection and many others as well. Hussain also observed that there were some physical problems that were raised by the students which are as a result of their usage of social media and these include; back-ache, pain in the fingers (caused by too much typing) and drying of the face as

well as blurring of one's vision caused by spending long periods glued to a computer or other "second screen" related devices. Conclusively, despite all these challenges, Hussain emphasizes that if SNS are used appropriately by the students for their academic activities, then achieving good results on the student's academic life becomes feasible.

Furthermore, most researchers seem to share the same sentiments as far as recognizing or acknowledging that Facebook is the mostly used social media platform by the majority of the university students is concerned. Bicen and Cavus (2011) are examples of such researchers and they conducted a case study specifically focusing on Facebook at CEIT, a university in Northern Cyprus. These two researchers wanted to explore the digital habits of undergraduate students by focusing on how they use Facebook. Their findings were similar to most of the previously mentioned researchers so far, in the sense that they also acknowledge that university students spend a great deal of their time on Facebook doing various activities. However, on an unfortunate note, students spend less time using Facebook for their academics compared to other non-academic activities, such as interacting with friends or entertainment purposes. Therefore, Bicen and Cavus (2011) strongly recommend that if the students spend more time not only on Facebook but on other SNS doing academic activities, this is likely to yield positive outcomes as far as their academic lives are concerned (p.943). In addition, the two researchers further go on to suggest that SNS must be adopted into the mainstream education system by the universities so as to help the students benefit academically.

In addition to Bicen and Cavus's research study on Facebook, Ahern, Feller and Nagle (2016) also conducted a similar research study but the only slight difference is that Ahern and colleagues did not only focus on Facebook in general, but they focused particularly on Facebook groups. Basically, these three researchers conducted a study on Facebook groups

as they sought to explore the motives behind the use of social media by undergraduate students as well as the benefits thereof. Their argument was that, “Contemporary students entering third level education communicate, collaborate, and learn differently from their predecessors; specifically, technology is ingrained in their lives and they rely more heavily on the use of personal technologies such as social media” (p.35). They also noted that in recent times, students have made use of social media so much that the role of social media in universities ought to be understood better and taken seriously. Like Bicen and Cavus, Ahern and colleagues also believe that Facebook is the major social media platform that most universities use and as a result, research on how students use Facebook and other various social media platforms as well, have started to emerge recently.

According to Ahern, et al (2016), previous studies carried out on Facebook groups mainly focused on a formal Facebook group that the students engaged in, but the administrator or “admin” was someone who was not a student, for example, the tutor or educator. However, nowadays, the students themselves seem to be in full control of these Facebook groups. To begin with, Facebook groups are very important for the students (especially the first-year students) in the integration process as they try to adapt to university life or “campus life”. Additionally, it is ideal for students to belong to a Facebook community or group because they will be able to interact and share educational information or ideas with other students. Just like how Mastrodicassa and Metellus (2013) pointed out, on these Facebook communities or groups there is the creation of social capital which goes a long way in offering the students a variety of benefits as mentioned previously. Also, Ahern and colleagues share the same sentiments with researchers like Bosch (2009) when it comes to social media playing a critical role in collaborative learning. Therefore, the STUH framework is ideal for understanding the students` activities on these Facebook groups as Ahern and colleagues also realized that the need to interact with peers motivates the students to be part of a Facebook group.

In addition, easy access and content control whereby students are the administrators of these Facebook groups creates some form of autonomy for the students. On these Facebook groups, students also share academic information, that is, they can upload or download information easily.

The other important issue that Ahern and colleagues raised was the impact of Class Representatives or “Class Reps”. Class reps are basically the students that act as facilitators or mediators between the students and the lecturers or other staff members. The class reps play a fundamental role in passing important information from the staff members (lecturers) to the students or vice-versa. As such, Facebook groups makes the job of the class reps to be easier and efficient in the sense that all the important information is posted on the Facebook group and in that way, it also reaches a wider audience in a short space of time. As it has been mentioned already in the STUH framework that the interaction plays a vital role in linking the “means” and the “ends”, thus without proper communication, the goal of Facebook as far as being a platform for the students to make use of academically is concerned, will become difficult to achieve. According to Ahern and colleagues, they noted 5 key benefits (ends) that the students achieved by being part of these Facebook groups and these are;-

- i) Information seeking

That is, students join Facebook groups to seek for information and this information comes in various forms. It can be academic or non-academic information.

- ii) Communication efficiency

Students showed some enthusiasm as they regarded Facebook groups as helpful and useful platform for effective communication. Students stated that it is fast and easy to use compared to emails or Blackboards.

iii) Communication quality

In this case, Ahern, et al (2016) reiterated that, “Indeed, it can be inferred that the quality of communication determines the success of the group” (p.45). That is to say, Facebook groups offer the students a good quality communication and that is why most students prefer to use Facebook groups. In other words, the quality of the communication has to be good so as to ensure that all the Facebook group members receive information quickly or in time and it also allows them to give feedback without any technical glitches.

iv) Learning capability

Pollara and Zhu (2011) asserted that various social media groups that students belong to are for both educational and social purposes, thus they viewed Facebook groups as Edusocial space. That is to say, students belong to a Facebook group so that they can socialize with other peers or for academic purposes. In other words, Facebook groups have been used as informal learning platforms by the students and most students only wanted these groups to be entirely student-centered without the inclusion of educators so that they freely exercise their autonomy. As also stated previously by Al-Rahmi and Othman (2016), Facebook groups also help the students in collaborative learning.

v) Community

Ahern and colleagues viewed Facebook community as a vital aspect for the students because a strong Facebook community helps the students not only in their academic life but also in their emotional gratifications. Therefore, students need to belong to a strong Facebook community to gain support, cope with stress or loneliness and for their academic purposes, as illustrated in the UGT theory. As such, a strong Facebook community is that one which takes into account all the emotional and intellectual needs of the students and tries to make the student a better student both intellectually and emotionally. However, in conclusion, Ahern and colleagues recommended that it is of paramount importance for future researchers to substantively distinguish the relationship between “learning” and “social” activities on social media as well as to distinguish the relationship between “official” and “unofficial” social media platforms in the students` academic life.

Apart from Facebook, Twitter is also another example of a social media platform that the students have made use of for their academic purposes. However, scholars such as Ponter and Simon (2011) through their studies that they conducted on this subject, they came to the realization or conclusion that Twitter is not that popular among the students compared to Facebook when it comes to using it for their academic purposes. That is, there isn`t much research done on students and their Twitter usage for academic purposes. Nonetheless, I had the chance to find some important information about Twitter and how the students make use of it. Although the information collected on this issue at hand is not that much, but at least it also helps in adding to the literature on social media and academic purposes in general. In retrieving information on Twitter, I made use of Weller, Bruns, Burgess, Mahrt and Puschmann`s 2014 book, *Twitter and Society*. These five authors discussed how Twitter has impacted the lives

of people in general and when it comes to Twitter being used for academic purposes, they also acknowledged that it is still a rare phenomenon. However, they mentioned an interesting point on how Twitter is facilitating *Massive Open Online Courses* or MOOCs. McAuley, et al (2010) postulated that MOOCs, “integrates the connectivity of social networking, the facilitation of an acknowledge expert in a field of study, and a collection of freely accessible online resources” (p.4). In simpler terms, MOOCs are online platforms that people from across the globe can make use of for their academic purposes and they are like a normal school or class setting where students learn, but the only difference is that they learn online from wherever they are. It must also be pointed out that the MOOCs can be likened to Dijk (2006)`s concept of “telestudy” (p.163), a platform that also has similar functions to MOOCs. Ebner (2013) claimed that the most commonly used microblogging platform for MOOCs throughout the world is Twitter. In essence, “it can be concluded that microblogging can play a relevant role in educational contexts, especially in open online courses, by making learning more interactive and engaging” (Weller, et al, 2014, p.421). However, the authors also acknowledge the fact that, “further research is needed to better understand how social media can be integrated into learning and teaching” (Weller, et al, p.421).

Moving on, Mastrodicassa and Metellus (2013) also conducted a research study on how students make use of social media for their academic purposes. However, these two mainly focused on the impact (negative and positive) that social media usage has on the students. It must also be pointed out that the authors cautioned that researchers or other interested groups must not be blinkered into viewing social media as a bad thing or a problem, rather they must try by all means to firstly understand how social media is used by these students in a manner that is detrimental to them. In other words, the problem is not the social media but the various unproductive ways in which the students use it for. Thus, it also becomes of great significance for the educators alike to learn how to use social media

so as to be able to assist or guide the students in the proper and beneficial way of making use of social media. Mastrodicassa and Metellus also alluded to the fact that demographic factors such as race, gender and socio-economic status also play a pivotal role in ensuring that students benefit from these ICTs. For example, they gave common incidences in American educational set up whereby white American students are likely to have advanced ICTs compared to their black American counterparts. In addition, students who come from affluent families are at an advantage when it comes to the possession of advanced ICTs compared to those that come from poor families, thus the Matthew effect also comes into play here. Basically, despite the fact that 90 percent of the students own some form of a technological device, the previously mentioned factors are a stumbling blocks to the free and fair acquisition of information via the ICTs among the students since they come from different socio-economic backgrounds. Whilst on the same point, Mastrodicassa and Metellus (2013) proposed that, “college administrators need to remain sensitive to the fact that all college students do not have the same degree of access to technology” (p.22).

Moreover, Mastrodicassa and Metellus also noted that Facebook was the widely used SNS by the students for both personal and academic activities. Twitter was used also but not as frequent as Facebook. These two authors raised 6 key impacts of social media on the students and these are; student engagement, impact on academics and multi-tasking, relationships with peers, identity development, social capital and well-being. These 6 key impacts will be discussed shortly;-

i) Well-being

The authors used Henry (2010)`s exploratory study in trying to explain this impact. According to Henry`s study, students who use SNS for connecting

with friends and making new friends, scored high scores on psychosocial well-being whereas the ones that were shy or reluctant to use SNS recorded low scores.

ii) Social capital

In this case, social capital simple refers to the benefits that students receive from using SNS, and these benefits may include access to new information, emotional support, and exposure to diverse and helpful ideas. According to the authors, Facebook was by far the most common SNS that enabled students to create and maintain their social capital. Suffice to it that social capital is very crucial because it can also lead to a positive psychological well-being.

iii) Identity development

Just like how Danah Boyd reiterated, the authors also mentioned that social media plays a fulcrum role in helping the students take charge of their identity (that is, who they really are or who they really want to be). Social media allows the students to create profiles of their own choice and to identify themselves with a particular group with particular interests. In other words, social media offers the students autonomy and to fully express their feelings without having to worry about being kept an eye on by their parents or guardians in the real world.

iv) Relationships with peers

Mastrodicassa and Metellus also pointed out that social media has played an integral role in creating relationships among the students. For example, some students have found their loved ones on social media and social media has also made their communication with their peers to be easier and

fun. Thus, the authors referred this online scenario as “hook-up culture” whereby youths of today are finding romantic partners via social media. To a larger extent, the hook-up culture has really assisted introverts and shy students, together with most gay students who have taken advantage of social media to hook up with partners online because this is usually a difficult thing for them to do in the real world (organic community) due to fears of discrimination. Having said that, this now brings one`s attention to the issue of anonymity, whereby some students create fake profiles so that they can hook up with strangers. However, the authors argue that social media is not necessarily replacing offline social interaction among students, instead, it is helping the students in the facilitation of their offline activities. As a result, students of nowadays (digital natives) can multi-task, that is, they can chat with their friends physically whilst also chatting virtually on social media with other different peers as well. On a negative note, social media has also become a breeding ground for cyber bullying, since it allows cyber bullies to be anonymous and cause havoc to other online users. Therefore, Mastrodicassa and Metellus recommend that university authorities and parents as well must play an active role in ensuring that the safety of their children is not tempered with by these cyber bullies.

v) Impact on academics and multi-tasking

When it comes to academics and social media, the authors raised a very critical issue by stating that it`s not about how many hours the students spend on social media but it`s actually about what they do (activity or purpose) when they are on social media. That is, the authors realized that most students spend a lot of time on Facebook doing activities that are outside studying and this is a cause for concern because such students got poor marks in their academics. In addition, even in class during lessons or at home doing their homework, students still remained online, glued to social media. As such, this leads to divided attention, which is not good

because in this case social media will be acting as a “distractor” for them to properly concentrate on their schoolwork, hence leading to poor academic performance. Thus, Mastrodicassa and Metellus (2013) insisted that, “it is more important to examine the actual use of social media site to determine its impact than merely just the time on the site” (p.26). However, on a positive note, students who used social media productively (mainly academically), recorded good academic scores.

vi) Student engagement

As far as student engagement is concerned, the authors stated that social media plays both a negative and positive role in student engagement. Therefore, it is not a matter of which side of the bread is to be buttered but how thick the side to be buttered is buttered. That is to say, it is all about how the students engage themselves on these social media platforms, rather than the time they spend on them. However, the authors also take into account the fact that there have been mixed feelings among researchers as to what type of impact social media has on the student`s engagement. In their conclusion, the authors contend that there is no single conclusion that can be drawn from the research about the impact of social media on students because this field is still a murky field and there seem to be different viewpoints among the researchers. This is so because technology is constantly changing and this also means that their purposes, existence and uses also change. As a result, it becomes difficult to draw an empirical conclusion about their impact. Nonetheless, what is clear and undeniable is that social media has both negative and positive impact on the students.

2.3.8 Social Media For Academic Purposes In Africa

Having delved much on social media for academic purposes across the globe as shown above, I will now shift my attention to the African context. As it has been mentioned already in the preliminary stages of this thesis, most of the research studies on social media for academic purposes by university students mainly comes from the developed countries and there is very little research that has been done on this subject in the developing countries, particularly in Africa. Some researchers have attributed this huge research gap to the fact that Africa is still lagging behind as far as ICTs are concerned and hence the implementation of e-learning in African universities becomes a difficult goal to achieve. In addition, several debates have been wrapped around the use of social media for academic purposes by university students. Parents, lecturers and other responsible authorities in Africa, still argue on whether or not university students must be allowed to use social media for their academic endeavors. However, despite the fact that there is little research on this subject in Africa, I managed to get some few research studies that were conducted in Africa about this subject and they shall be unpacked in the forthcoming paragraphs.

Coming closer to home (Zimbabwe), Bosch (2009) conducted a research study in one of the most popular South African university, University of Cape Town (UCT). His research title was based on, "Using Social Networking for Teaching and Learning: Facebook use at the University of Cape Town". Bosch acknowledged the emergence of social media as a positive aspect that has made learning for university students to be easier and simpler. This is so because educators can now just upload course notes or other valuable learning materials on these social media platforms for their students and the students would have to download the materials freely at any time, they deem necessary. The social media applications that these students usually use include; Facebook, YouTube and Podcasts.

Generally, Bosch's research study was about the use of social media for academic purposes by paying attention to Facebook. As far as the results of the research study are concerned, Bosch realized that indeed Facebook has had a positive impact on the UCT students as far as learning is concerned but he also cautioned that one must not ignore the availability of negatives as well that have been brought about by online learning. The disadvantages that Bosch highlighted include the uneven access of these new media technological devices as well as ICT illiteracy. Therefore, the bone of contention for Bosch is that, he agrees that students can have social media applications or SNS at their disposal, but the main worry is that, are they able to make use of them in a way that benefits them academically? In other words, Bosch stressed that the university students at University of Cape Town seem to have some knowledge about these social media platforms. However, it still remains to be seen whether or not they are in a position to use these social media platforms productively in a manner that will help boost their academic lives.

Furthermore, in west Africa, Acheaw and Larson (2015) conducted a research in one of Ghana's tertiary institution, Koforidua Polytechnic. These two researchers wanted to examine if there was a relationship between social media usage by students and academic performance. As such, they conducted questionnaire surveys which focused on about 1 500 students from the above-mentioned institution. Their findings were that indeed students have knowledge on the existence of various social media platforms and they also discovered that there is certainly a relationship between academic performance and the use of social media by the students. To a larger extent, Acheaw and Larson's research results proved that social media has a negative effect on the students' academic performances. This is evidenced by the fact that students spend most of their time on these social media platforms not studying but doing other activities that are outside schoolwork. For example, students spend a lot of time chatting to each other on social media instead of doing their school

tasks. Therefore, Acheaw and Larson proposed that it was going to be beneficial for the students to shift the hours they spend on social media chatting into doing research in the libraries. In addition, these two researchers suggested that the students should substitute spending unproductive time on social media with reading novels and this will go a long way in improving their intellectual capabilities. In essence, according to Acheaw and Larson`s research study, one can conclude that social media is detrimental to the students` academic performances if used inappropriately. As such, there is need to encourage students to reduce the amount of time they spend on these social media platforms and focus more on doing their schoolwork. Quite frankly, this is not solely a Ghanaian student` problem alone but it is rather a ubiquitous problem as evidenced by the fact that some of the above mentioned researchers also noted the same problem in their research studies whereby students were spending more time on social media doing non-academic activities.

Still in West Africa, Asemah, Okpanachi and Edegoh (2013) conducted a similar research to the previously mentioned one, done by Acheaw and Larson (2015). However, these three conducted their research in Nigeria at a university called Kogi State University in their quest to examine the relationship between social media and academic performance. Suffice is to say that their findings seem to corroborate with Acheaw and Larson`s findings as witnessed by the fact they also stated that the use of social media by university students at Kogi has a negative effect on their academic performances. This is so because just like how Acheaw and Larson lamented, students spend a great deal of their time on social media chatting and doing other activities that have nothing to do with their schoolwork. As a result, this leads to them getting poor marks at school because they give too much focus on social media and less focus on their studies.

Moving on, Musa (2015) conducted a research study at Kano State Polytechnic, Nigeria with the bulk of his research participants coming from the faculty of Mass Communication. Musa`s main objective of his research was to find out how feasible it would be for the students if social media was to be implemented into their mainstream education curriculum. The main reason why Musa conducted such a research study was that, he was aware of how social media has positively impacted on the academic lives of the students in the developed countries, but the opposite is true for the majority of the countries in the developing countries, especially in Africa. As such, Musa sought to understand the possibilities and repercussions of implementing such an initiative in African universities as well.

The research results proved that it is actually possible for students in African universities to benefit academically from the use of various social media platforms. Most research participants welcomed this move of implementing social media into their university system as they believed that it would go a long way in improving the students` academic performance. Thus, Musa mentioned the fact that learning via social media creates a student-centered kind of learning environment whereby students can have control and access to a wide range of academic material readily available at their disposal. However, Musa also warned that although social media is beneficial for the students academically, there must not be overreliance on it by the educators as this will end up making them to become lazy. That is to say, educators must also come up with other viable learning platforms that would supplement the social media.

CHAPTER 3: ZIMBABWE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

In this chapter, before I discuss in detail about the Zimbabwe educational context, I will firstly provide background information on the Zimbabwean education system, prior independence and post-independence by focusing mainly on the study done by Kanyongo (2005).

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe is a country which is situated in the southern part of Africa. It is a landlocked country with a population of about 17 million and it also has 16 official languages (including English) (Kanyongo, 2005, p.65). Before Zimbabwe got its independence in 1980 from the British colonizers, it used to be called *Rhodesia*. This was so because of one famous man who spearheaded the occupation of Zimbabwe, *Cecil John Rhodes*, thus the name *Rhodesia* came to be. In other words, Zimbabwe used to be a British colony, and this explains why even up to now English is still part of the Zimbabwean official languages. In addition, most of the institutions in Zimbabwe still use the English system or style, with Zimbabwean education system also facing the same fate.

Basically, the period between 1961 to 1965 saw the British colonizers take full independence or control of Zimbabwe, however, this did not go down well with the U.K government (mother country) as it wanted more freedom and rights for the black people in Zimbabwe. As a result, this led to the war of liberation as the native Zimbabweans took up arms and fought against the British colonizers. With the help of the sanctions imposed by United Nations, the “guerillas” (Zimbabwean freedom fighters) won the war and for the first time, free elections were held in 1980 (Kanyongo, 2005, p.65). Robert Mugabe won the elections and became the first black Zimbabwean president. In short, Zimbabwe gained its independence from the British rule

in 18 April 1980. It must also be pointed out that before Zimbabwe gained her independence, the majority of the population struggled to get basic education due to the lack of adequate resources and schools. However, post-independence has seen as an improvement in the Zimbabwean education system although there is a lot that still needs to be done to ensure that the whole population benefit educationally (Nuffic, 2015). Consequently, immediately after independence, the main task was to make numerous reforms that were in line with the new national goals. As such, education was also part of those goals. Therefore, I will now turn my attention to the education system in Zimbabwe from pre-independence, post-independence and until now (current state of affairs).

3.2 ZIMBABWEAN EDUCATION SYSTEM BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

According to Kanyongo (2005), without any doubt, the Zimbabwean education system before independence was very racially inclined, with the white students being favored over the black students. During that time, good educational opportunities were given to white students whereas the black students were given a blind eye by the British colonial government as far as their education was concerned. The British settlers arrived in Zimbabwe in 1890, and this made it easier for the missionaries to spread their influence on the local people. In essence, realizing that the British government didn't care much about the black people's educational needs, the missionaries decided to come to the rescue for the black people thereby offering informal education to the black people. In all fairness, the missionaries really tried to cover the gap and ensure that black people also benefit educationally.

Furthermore, Kanyongo (2005) also stated that the missionaries also built several schools in Zimbabwe that were aimed at ensuring that black people's educational needs were taken care of. However, it must be

emphasized that the influence of missionaries on black people's education was restricted by the British colonial government which controlled how the missionaries go about offering education to the indigenous people. As a result, the indigenous people were only limited to basic education, mainly involving industry and agriculture because the British colonial government's idea was that black people must only be taught how to be white people's laborers rather than being taught how to be intellectual and smart. Basically, the British colonial government did not want to see a situation whereby the black people become more educated than the white people. That is, they always wanted the dominance of white people not only in education but also in other fields as well. In short, the education system in Zimbabwe before independence was unequal and unfair since it was aimed at favoring the white minority over the black majority.

3.3 ZIMBABWE EDUCATION SYSTEM AFTER INDEPENDENCE & THE REFORMS

As mentioned above, prior to independence, the education system in Zimbabwe was biased in the favor of white students. Thus, the missionaries played an integral role in trying to address this bias (although they were restricted). In addition, even the few black students who managed to have access to education, they were placed in schools of poor quality and they used a different educational curriculum (very basic) compared to the white students (advanced). In fact, the education system prior independence was divided into two categories, that is, schools for white people and those for black people. Consequently, after independence, the major reform in education that was made was aimed at removing the "racial divide" between black students and white students. In other words, the incumbent government ensured that all the students (black or white) must have equal opportunities and access when it comes to education. In addition, Kanyongo (2005) also asserted that, "The government expanded the

education system by building schools in marginalized areas and disadvantaged urban centers, accelerating the training of teachers, providing teaching and learning materials to schools” (p.66).

Moreover, “In 1988, the government formed a separate Ministry of Higher Education to be responsible for tertiary education, which included teacher training colleges, universities and vocational colleges. More and more trained teachers were supplied into the education system and this helped reduce the proportion of untrained teachers. All the different government strategies helped boost the number of teachers from 18 483 in 1979 to 60 886 by the end of the decade” (Kanyongo, 2005, p.67). In essence, the reforms introduced by the new government were bent towards improving the quality of the Zimbabwean education system thereby putting in place a couple of training initiatives for the educators as well as adopting new teaching skills and technologies in the education sector. Thus, the period between 1990 to 2001, saw a massive change in the Zimbabwean education system and Kanyongo proclaimed that, “The proportion of trained teachers increased drastically during this period. In 1990, about 51,48% of primary school teachers were trained and by 1997 the proportion of trained primary school teachers had jumped to 77,2%. In secondary schools, only 48,1% of the teachers were trained in 1990 and this number increased to 89% by 1996” (p.67).

Moreover, the other major and important reform that was implemented was the creation of the local examination board as a way of replacing the old one which was based in the U.K. Basically, before Zimbabwe gained its independence, all the examinations were marked in the U.K by an examination board called University Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) but after independence, a new Zimbabwean based examination board was established and it was called the Zimbabwe School Examination Council (ZIMSEC). In all fairness, this reform was a good

move as it meant that there was no longer the need for the Zimbabwean government to waste a lot of foreign currency via sending examinations to be marked in the U.K as they can be marked locally by ZIMSEC. In simpler terms, “Education in Zimbabwe today aims at promoting national unity to contribute to national development particularly, economic development through the supply of trained and skilled teachers and staff. The aim is also to revive neglected languages and cultural values and to develop a distinctive way of life with mutual recognition and enrichment of the diverse cultures” (Kanyongo, 2005, p.67).

3.4 STRUCTURE OF THE ZIMBABWEAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Zimbabwean education system is characterized by “2 years of pre-primary school (nursery school), 7 years of primary school, 4 years of lower secondary school, 2 years of upper secondary school and at least 3 years of higher education” (Nuffic, 2015). Thus, the education system in Zimbabwe has a “2-7-4-2-3+ structure” and the “General responsibility for education lies with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary education and the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education” (Nuffic, 2015). Essentially as well, the Zimbabwean academic year runs for the whole year (January to December) and there is the use of trimesters whereby each trimester is separated by a break of 1 month.

3.4.1 Primary Education

The average and standard age for one to start primary school in Zimbabwe is 6 years. The primary education runs for 7 years that is Grade 1 to Grade 7. However, it must also be pointed out that before the students are admitted to primary school, it is mandatory for them to first of all attend early childhood education and care (ECD) or in other words, (preschool). The subjects taught at primary school include: - Mathematics, Environmental

Science, Religious Education (mainly Christianity), indigenous languages (that is, Shona and Ndebele), General Paper (all about Social Studies) and English as well. The ratio of teacher to students is usually 1: 30 or 40, although sometimes it can even be more than that because there is lack of teachers in most Zimbabwean schools, but the number of students keeps on increasing, and hence that explains the teacher deficit. Generally, most teachers in Zimbabwean primary schools are holders of Diplomas, however, there are also untrained teachers as well and they usually operate in the remote areas where teachers who are trained show an unwillingness to serve mainly due to the poor educational circumstances in the rural areas. Primary school students write exams at the end of Grade 7 and due to the fact that primary school is compulsory in Zimbabwe, both failed and passed students will still progress to the next academic level (secondary education). However, it must be stressed out that some secondary schools have a robust selection process which only prefers primary school students who would have excelled in their exams. As such, those who fail their Grade 7 examinations are at risk of enrolling at poor secondary schools.

3.4.2 Secondary Education

The official age for a student in Zimbabwe to be enrolled in a secondary school is 13 years and the student undergoes 4 years of secondary education (that is Form 1 to Form 4). In other words, Form 1 to Form 4 is similar to saying Grade 8 to Grade 11, just like how it is the case in the South African education system. In Zimbabwe, there are two types of secondary schools that a student can attend, and these are; private secondary schools and public secondary schools. In addition, these two types of secondary schools can be either “day secondary school” or “boarding school”. Day secondary school simply means that students go to school every weekday from morning till afternoon and they go back home whereas in boarding schools, students live at school and they only go back

home during the school holidays. Unfortunately, boarding and private secondary schools are expensive in Zimbabwe. Therefore, most parents can only afford to send their children to day secondary schools which are mainly public schools and they are cheaper as well. In general, despite the fact that private and boarding secondary schools are expensive, they offer better educational quality than day public schools. Myself, I went to a public day school (Magwegwe High School) where I did my Form 1 to Form 4 and I should say the educational standards there were not that good. For example, there was shortage of teachers, teaching materials (textbooks) and the school was outdated in terms of technological advancements. For my upper secondary school (A-level), I went to Premier High School, although it was a private school but there wasn't too much difference with Magwegwe High School.

Just like in primary education, the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture is also responsible for designing the curriculum for secondary education. Most importantly, secondary education or high school is divided into two stages and these are Ordinary level (O-level) and Advanced level (A-level). O-level starts from Form 1 to Form 4 and A-level starts from Form 5 to Form 6. At the end of Form 4, students write examinations known as the Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education Ordinary level (ZGCE-O) and they have to pass with a minimum of 5 subjects in order for them to qualify for A-level. Among those 5 subjects to be passed, 3 of them (Mathematics, English and Science) are compulsory and without passing them a student cannot attend A-level even though they might have passed more than 5 subjects. At A-level, the student majors in at least 3 subjects and these subjects must be in line with the degree program that they would like to pursue. For example, if a student would want to pursue Law at university, it is advisable that they take subjects like History, English Literature and English at A-level. It must be pointed out that A-level is the last stage of secondary or high school, and it determines whether or not a student will make it to university. Therefore, it is of paramount importance for A-level

students to pass their final A-level examinations so as to fancy their chances of being enrolled at university.

3.4.3 Tertiary Education

“Tertiary education in Zimbabwe covers all universities, technical colleges, polytechnic colleges, teacher`s training colleges and other vocational skills training centers. Tertiary education falls under the Ministry of Higher Education and Technology” (Kanyongo, 2005, p.68). However, I will only focus on universities since they are the premise of my thesis. According to Nuffic (2015), “when Zimbabwe gained its independence in 1980, the country had only one university: The University of Zimbabwe”. With passage of time, the number of Zimbabwean universities have risen in a remarkable way. For example, “at the moment there are twelve recognized universities, 9 recognized polytechnics and 12 recognized teacher colleges” (Nuffic, 2015). Zimbabwean university institutions offer an academic degree upon completion whereas non-university institutions offer a qualification which can be in the form of a certificate or a diploma. The university system is basically divided into 2 phases and these are undergraduate and post graduate phase. Undergraduate phase is usually a Bachelor`s degree program that runs for 3 to 4 years depending on the degree program. On the other hand, the postgraduate phase consist of a Master`s degree or doctorate.

3.5 SUCCESSES AND FAILURES OF ZIMBABWE`S EDUCATION REFORMS

The post-independence reforms that were implemented by the new Zimbabwean government in the education sector recorded some positive outcomes. For example, some of the most noticeable positives were seen in the increase in enrollment of students and staff members, abolition of

racial segregation in schools, gender equality, increase in the supply of educated personnel and most importantly, there was massive improvement in Zimbabwe's literacy rate. Therefore, all these and other reforms will be discussed in detail shortly.

3.5.1 Access To Education

The new government ensured that through its policies and reforms, no child was to be left out as far as being enrolled at a primary school was concerned. This is so because the government offered free primary school education for all children and it also made it clear that going to school was a right of every child. In addition, more schools were built, "according to the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture (2001), during the first decade of independence, the number of primary schools jumped from 2401 in 1979 to 4504 in 1989, 87,6% increase and primary school enrollment showed a 177,5% increase 819, 586 to 2,274,178 during the same period. The number of secondary schools increased from 177 in 1979 to 1502 in 1989, a change of 748,6% and secondary school enrollment increased from 66,215 to 695,882 a 950,9% change." (Kanyongo, 2005, p.69).

3.5.2 Gender Equity In Education

According to Kanyongo (2005), "in 1980, the proportion of female students in primary schools was 47,6% compared to 52,4% males. By 1999, the proportion of females had increased to 49,1% and that of males had gone down to 50,9%" (p.70). Although the exact equality between females and males in education had not been achieved, but at least the situation had improved, and it was heading towards the right direction.

3.5.3 Racial Equity In Education

It must be pointed out that before Zimbabwe gained its independence, there was massive racial segregation in the Zimbabwean education system. The education system was divided into 2 categories and these were; Group A and Group B schools. Group A schools were only for white students and they were well resourced whereas Group B schools were for the black people and they were poorly resourced. However, this racial categorization of schools was abolished by the new Zimbabwean government soon after independence. As a result, all students (black or white) now have equal chance to be enrolled at any school of their choice.

3.5.4 Educated Personnel

The post-independence government embarked on robust educational reforms and these went a long way in producing quite a number of skilled personnel, both in government and in the private sector. Zimbabwe has become the main source for professionals, (particularly teachers) for most countries in the southern part of Africa (Kanyongo, 2005). Generally, Zimbabwe has thousands of teachers and other professionals as well working in various countries and abroad. Unfortunately, due to the current economic instability, this has led to massive “brain drain” – the loss of the country’s skilled personnel to other countries due to unfavorable conditions.

3.5.5 Literacy Rate

When it comes to the literacy rates, one can refer to the statistics provided by the UNESCO’s Institute for Statistics (2014) report which has already been mentioned in chapter 1.4 of this thesis. However, the summary of the literacy rate statistics gotten from the 2014 report is as follows; youth

literacy rate = 90,43% and adult literacy = 88,69%. I will also add the total literacy rate for people aged 65 years and above (which was not included in chapter 1.4 of the thesis), it stands at 81,13% (UNESCO, 2014). Therefore, what can be concluded from these above-mentioned total literacy rates statistics is that, despite the harsh economic conditions that are currently bedeviling Zimbabwe, the country still boasts of a high literacy rate and it is still a force to be reckoned with on the African continent.

3.5.6 Information Technology

“The promotion of technology in the school system is one area which has not been moving fast enough. In fact, this is a problem in most developing parts of the world not just Zimbabwe. The problem is that while most schools and other educational institutions in the industrialized countries have ready access to computers and internet, the same can't be said of developing countries” (Kanyongo, 2005, p.73). In addition, Moore (2000) summarized the situation in Africa by stating that 0,1% of the African population uses basic services of the internet, for example emails. “The lack of financial services and poor infrastructure are the main reason why it is difficult to introduce computer technology in most rural schools. Although computers have been part of the country`s education curriculum for a long time, their use has been limited to a few well-funded private schools and boarding schools that have electricity. The majority of the schools don't have basic facilities required for the use of computer technology.” (Kanyongo, 2005, p.73) Generally, most developing countries rely on donor funding to help cater for their educational needs and such is the case in Zimbabwe as well. Therefore, such financial constraints impact negatively on the quality of the Zimbabwean education system and it becomes difficult, “to implement reforms that improve academic, and proficiency and hence provide quality education” (Kanyongo, 2005, p.73). Basically, in addition to the challenges mentioned previously which hinder

the smooth e-learning experience in most Zimbabwean schools, there is no clear ICT policy in Zimbabwe, and this makes it difficult for schools to adopt or implement ICT centered curriculums. In short, the ICT situation in most Zimbabwean schools requires a lot of work to be done for it to be successful. This can be evidenced by the World Economic Forum (2014) report which ranked Zimbabwe in position 119 out of 148 countries on a global scale as far as having internet access in schools is concerned (p.319). It must be noted that the challenges and solutions or recommendations as far as this issue is concerned will be explained in depth in the last chapters of this thesis.

CHAPTER 4: DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I give a detailed exposition of my field research which I conducted at NUST University, in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe in 2018 during the summer break (July to September). First of all, I was really excited to go back home (Zimbabwe) for the summer holidays. I came to Turkey on the 19th of October 2016 and I had spent close to 2 years in Turkey (without returning back home) and I was really missing my family and friends a lot. Thus, I felt going home was going to be ideal for me and the right thing to do because not only was I going to meet my friends and family, but I was also going to conduct my research in my home country since I was going to stay for close to 2 months. In other words, instead of just having fun for the duration of the whole summer holiday, I decided to also conduct my research study, since my topic required me to collect data in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe and also to cut the costs of having to come back home again the following year for research purposes, thus, I might as well do the research (collect data) once and for all whilst being on holiday as well, which the wise people would refer to as, “killing two birds with one stone”. Before I begin to provide a detailed journey of my research expedition in Bulawayo, I will firstly provide a brief background of Bulawayo as a way of familiarizing the reader with my home city.

4.1 BACKGROUND OF THE CITY OF BULAWAYO

For the avoidance of doubt and misinterpretations about Bulawayo, I went straight to the Bulawayo City Council website, which is where I got genuine information about Bulawayo. Therefore, the bulk of the information about the background of Bulawayo was taken from the Bulawayo city council website (www.citybyo.co.zw). As a starting point, Bulawayo is Zimbabwe's second largest city with a population of approximately 1,5 million people who are integrated together despite their differences in tribe, race and

culture. It is located south-west of Zimbabwe and according to www.zimfieldguide.com, “Bulawayo is situated near the watershed between the Zambezi and the Limpopo drainage basins and slopes gently down the north and north-west, although the southern suburbs are quite hilly merging into the rocky Matobo Hills”.

Bulawayo boasts of a very rich traditional history which dates back to pre-colonial times and it was founded by Lobengula, the son to Mzilikazi, the last leader of the Ndebele state. Infact, it was king Lobengula himself who selected the location of Bulawayo and when he succeeded his father in 1870, that is when the city became a capital. Initially, Bulawayo was referred to as “Gibixhegu” but then it was later changed to “koBulawayo” and king Lobengula stayed there until 1881. The name Bulawayo or koBulawayo simple means a “place of slaughter” or “the place of killing”. That is, it was derived from the Ndebele language “bulala” which means to kill. So basically, in Bulawayo a lot of killings took place during war times or the time of uprising in 1896. The Uprising was referred to as “Umvukela” or “Matabele Uprising”. As such, “Bulawayo then became a city under Proclamation 41 on the 4th of November 1943. Each year in November the city of Bulawayo celebrates the declaration of the city during the month of November” (www.citybyo.co.zw). Most importantly, Bulawayo is the industrial hub of Zimbabwe with well planned rail and road network which do not only provide gate-ways to different parts of Zimbabwe but to other southern African countries as well. For example, Bulawayo provides good transport links to Botswana, South Africa and Zambia which go a long way in boosting the country’s industrial sector. As a result, Bulawayo is a strategic city for industrial purposes, however, it is sad to mention that the city has lost its attractiveness due to the severe economic hardships that are currently bedeviling the country.

On the contrary, some analysts still argue that Bulawayo is still an attractive city. For example, Chauke (2019), a journalist for *The Sunday News* (a local Zimbabwean newspaper), wrote an article titled, *Bulawayo the real tourism colossus*, where he argued that, “Bulawayo, the City of Kings is famed to be the cleanest city in the country and that on its own places it as an attractive tourist destination”. In addition, www.zimfieldguide.com briefly describes Bulawayo as follows :

it is a relaxed, attractive and atmospheric city of tree-lined streets and avenues, beautiful parks, an air of shabby gentility and until recently was Zimbabwe’s industrial capital. Bulawayo offers a significant contrast to Harare as it consists of a mixture of slowly fading colonial houses with wide verandas and many of its old public buildings including the City Hall (where the flower sellers congregate, as well as basket and crochet vendors) Bulawayo Club, the High Court and the rail station which are maintained as the heritage sites and a mix of low-rise and high-rise buildings.

Moving on, having provided a brief background of Bulawayo, I will now move on to my data collection journey. However, before I do that, I will put two key images below (map of Zimbabwe and Bulawayo Central Business District, respectively). I will put the image of the map of Zimbabwe so as to show the reader the geographical location of Bulawayo and also how it links with neighbouring southern African countries (mentioned above). I will also provide an image of Bulawayo showing the city’s tallest building (the National Railways of Zimbabwe) and the surrounding areas.



Figure 1 : Map of Zimbabwe showing geographical location of Bulawayo.

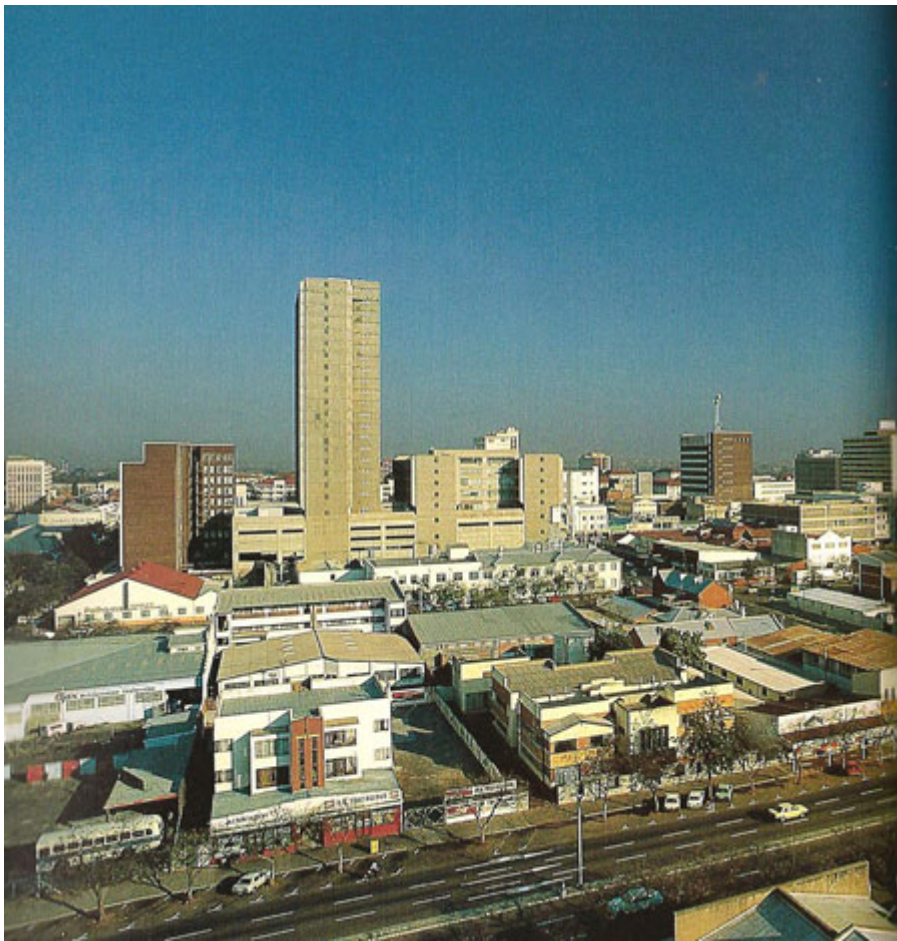


Figure 2: Bulawayo Central Business District.

4.2 MY DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

As soon as my thesis proposal was approved by the department and my scholarship providers (YTB) had initially approved my thesis topic, thus, giving me the green light to go on with my research study. I arrived in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe in mid-July 2018 but I couldn't straight away get into the field and collect data because I needed some time to be with my family, visit relatives and friends. In addition, it was during semester break and the universities were closed so I couldn't start my data collection since my target population was the university students. Above all, the month of July was hyped by the presidential election fever whereby Zimbabweans were going to the presidential elections for the first time since independence

without the 94 year old dictator, Robert Mugabe who had ruled them for an unprecedented 37 years. As a result, the 2018 presidential election was a watershed and historical election for the Zimbabweans, thus I couldn't collect data about my research in July because people were very much engraved in the presidential election fever, including myself. Therefore, I postponed my data collection to the following month (August), with the hope that nerves would have calmed down and also the universities would have opened by then.

When the presidential election fever, drama, fiasco and tragedy (according to some social commentators) had calmed down and the university students had started going back to their respective schools, I also began my data collection. Initially, my research topic was targeting Bulawayo university students but I later discovered that it was going to be difficult and a bit tricky to collect data from all Bulawayo university students. This is so because, despite the fact that I had little time to conduct my research and go back to Turkey; it is very difficult to identify the universities that are "originally" from Bulawayo. Most of the noticeable universities in Bulawayo have campuses in Bulawayo where students can conduct their lessons but they are not originally Bulawayo universities. That is, they are satellite universities and most of them have their headquarters or main campuses in the capital city, Harare. Thus, this makes these satellite universities not to fully fall under the bracket of "Bulawayo universities". Examples of such universities include; Women University of Zimbabwe and Catholic University of Zimbabwe. Other universities in Bulawayo which have similar "identity crisis" but don't have their offices in Harare include; Solusi University and Lupane State University.

Having realized that, I then narrowed down my research to National University of Science and Technology (NUST), which happens to be the biggest, popular and original Bulawayo University. In other words, I did not

want to take the risk of collecting data from all the Bulawayo universities because of their controversial nature as mentioned above, thus it was better and ideal for me to stick to one university (NUST) with which I was very confident that it fits the category of Bulawayo University. Besides, it is the “talk of the town” not only in Bulawayo but also in Zimbabwe. Therefore, I felt that collecting my data from such a university will go a long way in not really or totally giving a true reflection of the views of Bulawayo students as far as the use of social media for academic purposes is concerned but rather give an idea of the whole picture with regards to this research topic. In addition, the data collected at NUST and the findings can act as a starting point for future research expeditions as far as this research topic is concerned in Zimbabwe. Before I describe how I entered the field (NUST) for my data collection, I would firstly provide a brief historical background of NUST.

4.3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF NUST

It must be noted that all the information about the historical background of NUST was taken from the university’s website. National University of Science and Technology is a university that is found in Bulawayo and it was opened on the 8th of April 1991. It started with only 270 students, 3 faculties (Applied Science, Commerce and Industrial Technology) and 28 academic staff members. NUST’s first chancellor, former president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe was installed in October 1991, with Professor Phinias Makhurane being his vice-chancellor. A huge public event was held on that day to install these two revered people. Fast forward to 1995, the number of students enrolled at NUST increased to over 1200 as well as the academic staff increased to 85. In addition, the university held its first graduation ceremony in that year and a total of 163 graduates from the faculties of Applied Sciences and Commerce were capped. Basically, the vision for NUST reads as follows, “to be a world class university in science,

technology, innovation, entrepreneurship and business development, spearheading industrialization locally and beyond” (www.nust.ac.zw).

Furthermore, the construction of the university’s library began in 1998 and then later that same year, the Ceremonial Hall and the Student Services Centre followed. At the present moment, the chancellor for NUST is Professor Mqhele E. Dlodlo and the university now has a total of 7 faculties and 40 departments.

4.4 NUST FACULTIES AND THEIR DEPARTMENTS

Below is a list of NUST’s 7 faculties and their respective departments.

i. **Faculty of Applied Sciences**

- Department of Applied Biology and Biochemistry
- Department of Applied Chemistry
- Department of Applied Mathematics
- Department of Applied Physics
- Department of Computer Science
- Department of Environmental Science and Health
- Department of Forest Resources and Wildlife Management
- Department of Sports Science and Coaching
- Department of Statistics and Operations Research

ii. **Faculty of The Built Environment**

- Department of Architecture
- Department of Land and Urban Design
- Department of Quantity Surveying

iii. **Faculty of Commerce**

- Department of Accounting

- Department of Banking
- Department of Business Management
- Department of Finance
- Department of Marketing
- Department of Insurance

iv. **Faculty of Communication and Information Science**

- Department of Library and Information Science
- Department of Journalism and Media Studies
- Department of Records and Archives Management
- Department of Publishing Studies

v. **Faculty of Engineering**

- Department of Chemical Engineering
- Department of Civil and Water Engineering
- Department of Electronic Engineering
- Department of Fibre and Polymer Materials Engineering
- Department of Industrial and Manufacturing Engineering

vi. **Faculty of Medicine**

- Department of Anatomy and Physiology
- Department of Community Medicine
- Department of Paediatrics
- Department of Pharmacology and Biochemistry
- Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology
- Department of Surgery and Anaesthetics
- Department of Pathology
- Department of Nursing and Midwifery Sciences
- Department of Psychiatry and Social Behavioral Sciences
- Department of Medicine

vii. **Faculty of Science and Technology Education**

- Department of Art, Design and Technology Education
- Department of Science, Mathematics and Technology Education
- Department of Technical and Engineering Education and Training

I will now proceed to NUST enrolment statistics or the number of students enrolled at NUST.

4.5 ENROLMENT STATISTICS FOR NUST

When it comes to the enrolment statistics of the students at NUST, I couldn't find the information on the NUST website, thus I went straight to the Administration Block at NUST (Admissions and Student Records) where I was given up to date information about enrolment statistics. Due to the fact that I collected my data during the semester break, therefore, I requested for enrolment statistics as of 31 December 2017 to 31 May 2018 academic year. During the mentioned period, the total number of enrolment at the university was 9710 students (5448 males and 4262 females). However, it must be noted that this figure (9710) is both for undergraduates and postgraduates students. Therefore, since my research study is focusing on the undergraduate students, thus I will only use the enrolment statistics of the undergraduate students which was **8151** (4569 males and 3582 females).

4.6 NUST IMAGES



Figure 3. NUST logo



Figure 4. NUST main entrance



Figure 5. Administration Block at NUST (where I got my letter of approval and statistics about NUST).



Figure 6. NUST Hostels for students.



Figure 7. NUST Commerce building



Figure 8. Image of myself (in the middle with a bag full of questionnaires and my research materials) and two of my participants (South Sudanese) at NUST.

I had just finished collecting data on that day and just about to head home. I didn't know that NUST actually caters for foreign students as well, I only thought that it was full of local Zimbabwean students until I met these South Sudanese gentlemen. Ironically, it also turned out that these two gentlemen were actually friends of one of my South Sudanese friend studying in Ankara, Turkey. I only got to know about this after we had done our introductions, and they were really happy (me too) to know about this. Thus,

they suggested that we take a photo so that I show my friend back in Ankara. Indeed, *it`s such a small world!*

4.7 ENTERING THE FIELD AT NUST

To begin my research expedition, I prepared my questionnaires and interview questions (typed and printed out). However, before I went to the main NUST campus, which is situated 10-15minutes out of town (Bulawayo CBD), I wanted to test the response that I was going to get from the NUST students in the conduction of my interviews and the physical distribution of my questionnaires. Therefore, I first went to the NUST main library which is situated in Bulawayo CBD where some of the students spend their time there doing their research. When I arrived at NUST main library on my first day, I met quite a number of students and then I began to have an intercourse with them, asking general information about NUST and about my research topic. The response that I got from the NUST students was very encouraging and phenomenal as witnessed by the fact that most of them showed a genuine willingness to help me and participate in my research. In addition, I thought I knew a lot about NUST but to my surprise, it turned out that I only had outdated information about the university and these students really helped me in updating me about the NUST`s current state of affairs as far as the whole educational environment is concerned. Thus, after the conversation with them, I felt much informed than I was before I came in contact with them. For example, I now knew which departments to go and how to locate them, suitable times to conduct my research at the university, how and where to find the Lecturers or Deans for my interviews, best times and places to meet students for interviews and distribution of questionnaires, among other things. Thus, I was keen to start the real research expedition. As such, I also distributed a couple questionnaires to the few of them as a way of testing how my whole data

collection process was likely to go like and the students really cooperated very well.

Moving on, the resounding cooperation that I received from the NUST students at the NUST main library gave me hope and boldness to go to the NUST main campus and start the real business of my research expedition. Upon arrival at NUST main campus, before I could start collecting data for my research, it was of paramount importance to seek permission from the relevant authorities at NUST so as to respect the ethical guidelines of research. Thus, I went to the Administration Block to find out who can help me with an approval letter that was going to enable me to go ahead and conduct my research at NUST. At the Administration Block, they referred me to the Registrar, (Mr F. Mhlanga) who happens to be the person in charge of approving or disapproving researches to be conducted at NUST about NUST. I handed in my application letter seeking for permission to conduct my research at NUST to the Registrar's secretary and fortunately, Mr Mhlanga approved it. I was delighted and ready to go.

Having acquired the approval letter, my next stop was the Admissions and Student Records where I was hoping to get all the necessary information about the university that was going to help me in my research. This information included; How many Faculties are there at NUST?, Where are these Faculties located?, How many departments does each Faculty have?, What are statistical figures of the number of students for each Faculty, as well as the enrollment figures? All the answers about my questions I got them from the Admissions and Student Records, and thus I was able to structure properly my data collection plan/design. As mentioned above already, NUST has 7 faculties and I had to target all the 7 Faculties at NUST and then decide under each Faculty how many departments was I going to include in my research plan. It must also be pointed out that 6 of the NUST's Faculties are found at the main campus and only 1 Faculty

(Faculty of Medicine) is situated at a different location, (at Mpilo Hospital). As a result, I first dealt with the 6 Faculties at the main campus and then ended with Faculty of Medicine. The 6 Faculties are as follows; Faculty of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Communication and Information Science, Faculty of Industrial Technology, Faculty of Science and Technology Education, Faculty of Commerce and Faculty of The Built Environment.

Furthermore, I made show that I evenly distributed my questionnaires to the students from all the faculties and some of their respective departments. Suffice it that I didn't cover all the departments but I managed to collect data from the majority of the departments across all the Faculties. As far as the Faculty of Medicine was concerned, I was told that there are 10 departments, however, not all the 10 departments can stand alone; in fact they complement each other. As such, all the 10 departments fall under the umbrella term (MBBS), that is, Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery. Therefore, this means that students from different departments under Faculty of Medicine can also take some mandatory courses from other departments in the same Faculty.

Generally, the distribution of questionnaires and interviewing of students was not a problem to me because the students were willing to participate and they were readily available in and around the campus. I did all my data collection processes physically at the university premises and I physically distributed 285 questionnaires to the students. However, I encountered some challenges in trying to interview the Deans and Chairpersons of the majority of the faculties because most of them were always busy, others were not available in their offices and some of them gave me appointment dates that were after the 15th of September, which is the date that I was supposed to be boarding my flight back to Turkey. Although, the Deans and the Chairpersons were not necessarily my target population, I just wanted to interview them so that I could just hear their side of the story and I also

felt that interviewing them would balance and substantiate my research findings. Realizing that it was a mammoth task to get hold of the Deans and most of the Chairpersons, I then decided to interview whoever was second in command as far as the departments were concerned, hence the lecturers became my target. Let me also hasten to say that my data collection is divided into two categories and these are (interviews I did with lecturers and the questionnaires I did with the students). However, it must be pointed out that the questionnaires I did with the students are the main focus of this research study since my target population are the university students themselves. Therefore, I will start with the details obtained from the questionnaires with the students and then followed by the interviews with the lecturers or educators.

4.8 QUESTIONNAIRES CONDUCTED WITH NUST STUDENTS

Basically, the questionnaire surveys conducted with the NUST students are the pith and backbone of my data collection and my research study as a whole. The questionnaire surveys involved 285 NUST students who were randomly selected from 7 different faculties and their respective departments. I divided my data into 3 sections and these are demographic data, descriptive data and the discussion panel.

4.8.1 Demographic Data

a) Sex

SEX	NUMBER
Male	161
Female	124

Out of the 285 students who participated in the questionnaire survey, 161 were males and 124 were females. Therefore, more males participated in the survey compared to the females.

b) Age

AGE	NUMBER
19 to 25	239
26 to 30	26
31 to 35	17
36 and above	3

Students between the ages of 19 to 25 were the highest contributors of my survey, whilst the other age groups recorded low numbers, especially those who are 36 years and above. This can be due to the fact that, in Zimbabwe, the average age for one to begin university is 19 years, hence the majority of the students are in that age group since they are doing their undergraduate. From the age of 23 going upwards, one is expected to have finished their undergraduate degree, and this probably explains the low figures in the age groups from 26 and above.

c) Faculty

FACULTY	NUMBER
Medicine and Surgery	42
Accounting	23
Blank Spaces	21
Industrial Manufacturing Eng	14
Civil and Water Engineering	13
Fibre and Polymer Materials Eng	13
Fiscal Studies	12

Operations Research and Statistics	12
Environmental Science and Health	11
Finance	11
Chemical Engineering	10
Records and Archives Management	9
Sports Science and Coaching	8
Architecture	7
Journalism and Media Studies	7
Marketing	7
Electronic Engineering	6
Quantity Survey	6
Computer Science	5
Management	5
Risk Management and Insurance	5
Applied Maths	4
Business Management	4
Applied Physics	3
Banking	3
Development and Social Science	3
Human Resources Management	3
Library and Information Science	3
Property Development and Estate	3
Radiography	3
Biotechnology	2
Medical Physics	2
Forestry Resources	1
Informatics	1
Publishing Studies	1

I managed to get participants from all 7 of NUST's faculties and their various departments. The major contributors of the survey came from the department of Medicine and Surgery (42), followed by Accounting (23). However, it must be pointed out that a total of 21 students did not specify their departments (blank spaces), whilst some of them only wrote the name of the university in the space provided instead of their department. Probably, they did this due to their misinterpretation of the response needed in the specified space. On the other hand, departments such as Publishing, Informatics and Forestry Resources were the lowest with only one participant each.

d) Family Income Status

FAMILY INCOME STATUS	NUMBER
Average	218
Low	53
High	12
Blank Spaces	2

The majority of the participants stated that they were in the average family income status category, which is pretty much the situation for most Zimbabweans because the current state of affairs in the country's economy is not that good (economic instability). However, I also realized that some of the participants did not really provide a true reflection of their family income status as they felt that it was more of a personal question, thus some of them just wrote "high" or "average" as a way of avoiding being judged or ridiculed. This is so because most people generally don't like to be associated with poverty even though they might come from a low family income status. The reality of the matter is, there are very few rich people in Zimbabwe, the majority of the people are struggling to make ends meet. In addition, only 2 participants left blank spaces in their questionnaire forms.

4.8.2 Descriptive Data

a) Are You on Social Media?

YES	284
NO	1

All my participants agreed that they make use of social media except for one male participant in department of Medicine and Surgery. However, 41 of his other colleagues in the same department made use of social media which then proves to one that it's not about the department or program that one is doing which determines their use of social media.

b) Do the NUST students use Social Media for academics?

YES	281
NO	4

281 participants use social media for their academic purposes whereas only 4 participants use it for non-academic purposes. It must be pointed out that the purposes for social media usage will be outlined in the discussion panel.

c) Main Social Media platforms used by the NUST students.

Google	270
WhatsApp	245
YouTube	217
Facebook	96

Twitter	59
MySpace	5
Instagram	3
Skype	3
Wikipedia	2
Gmail	2
Google Class	2
Yahoo	1
Pinterest	1
Zoom	1
LinkedIn	1
Blank Space	1

Google, WhatsApp and YouTube are among the most used social media platforms by my participants, with Google being the highest. Facebook and Twitter are not that frequently used compared to the previously three mentioned applications. On the other hand, social media applications such as Pinterest, Skype and Myspace recorded very low figures.

4.8.3 Discussion Panel

a) Purposes for using Social Media by NUST students

NUST students use social media for various purposes and these purposes are both academic and non-academic. Therefore, based on the data that I received from the questionnaires, I managed to come up with 4 different categories that will help to clearly distinguish the social media purposes by the NUST students. However, it must be noted that the participants were not limited to one category only, as evidenced by the fact that most of my participants had three or more purposes that they mentioned in their social media usage. In addition, some of the categories had sub-categories as

well as shall be seen shortly. Only 10 participants did not specify their purposes. The 4 categories identified are as follows:-

1. Research purposes

The majority of the NUST students (90 percent) use social media for research and the research varies from general (non-academic) to specific (academic) research. This then brings me to the sub-categorization of this category into two (academic and non-academic research).

1.1 Academic research purposes

Under this sub-category, the NUST students stated how they make use of social media for their academic purposes which is also the primary focus of this thesis. Most of the students mentioned that they use social media for doing research for their assignments, presentations, case studies, examinations and other academic related projects. For example, most of the students in the Medicine and Surgery department use social media for studying Anatomy. In addition, some students watch tutorial videos online (usually on YouTube) so as to gain more knowledge on a particular academic subject. Also, some students access notes on social media to help them in their studies. All these given academic research purposes are the most common ones among the NUST students as far as their use of social media for academic purposes is concerned.

1.2 Non-academic research purposes

One must not be blinkered into believing that the NUST students only use social media for their academic purposes because they also use it for non-academic research purposes. For example, one male student in the department of Finance stated that he uses social media for checking on

current world economic status. On the other hand, one female participant in the department of Risk Management and Insurance stated that she uses social media to keep herself abreast of current affairs and to search for job opportunities. In addition, one female participant in the department of Environmental Science and Health stated her non-academic research purpose of social media which I found very interesting. She mentioned that she uses social media for getting inspiration, however, she did not specify what kind of inspiration. Furthermore, one male student (faculty not specified) stated that he uses social media for applying for scholarships. Basically, the students in this sub-category use social media for general seeking of any type of information (outside academic) that they want at that particular moment.

2. Academic information sharing purposes

Social media has played a pivotal role in the easy transferring or sharing of academic information for the NUST students. It must be emphasized that this transfer of academic information is not only among the students themselves but also between the students and their lecturers. One noticeable example that was raised by the students during the questionnaire surveys is the use of social media for sending and receiving assignments. For instance, quite a number of NUST students mentioned that they make use of social media for sending and receiving their assignments. In other words, social media has made the lives of the students to be easier because they can send and receive their assignments from wherever they are without having to physically go to the lecturer's office, as was the case before the advent of social media. Therefore, by so doing, social media is not only leading to "death of distance" like how Cairncoss (2001) will put it, but it is also saving the students a great deal of time and cutting transport costs. In addition, sending and receiving

assignments via social is faster compared to physically submitting them to the lecturer`s office.

Furthermore, students also receive academic material (for example, notes, pdfs, and course outline) from their lecturers and at times amongst themselves. This then brings me to “group discussions” whereby students create groups on social media (usually on WhatsApp) so that they easily share academic information with each other. These groups on WhatsApp have been referred to as “WhatsApp Groups” and the lecturers are also making use of these groups to share information with their students. For example, lecturers share information such as lecture cancellation or adjustment, quiz or exam dates, course guideline and other information as well that would have been forgotten during the lecture in class or which needs immediate attention (urgent notifications). More so, WhatsApp groups are being used by the NUST students to cross pollinate ideas on various academic subjects.

3. General communication or interaction purposes

It is beyond any reasonable doubt that the need for interaction has motivated students (and people in general) to use social media. In addition, social media has made the communication or interaction of people to be easier and more fun. As mentioned earlier on in the theoretical framework of this thesis, one can refer to Guo, Li and Steven (2012) `s STUH theory which states that the great need for interaction motivates the students to use social media. NUST students also mentioned that they make use of social media for communication and this communication can be among students, between students and their lecturers, parents or friends. It must also be pointed out that social media groups such as WhatsApp groups are the most widely used platforms for interaction. For example, one student in Industrial Manufacturing and Engineering stated that he uses social media

to communicate with other students from across the globe and lecturers from various institutions. In addition, a student from Electronic engineering also shared the same sentiments with the previously mentioned student but the only slight difference is that he uses social media to interact with other students around the world 'who do the same program' with his. Therefore, if a comparison or similarity is to be made between these aforementioned students, what is clear is that they both make use of social media for interacting with other students around the world but the only different is that one is specific in his audience choice (Electronic engineering student) whereas the other one is more flexible (Industrial Manufacturing and Engineering).

Moreover, besides communicating with other students, NUST students also use social media to communicate with their friends and parents via different social media platforms. Therefore, the Uses and Gratifications Theory by Blumler and Katz (1974) can also come into play so as to help explain this scenario. These two theorists identified 5 needs which make human beings use social media, however, for this particular scenario, the "social integrative need" is the most suitable one to explain this phenomenon. Under this need, people use social media so as to feel part of a larger social group and interact with others, as such, that is the case for most NUST students.

4. Online learning (e-learning)

Online learning or e-learning has become a widespread phenomenon across the globe, thanks to social media which has made it possible for students to conduct their lessons via social media. As mentioned before in the thesis, scholars such as Dijk (2006), Hussain (2012) and McAuley, et al (2010) seem to corroborate despite the fact that they use different terminologies to explain the same situation (online learning). For instance,

Dijk referred to it as “telestudy”, Hussain referred to it as “Virtual Learning Environments” (VLEs) and McAuley, et al referred to it as “Massive Open Online Courses” (MOOCs). However, in the case for NUST students, this is a rare phenomenon as evidenced by the fact that only 5 students stated that they make use of online learning whilst the rest do not.

b) Extent of Social Media help

Greater Extent	176
Fairly Helping	99
Lesser Extent	7
Not Helping at all	2
Blank Space	1

176 participants out of 285 were of the view that social media has helped them in their academic life to a greater extent whilst only 2 people mentioned that it was not helping them at all. However, based on the huge figures for “greater extent”, it becomes clear to one that students are benefiting immensely from the use of social media for their academic purposes.

c) Social Media use in the tertiary education system.

In this section, I wanted to find out the opinions of the NUST students as far as the use of social media in their university is concerned. In other words, I wanted to know whether the NUST students agree to the implementation of social media into their education system. A huge number of the students (245) said Yes (agreed to it), 35 said No (did not agree to it) and there were only 5 blank spaces (no comments). Therefore, I will divide this section into 2 parts, that is, those in agreement (proponents) and those in disagreement (opponents), and

then outline their reasons for opposing or agreeing with the above assertion.

1. *Opponents*

- Those who said No, chief among their reasons was that social media is so distractive, as students may end up finding themselves doing non-academic activities. For example, one female student in the Chemical Engineering department stated that social media can distract the students from their schoolwork hence lowering their concentration in class. In addition, students can also end up watching or listening to videos or chatting to friends, which has nothing to do with their academics.
- The other reason why they said No is that, some students abuse social media through for example, posting irrelevant or non-academic material on social media platforms that are supposed to be academic (female student in Accounting department).
- Whereas others, use social media to bully other students (cyber bullying) and some visit immoral social media sites that have nothing to do with academics.
- Last but not least, social media has a lot of fake news and thus one male student (department not specified) argued that it should not be put in the mainstream education system because it would be detrimental to the students` academics (for example, plagiarism).
- Others believe that it should not be put in place because it is too informal. One male student in the department of Civil and Water Engineering is an example of such students who believe that social media is too informal. It must also be pointed out that, his views also corroborate with one lecturer (Mrs. C) I interviewed who also shares the same view.
- One female student from the Medicine and Surgery department expressed that social media should not be put in the mainstream

education system because most students lack the necessary gadgets which enable them to be on social media, thus if put in place it will only benefit a few individuals, especially those from the elite side, that marks digital inequality. Therefore, she suggested that the status quo should remain as it is so as to ensure that no student gains unfair advantage over the other as far as the use of social media at school is concerned.

- Meanwhile, one male student from the Civil and Water Engineering stated that social media is difficult to control and verify and thus it should not be put in place.
- One male student in the Accounting department was of the opinion that students must not over rely on social media for their academics because some information requires the lecturers to physically explain to students in class rather than relying on social media.

2. Proponents

On the other hand, quite a number of students agreed with the above-mentioned assertion. However, before the proponents` reasons are discussed, it is important to also mention that 16 of them just said Yes but didn't provide any explanations. Nonetheless, the majority of them provided their reasons and these reasons include;-

- Social media is a cheap, easy and convenient way of communication between the students and their lecturers or among the students themselves. In addition, social media also helps in making research and studying easier or the academic lives of students are made easier (female student in the Sports, Science and Coaching department). This is so because, the flexibility of social media allows the students to learn anytime anywhere.

- The other important point that the students raised was that, the world has changed, we are now living in a digital age whereby social media usage has become inevitable, therefore, it ought to be embraced even in the education set up. Two examples of students who agreed with this point include; - one male student in the Medicine and Surgery department and the other in the Development and Social Science department.
- Others stated that different people understand differently when taught by different people, hence social media widens learning or it offers students with a variety of platforms to learn from other than the physical class setting (for example, via e-learning). In addition, one female student in the Medicine and Surgery department mentioned that in the event that a student did not understand what was taught during a class lecture, social media platforms like YouTube (tutorial videos) are ideal in helping the student revise or re-look on his or her own what was discussed in class.
- It is easily accessible compared to textbooks (male student in the Fiber and Polymer Materials Engineering and the other in the Accounting department).
- It provides the students with necessary exposure to the outside world and it also allows global interaction among students. Examples of students who expressed this idea include;- 2 male students in the Human Resources department, one male student in the Fiber and Polymer Materials Engineering department and the other in the Electronic Engineering department.
- One female student in the Marketing department and one male student in the Applied Math department stated that social media provides unlimited information to the students and keeps them up to date with current trends.
- In a nutshell, one female student in the Medicine and Surgery department stressed that it is essential to be aware that Zimbabwe is lagging behind when it comes to modern technological trends,

therefore, platforms like Google will assist and enlighten students. In other words, she believes that social media can go a long way in improving the lives of the students academically.

d) Parental control and social media use

In this segment, I wanted to find out the students' views with regards to them being allowed to use social media for their academic purposes by their parents. In simpler terms, the question I asked the students in this segment was, "Should parents allow students to use social media for their academic purposes?". However, I realized that the responses that I received in this segment were almost similar to the previous one. In addition, only 5 participants left blanks (no comments), 11 said NO and 269 said Yes. Just like the previous segment, I will start with the opponents of this assertion and their reasons are as follows;-

1. Opponents

- It must be pointed out that the main reason that was raised was that social media is distractive, students may end up diverting from academic attention.
- Others stated that it has a lot of misinformation.
- Whilst some stated that some students abuse it, for example, cyber bullying or various other internet abuses.
- On a more neutral stance, some students emphasized that parents should not have a say on whether or not students use social media for academic purpose because the assumption is that students are already mature enough to know or choose what is bad or good, right or wrong from social media. Therefore, the decision should not lie in the hands of the parents but in the students themselves, since they know better how to use social media compared to their parents.

2. Proponents

On the other hand, as far as the proponents are concerned, 27 of them only said Yes but didn't provide any explanations. However, the majority of them gave explanations and these include;-

- We now live in a digital age and the use of social media at schools is inevitable.
- Social media provides the students with up to date information (current affairs).
- It is cheap, fast and easier way of communicating and sharing of information.
- It makes academic lives of students to be easy and it encourages students to be computer literate.
- It is cost effective compared to buying textbooks.
- It enhances learning and widens scope of research, allowing own critical thinking in comparison to others.
- Group discussions help students improve their social skills.
- It is convenient and provides students with unlimited access to information.
- It provides platform for students to interact and study together regardless of their physical location.
- It makes the transfer of information to be easier. For example, from lecturers to students or vice versa. That is, students can be notified of any changes like lecture cancellation, hence saving the students from the use of money on transportation.

In conclusion, from the responses gotten from this segment, I also realized that there was an on-going debate on whether there should be parental control on social media. Some students believe that there should be parental guidance whilst others seem not to agree with this by alluding to

the fact that students deserve their privacy on social media (one can also refer to Boyd's views on this issue in the literature of this thesis). In addition, the other debate that was left in my head was whether or not social media leads to better academic performance? From the responses given, there seems to be a debate on this issue as well.

e) Social media use at NUST University and Possible challenges

When it comes to the challenges faced by the NUST students from their use of social media, 54 students stated that they haven't encountered any challenges, 11 students left blanks and a total of 220 students stated that they face challenges. As such, I will only focus on the challenges mentioned which I will also put in categories. I managed to come up with 8 categories and the challenges that these students face are as follows;-

1. Difficulties in Internet Access

Under this category, the difficulties in internet access encompasses a whole load of challenges as well. I realized that the majority of the students mentioned a myriad of challenges that makes it difficult for them to access the internet. For example, one female student from Finance department mentioned that internet data package are very expensive, and it is very difficult for students to access the internet because they cannot afford to buy internet data packages (bundles). Some students, for example 2 females and one male student from the Accounting department stressed that at times the Wi-Fi at school is very weak or slow and, in some cases, it is not even available or accessible (no network) and this makes the internet access for students to be very difficult. In addition, Wi-Fi at NUST premises is unevenly distributed as evidenced by the fact that there are some places at the school where one cannot access the internet. That is, at NUST campus, there are certain places where a student has to be in

order to access the internet. Additionally, another female student in the Accounting department mentioned a very critical issue which has proven to be a stumbling block on the NUST students` internet accessibility. She stated that power cuts (electricity shortages) are also a hindrance to the smooth access of internet by the NUST students.

2. Incorrect or Inaccurate Information

NUST students also raised a social media concern whereby at times the information that they get from social media is incorrect or inaccurate. For example, according to one male student from the department of Civil and Water Engineering, some of the information gotten from social media cannot be verified, as it would be someone`s ideas. Thus, this impacts negatively on the students as they end up finding themselves involved in acts such as plagiarism.

3. Internet abuses

There are several internet abuses that emanate from the use of social media. However, NUST students mainly raised the issues of cyberbullying and verbal attacks (insults) that occur on social media. Two students, one female student from the department of Records and Archives Management and the other one a male student from the department of Civil and Water Engineering are examples of students that mentioned these issues.

4. Irrelevant information

NUST students also mentioned that there is a lot of irrelevant or unnecessary information on social media and they gave an example of “pop-ups” and unwanted advertisements or “ads”. For instance, one male student from the department of Computer Science complained about a lot

of unwanted advertisements on social media that disturb his schoolwork. In addition, a male student in the department of Computer Science and one female student in the department of Civil and Water Engineering also complained about too many pop ups on social media which also disturbs their research on social media.

5. Lack of ICT gadgets

Some NUST students expressed that the lack of ICT gadgets that enable them to use social media is a challenge for them as they are left behind in terms of digital learning whilst students who have these gadgets continue to benefit from them (for example, according to one male student, department not specified). However, it must be pointed out that this is not the fault of the students alone because even the university itself is failing to provide ICT gadgets to its students as mentioned by one male student in the Fiber and Polymer Materials Engineering.

6. Distraction to schoolwork

The other major challenge that the majority of the NUST students raised was the distractive nature of social media. As mentioned in the preliminary stages of the thesis, social media is a “one stop shop” which allows people to do a lot of activities at the same time. Therefore, the fact that students can chat with their friends, listen to music or watch videos whilst doing their academic research on social media, makes it easier for them to end up being tempted to focus more on entertainment or non-academic activities, hence neglecting their schoolwork in the process.

7. Social media over reliance syndrome

2 students, one male student in the department of Finance and one female student in the department of Fiber and Polymer Materials Engineering cautioned that too much reliance on social media makes the students to be lazy. That is, nowadays digital natives find it hard to study, do research or independently think without the help of social media and this is a cause for concern on this generation of students because in the event that social media is unavailable, a lot of them are likely to struggle with their academics.

8. Lack of Skills access

As far as this challenge is concerned, some NUST students lack the necessary skills to operate the computer to their academic advantage (operational skills) and in some cases, some fail to identify credible sites or sources on social media which can help them in their schoolwork (informational skills). As such, I have referred to Dijk (2006) so as to help explain this scenario (skills access). For example, one female student in Architecture and one male student in Civil and Water Engineering stated that at times they fail to find specific information that they are searching for on social media. In addition, some students lack the necessary knowledge of which site to search from when doing their academic researches.

f) Recommendations

In this section, I tried to find out from the NUST students what can be done to ensure that students fully benefit from the use of social media for their academic purposes. Only 23 students left blanks, but the rest of them (262) provided some recommendations. Just like the previous sections, I also put these recommendations into categories. I managed to come up with 8 main categories and these shall be discussed as follows;-

1. Embrace social media

The starting point in ensuring that students fully benefit academically from the use of social media is firstly embracing social media as a tool that can be used for academic purposes. For example, one male student in the department of Computer Science and one female student whose department was not specified emphasized that NUST students and lecturers alike should first of all embrace social media and acknowledge that it can go a long way in improving the lives of the students academically. As mentioned in the literature review, most universities in the developed world have embraced social media into their education system and this has yielded brilliant results as far as the academic performance of their students is concerned. Therefore, NUST must also follow suit.

2. Educate the students about social media

Once the NUST students and lecturers have embraced social media, the next step will be to educate them on how to fully utilize social media for their academic purposes. Examples of students who expressed this point include; one female student from the department of Chemical Engineering and two male students from the department of Management and Human Resources Management, respectively. Most importantly, this education must start in first year of the student's admission to university so that they won't struggle throughout the duration of their educational life.

3. Provide ICT gadgets to the students

Quite a number of the NUST students reiterated that the university should provide the students with the necessary ICT gadgets that enable them to use social media. In other words, some students (especially the less privileged students) cannot make use of social media for their academics

because they lack the required ICT gadgets that enable them to use social media. Therefore, such students suggested that the university must play an integral role so as to avert this situation.

4. Build more computer labs

In addition to the previous recommendation, one female student in the department of Fiscal Studies, further suggested that the university should also build more computer labs. This is so because NUST has very few computer labs and they are not proportional to the students available. Therefore, more computer labs should be built so as to accommodate all the NUST students.

5. Provide strong and unlimited Wi-Fi

Once the students have been given ICT gadgets and more computer labs have been built, a strong Wi-Fi must then be put in place. Most NUST students expressed their anger and unhappiness on the NUST Wi-Fi strength and quality as they stated that it is weak and does not cover the whole circumference of the university. Therefore, the university must provide a strong and unlimited Wi-Fi which covers all the corners of the university.

6. Ban non-academic social media sites

Some students suggested that non-academic social media sites must be banned. In other words, the NUST students' activities on social media must be limited only to academic activities. For example, one female student in the department of Accounting and the other in the department of Biotechnology suggested that there must be the banning of sites which don't contribute to academic purpose.

7. Put in place security systems on social media

One female student in the department of Fiscal Studies suggested that security must be put in place to ensure that students only use social media for academic purposes not for other irrelevant stuff. In addition, one male student in the department of Radiography suggested that there must be close monitoring and restricting of certain sites.

8. Reduce data tariffs or costs

As mentioned earlier on, one of the major stumbling blocks which hinders students from using social media is the expensiveness of data tariffs. Thus, one female student in the Risk Management and Insurance department suggested that telecommunications service providers must reduce their data tariffs, especially for the students so as to increase and improve their social media access.

4.9 INTERVIEWS WITH THE NUST LECTURERS/EDUCATORS

Having provided the data that I got from the questionnaire surveys with the students, I will now turn my attention to the interviews I conducted with the lecturers or educators at NUST. However, it must be clarified that the interviews I did with the lecturers do not form the pith of my research study, but they only help to strike a balance or supplant the students' responses. In other words, rather than just relying on the data provided by the students, I also thought that it was ideal to also hear or take into consideration the lecturers' point of views, since they are the ones that deal with these students on a regular basis. It is also important to note that I prepared a set of semi-structured interview questions and the lay out of the set of questions asked will be revealed at the end of the thesis.

Moving on, my interviews were centered on specific set of questions and the time allocated for each interview differed from interviewee to interviewee. This is so because some lecturers had very little to say about this subject whereas others had much to say as shall be seen in the responses below. Below are the educators from various NUST faculties that I managed to get hold of and interview. In addition, I also included their responses that they gave me during the interviews. Most importantly, I kept the names of these educators anonymous so as to respect their privacy. As such, I came up with new names for them (by making use of alphabetical letters) as shall be seen below, but first I will provide the demographic summary of the interviewees, then proceed to their detailed responses.

4.9.1 Demographic Summary Of The Educators

NAME	SEX	FACULTY
Mr A	Male	Applied Physics
Mr B	Male	Industrial and Manufacturing
Mrs C	Female	Chemical Engineering
Mrs D	Female	Sports, Science and Coaching
Mrs E	Female	Journalism and Media
Mr F	Male	Library and Information Science
Mr G	Male	Environmental Science and Health

Interview 1: Mr A (Faculty of Applied Physics)

Having struggled to get hold of the Deans and Chairpersons for my interviews, I finally got hold of my first interviewee, whom I called Mr A because A is the first letter of the alphabet and he was also my first interviewee. As such, for the other remaining six interviewees, I will also make use of the letters of the alphabet, in an ascending order based on who came first, second and so on. Mr A, a calm and collected man, who works in the faculty of Applied Physics at NUST. Basically, Mr A vehemently agreed that the students make use of social media for their academic purposes. According to him, the main social media platforms that the students use for their academic purposes are WhatsApp and Facebook. However, he also pointed out that there are some social media platforms that the students make use of and these are; Google Classroom, Sakai and Moodle. On his view about the feasibility of the use of social media by the students, Mr A stated that generally the idea is there as far as the use of social media for academic purposes is concerned, but the main challenge is the implementation. He went on to say that basically the students are well ahead of lecturers in terms of social media usage, hence there is need to encourage the lecturers to follow suit. Other challenges that make this exercise to be difficult for students as mentioned by Mr A, include inadequate equipment and slow speed of the NUST internet. As a recommendation, Mr A was not shy to say that the lecturers are the main culprits that need to be educated and cooperate so as to make the use of social media by students for academic purposes a success. In other words, according to him, lecturers must be encouraged to make use of various social media platforms so as to make the learning process much easier and efficient for students.

Interview 2: Mr B (Faculty of Industrial and Manufacturing)

I did my second interview with Mr B and he also agreed that the students use social media for their academic purposes, with WhatsApp being the main platform that they use. Mr B also stated that even himself, he makes use of WhatsApp to communicate with his students and they have actually opened a WhatsApp group where they share all the educational information. In addition, Mr B mentioned that at times he also uses Gmails to communicate with the students but the problem with Gmail is that the students rarely open their emails and one needs more data to be able to open emails. Realizing the hassles caused by emails, Mr B has kept his faith in Whatsapp citing that it is cheap, easy to use and all his students use Whatsapp. For example, since Mr B and his students have a Whatsapp group, he posts most of the educational material (pdfs and urgent notices) on the Whatsapp group. According to Mr B, Whatsapp as a social media for academic purpose is very advantageous for both the lecturer and the students in many ways. For instance, to send a pdf via WhatsApp its time efficient and there is no need for the students to worry about the money to print out the document since they can read via their phones or tablets. Suffice to it that Mr B is aware that most of his students don't work (unemployed), therefore using WhatsApp is cost effective.

Furthermore, Mr B stated that there are some students who are shy to contribute in class or to say their problems to him face to face, thus Whatsapp platform provides them a chance to reveal their inner feelings. The previous point led us to a controversial issue of "teacher-student" relationship on social media as to how it has to be handled since they are mixed opinions about this issue. Mr B reiterated that the teacher-student relationship on social media is very important but the students must know where to draw the line. He gave an example that he teaches some of his students who are older than him and some who are actually the same age

with his parents, but they always try by all means to keep it professional on the Whatsapp groups. He went on to say that, he doesn't want to be seen as a "lion" by his students, rather he wants to be friendly with them but at the same time keeping it professional.

As recommendations, Mr B stated that NUST must ensure that the computers are enough in the computer labs to avoid congestion especially during the exam period. In addition, he also said that there must be improvement between the teacher-student relationships especially on the social media platforms. Moreover, Mr B also said that the strength of the NUST Wi-Fi must be improved as well as its radius or proximity.

Interview 3: Mrs C (Faculty of Chemical Engineering)

Mrs C was the first female lecturer that I interviewed and she appeared to be a more strict and conservative type of a lecturer. Although she acknowledges that social media has played an integral role in modern learning especially for the students, however, she still believes that the traditional ways of teaching are still a force to be reckoned with. Unlike the above mentioned lecturers, Mrs C is not really a fan of WhatsApp as way of conducting lessons with her students because she thinks that WhatsApp is an informal platform. Therefore, she prefers more formal platforms such as Sakai and Google Classroom. This is so because according to her, such platforms enables her to keep things professional with her students whereas on WhatsApp some students might end up posting or commenting irrelevant information that has nothing to do with the subject of study. In essence, Mrs C still wants a clear distinction between the students and the lecturer, that is, the students must always respect the lecturer and there is no time for teasing or playing funny games with the lecturer on social media.

Mrs C is of the view that NUST is really trying by all means to create platforms for students to fully benefit from the use of social media academically. For instance, she uses the formal social media platforms to conduct quizzes and tests with her students. In addition, according to her, the other advantage that has been brought about by e-learning is her ability to conduct “distance learning”. By distance learning, Mrs. C referred to a situation whereby she also conducts lessons online via Google Classroom to students who are not full-time learners at NUST (usually post-graduate students). However, she also pointed out some challenges that have hindered this process and these include; poor connectivity and inadequate computers. In fact, Mrs. C notified me that for example in her department there is no computer lab, which is a sign that a lot still needs to be done in order to achieve the full benefit and potential of social media as a tool for academic purposes. As recommendations, Mrs C suggested that NUST must put in place more libraries and increase the connectivity of their internet.

Interview 4: Mrs D (Faculty of Sports, Science and Coaching)

Following unyielding attempts to get hold of the Chairperson or Lecturer in the Sports, Science and Coaching department, I then decided to interview one of the members for the department, Mrs D who showed some willingness to assist me in any way possible. I had become a regular visitor to this department but every time when I visited I was told that either no one was available or the lecturers were too busy. Therefore, I guess Mrs D ended up feeling pity for me and hence she decided to chip in. She told me that indeed the students were making use of social media for academic purposes and the commonly used social media platform is WhatsApp. She said that students use WhatsApp to share educational information because it is cheap and it reaches a wider audience in a short space of time.

However, Mrs D also notified me of some challenges that make this process a futile one which include the network problem and insufficient computers in the libraries. Although according to her, the university is trying to encourage students to use social media for their academic purposes, their follow-up hasn't been strong enough. Thus, as recommendations Mrs D suggested that social media must be put in the mainstream education system of NUST and students as well as their lecturers must be taught or trained on how to fully benefit from the use of social media academically. In addition, NUST must also improve their connectivity as far as their internet is concerned.

Interview 5: Mrs E (Faculty of Journalism and Media)

I had initially met the chairperson for Journalism and Media, Mr T. Mpofu and he managed to offer me his time from his very busy schedule. In fact, before I went to the Registrar for approval, I first went to the Journalism and Media department because this department has quite a number of things in common with my department (Cultural Studies and Media). As such, I wanted to ask some general questions with regards to my thesis topic and to see whether the Questionnaire and the interview questions that I drafted were making sense. That is how I met with Mr T. Mpofu and he really helped me a lot in giving me some insights on how I can go about conducting my research. We promised each other that I was going to come back to him and we do the interview after I have gotten the approval letter from the Registrar. Unfortunately, when I got back to him, he became so tied up with work and he gave me an appointment date that was a bit far. Thus, I resorted to Mrs E who is also a member in this department.

Mrs E was shy and a bit scared to partake in the interview because she didn't want her name to be made public. However, I assured her that I will keep her name anonymous since I am a researcher who respects the

participants' needs and adheres to research ethics always. It was after I had assured her that she finally agreed to be interviewed. Mrs E agreed that indeed the students are using social media for their academic purposes with WhatsApp being the mostly used social media platform. Mrs E also told me that even at times they make use of Gmail, although it is to a lesser extent. She mostly uses WhatsApp with her students because the majority of her students are on WhatsApp and emails are difficult to access as they require one to be connected to Wi-Fi. Therefore, Mrs E uses WhatsApp to send documents and other important information to her students. When it comes to the challenges that students face from the use of social media for academic purposes, Mrs E noted that some students (especially the First Year students) don't have email accounts and some of them don't even know how to operate a laptop. Hence, the previous point is the other reason why Mrs E has resorted to WhatsApp. In addition, the NUST Wi-Fi is very poor and she told me that it is not accessible throughout the whole school premise as they are some areas within the school premises where one can't access it. Thus, it requires the students to know the access points but "funny enough, there is no problem with the staff Wi-Fi, it's only the students' Wi-Fi that has problems" she said.

However, Mrs E also pointed out some benefits that arise from the use of social media for academic purposes (particularly WhatsApp). She stated that WhatsApp reaches a wider audience at once. For instance, she can send some information on their WhatsApp platform and all the students on the group can access it immediately. In addition, due to the fact that WhatsApp is an instant messaging application, Mrs E is in a position to quickly get responses or feedback from her students. As recommendations, Mrs E suggested that NUST must try by all means to strengthen the student Wi-Fi so as to ensure that the students fully benefit from the use of social media for their academic purposes.

Interview 6: Mr F (Faculty of Library and Information Science)

I really enjoyed my interview with Mr F because he is a man who does not run out of words and he really gave me a lot of very interesting insights on this subject at hand. In addition, he has a good sense of humor and he has an amazing talent of being sarcastic whilst at the same time telling the truth. He really made me feel relaxed, enjoy the interview and get out of the interview fully equipped with various interesting dynamics that were helpful for my research. Mr F believes that students are using social media for their academic purposes to a lesser extent. However, like other lecturers that I interviewed, he is also of the view that WhatsApp is the main social media platform that the students use for their academic purposes.

Essentially, Mr F reiterated that lecturers have also contributed to the hindrance of the full usage of social media for academic purposes by students by being conservative and remaining stuck in the traditional ways of teaching. In other words, according to Mr F, the older generation (digital immigrants) still trust old ways of teaching instead of making use of social media. Therefore, I realized that Mr F and Mrs C both share the same sentiments with regards to this subject. This is also evidenced by the fact that Mr F just like Mrs C, views WhatsApp as an informal and unprofessional e-learning platform. Thus, he trusts Google Classroom and Sakai which he believes are formal and professional. In addition, Mr F stated that there is very little that NUST as an institution is doing in ensuring that students fully benefit from the use of social media for academic purposes. He attributed this to the fact that maybe it is because of the fact that Zimbabwe is a third world country, hence it is still lagging behind as far as technological advancements and e-learning is concerned. He also went on to say that both the educators and students are still yet to grasp social media as a tool for academic purposes. As such, according to him, much is yet to be done.

Furthermore, when it comes to the challenges that arise from the use of social media by the university students for academic purposes, Mr F stated that the NUST Wi-Fi is very weak. For example, in his office the Wi-Fi is not reachable, thus he has to go and mingle with students outside so as to get connected, which is so embarrassing according to him. In addition, the other challenge that Mr F pointed out was the people's reluctance to move with time and embrace new technological innovations in the form of social media. In addition, he also mentioned that people are yet to trust social media and fully realize the positives of social media as a learning tool. In other words, he argued that people only know the negatives and they have not fully grasped the positives that arise from the use of social media for academic purposes. Last but not least, Mr F stressed that people are scared to expose their ignorance. That is, they act as if they know whereas they don't really know how to fully make use of social media.

However, Mr F also mentioned the benefits of using social media for academic purposes as well by acknowledging the immediacy associated with it. That is to say, via the use of social media, for example WhatsApp, there is quick sending of information and WhatsApp also reaches a wider audience at a short space of time. In addition, he was of the idea that social media evokes new ways of doing things or it makes the students together with the lecturers explore the fullness of social media. On the other hand, as recommendations, Mr F suggested that there is great need for students to embrace technology at an early stage (for example, in Primary level) so that when they reach university level they are already accustomed to it. Thus, he gave an example of the recent curriculum put in place by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education which embraces the use of technology in schools. In addition, Mr. F was of the view that the university must embrace social media as a tool for learning and also find sustainable ways of encouraging the use of it by the students and the lecturers as well. Most importantly, Mr F also stated that Wi-Fi and more technological resources must be put in place and made available whenever one is in the

school yard. He also went on and said that the network providers such as *Econet* and *Zol* must not make their charges exorbitant. That is, he suggested that Wi-Fi must be available for free even at homes where students stay so that when they come to school they are well vexed with it rather than having to experience it for the first time at school.

Interview 7: Mr G (Faculty of Environmental Science and Health)

I did my last interview with Mr. G and just like the other educators that I interviewed; he strongly believed that students are making use of social media for their academic purposes. He told me that WhatsApp is the most common social media platform that his students use. However, before the advent of WhatsApp, Mr G relied on Facebook to share some educational materials with his students. For example, he had his own Facebook page that he created where his students could access whatever educational material that he would have posted. Nowadays, according to Mr G, Facebook is no longer common like it was before ever since WhatsApp came to the scene and he also stated that due to the fact that WhatsApp is cheap and fast, most students have resorted to WhatsApp as a platform of sharing academic information. However, he also acknowledged that there are some social media platforms that are utilized as well at NUST such as Sakai and Google Classroom.

Basically, Mr. G is of the view that NUST hasn't really seen social media as a serious platform for learning. In other words, NUST doesn't view social media as a platform ideal for enhancing the students' learning. He went on to say that top staff members seem not to trust social media and they prefer old ways of teaching, which is a similar point to what Mr F reiterated earlier on. In essence, Mr G pointed out that Zimbabwe is lagging behind as far as accepting social media as a tool for academic purposes is concerned. In relation to his department, Mr G told me that he uses WhatsApp to share

educational information not only with his students but with other staff members as well by making use of WhatsApp groups. Thus, he applauded WhatsApp by saying that due to the availability of WhatsApp groups, it is no longer always necessary to meet physically with the students as most of the lessons or educational information can be tackled on these WhatsApp groups. For example, he mentioned that via the WhatsApp groups, urgent meetings can be organized between the lecturer and the students, appointments can be scheduled, lecture notes can be shared and other relevant course notifications can be posted as well.

When it comes to the challenges that arise from the use of social media for academic purposes, Mr G stated quite a number of them. He stated that there are some limitations as to what one can send especially when the issue of sending video clips is concerned on WhatsApp. He went on to say that there is also the leaking of information whereby one can take the information shared on the WhatsApp group and send it to other groups. Mr G also mentioned that some students don't take the WhatsApp groups serious as evidenced by the fact that they may send jokes or irrelevant information that has nothing to do with the subject under study. This action by such type of students makes WhatsApp group to lose its relevance and this actually disturbs some serious students who are willing to benefit from the use of social media as an academic tool. Furthermore, Mr G told me that he chose one class representative who happens to be the WhatsApp group admin and he or she is the one responsible for posting some course related materials or updates on behalf of Mr G. However, at times there is a challenge that arises from these group admins when they decide to be deceitful by sending lies to the group, not what the lecturer would have said. He gave me a scenario where such an incident occurred, the group admin wanted to go somewhere and he didn't want to come to school on that particular day, thus he posted lies on the group that the lecture for that particular day has been postponed. In addition to these challenges, Mr G also stated the obvious ones as well like terrible internet connection and

the fact that at times there is a power cut at school which can last the whole day and this hinders academic progress.

On the other hand, Mr G also acknowledged some benefits that are brought up by the use of social media for academic purposes. According to him, these benefits include; it is cheap, fast, efficient, reaches a wider audience and it complements what would have been done in class. When it comes to the recommendations, Mr G suggested that people must view social media as a complementary platform that helps to ease the learning process rather than just viewing it as a “useless” platform. In other words, there is great need for NUST and other tertiary schools as well to change their mindsets as far as the use of social media for academic purpose is concerned. That is, tertiary schools in Zimbabwe have to embrace social media as a learning platform. In addition, Mr G also stated that the strength of the NUST internet must be improved as well.

4.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY & FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

As far as the limitations of this research study are concerned, one noticeable limitation of this thesis is that it only focused on one university in Zimbabwe (although there are not so many universities in Zimbabwe), probably due to the unavailability of adequate time on the researcher's part. As such, future researchers wishing to embark on a similar research study must involve a couple of universities across Zimbabwe and not just focus on one university. In essence, research on such a topic must not only be limited to Zimbabwean universities alone, other African countries must also be researched on as well so as to get a clear picture of social media and academic purposes in Africa (developing countries) since there is very little that is known about this topic in Africa.

Furthermore, the thesis did not clearly state whether social media usage for academic purposes leads to a good academic performance. In other words, is there a link or relationship between social media usage and academic performance? However, although this was not part of the objectives of the thesis, but it is ideal for future research studies to also explore this research question so as to clearly understand the impact or role of social media as far as the academic performances are concerned.

Additionally, the teacher-student relationship on social media was not really discussed in depth in this thesis. Although the thesis discussed about this relationship based on the interview responses from some of the lecturers at NUST and in the literature review by scholars like Boyd (2014) and Miller, et al (2016), however, future research studies must also explore about this relationship comprehensively. This is so because if the teacher-student relationship on social media is not properly addressed and understood, this may hinder the full beneficitation of students from social media for their academic purposes. In some incidences, this may also damage the reputation of the educator especially if wrong conclusions or perceptions are spread about the educator with regards to how they handle their relationship with students on social media. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to understand and address the teacher-student relationship on social media so as to keep things professional between the students and their educators and also to avoid regrettable occurrences. Equally important as well, the role of educators must be understood in social media and academics so as to make them aware how they can chip-in when it comes to assisting the students benefit from the use of social media for academic purposes.

Last but not least, the role of politics ought to be understood as well. That is, how does politics hinder or aid social media for academic purposes on the university students' usage. For example, with reference to the current

Zimbabwean political situation, indeed politics ought to be understood because it is bad politics or governancy that leads to bad economy which will then lead to the rise of several challenges in social media usage for the students. Thus, future research must also take the political situation of a country into to consideration so as to clearly understand how social media can be used effectively for academic purposes.

CHAPTER 5: DATA EVALUATION

In this chapter, I will dwell much on the key points or themes as well as problematic issues that were raised in my research findings. Most important as well, I will also make use of my research questions and key points or scholars of my literature review in a quest to formulate a link or connection that will help provide a solid back up for my data evaluation. Having said that, therefore this chapter will be divided into 3 main sub-headings which will seek to answer the research questions mentioned at the beginning of this thesis.

5.1 AWARENESS

Are the NUST students aware and making use of social media for their academic purposes?

Based on my research findings, it is undeniable that the majority of the NUST students are aware of social media existence and they are also making use of it in various ways (both academic and non-academic ways). Generally, the issue of social media awareness was also raised by several scholars in my literature review and they all seem to agree that university students make use of social media in various ways (Al-Rahmi & Othman, 2016; Ahern et al, 2016; Mastrodicassa & Metellus, 2013; Wu et al, 2011, Guo et al, 2012, Dijk, 2006, only to mention but a few). That is, apart from the students using social media for their academic purposes, they also use it for non-academic purposes as seen in my research findings. This then brings me to the UGT theory founded by Blumler and Katz (1974) whereby individuals use media for different gratifications, however, the cognitive need seemed to be prevalent among the NUST students which then corroborates with my research study. As such, I was mainly interested in how NUST students make use of social media for their academic purposes

and indeed, the research findings also showed that the majority of them (281 out of 285) are making use of social media for their academic purposes. This is also in line with Dijk (2006)'s views which were mentioned in my literature review whereby he stated that social media has become common nowadays in the educational culture of most students across the globe and the students are also making use of it for their academic purposes. Therefore, NUST students must not be left out when mentioning the university students that are making use of social media for their academic purposes. However, as far as the social media platforms they use for their academic purposes is concerned, Google, WhatsApp and YouTube were the mostly used ones, hence contradicting with some of the scholars mentioned in the literature review who alluded that Facebook is the predominant social media platform used by university students.

Furthermore, I also realized that the academic purposes vary from student to student as seen in the research findings. That is, there is no single or uniform way that all the NUST students make use of social media for their academic purposes. Nonetheless, the key academic purposes for social media usage that were frequently raised by the NUST students are; research on assignments, communication and interaction on academic related information and online learning. It must be pointed out that research was the highest academic purpose amongst the NUST students and online learning was the lowest, probably due to the fact that it takes a great deal of strong WI-FI or one has to fork out a lot of money in order for them to buy internet data bundles that will last for the whole duration of their online presence (of which most students cannot afford that). However, I am glad that the definition of academic purpose which I took from scholars like Weller, et al, (2014); Dijk, (2006); Bohl, (2005); Guo, et al, (2012); Pollara and Zhu, (2011) (mentioned in the introduction of my thesis), seem to match with the academic purposes that were stated by the NUST students. It must be emphasized as well that although the NUST students are aware and making use of social media for their academic purposes, one must not

be blinkered into believing that their social media experience is a rosy one. Therefore, this brings me to my next research question where I will be tackling the challenges and benefits that have been brought about by social media on the academic lives of the NUST students.

5.2 IMPACT

To what extent has the use of social media for academic purposes by NUST students impacted their academic life as far as benefits and challenges are concerned?

Throughout my research study, especially if one is to take a closer look at the debates around social media (which I discussed in the early stages of my research study) and literature review of scholars such as Dijk (2006), Boyd (2014), Miller et al (2016), Wu et al (2011), Mastrodicassa and Metellus (2013), among others, one fact that was salient and agreed upon by all these scholars is that social media impacts the students (and people in general) in both negative and positive ways. As such, I also realized that fact as well based on the responses I got from the NUST students and educators. Therefore, to properly evaluate the impact of social media on the academic lives of the NUST students, I will divide this section into 2 parts, and these will be negative (challenges) and positive (benefits) impacts. I will start off with positive impact which were the main ones and then later evaluate the negative impacts.

5.2.1 Positive Impact (Benefits)

As a starting point, 176 out of 285 (approximately 62 percent) NUST students agreed that social media has positively impacted their lives to a larger extent. As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, the advent of social media contributed immensely in making the lives of people **easier**,

simpler and convenient (Cairncoss, 2001; Mulgan, 1997 and Castells, 1996). As a result, the digital natives (according to Prensky) have benefited quite remarkably in their academic lives, thanks to social media. In other words, due to digital culture, the academic lives of the digital natives has also witnessed some positive changes whereby all the academic information they might want to acquire may be found easier just by the click of a button (“death of distance” or “timeless time”). Thus, the emphasis is no longer on the manual or physical aspect of acquiring information but rather on the online aspect (Dijk, 2006). In relation to the NUST students, social media has played a pivotal role in providing them with **various platforms where they can access academic information easier** and quicker. That is, NUST students only have to be connected to the Internet in order for them to access academic information and this is helping them a lot in not having to worry about going to the library (physically) where at times the books that they may be looking for may be unavailable or they may be inadequate computers in the computer labs. Thus, social media is saving the NUST students from unnecessary transport costs (that is, going to and from the library), frustrations of not finding books or computers in the library and providing them with an alternative information hub (social media) where they can access information easier from wherever they may be.

Furthermore, as mentioned by Ahern et al (2016), social media has played the role of a **“facilitator”** between the students and their educators. Suffice to it that, this is also the case between the NUST students and their educators. That is, NUST students are heavily relying on social media platforms such as WhatsApp to **interact and share information** with not only their educators alone, but also with other students as well. In this way, social media has helped the NUST students in bridging the gap between them and their educators as far as communication is concerned thereby providing an **effective communication platform**. In addition, Al-Rahmi and Othman (2016) also mentioned that shy or students who lack

confidence to speak or participate in class are able to **express their selves freely via social** media. Moreover, scholars such as Mastrodicassa & Metellus (2013), Ahern et al (2016) and O`Keeff & Clarke-Pearson (2011) stressed that social media groups or online communities where students help each other with academic information, earns them a strong social capital. **Social capital** emphasized by these above mentioned scholars can also be linked with the social needs mentioned by Blumler and Kartz (1974) in their UGT theory whereby since the students will be part of a large social group hence this **boosts their academic network** and increases their chances of becoming part of the global citizenship thereby providing them with **necessary exposure to the outside world**. Therefore, I strongly agree with Pollara and Zhu (2011)`s view that social media is **“edusocial”** in the sense that whilst the NUST students are benefiting from it in their social activities, they are also benefiting from it in their academic purposes. However, it must be emphasized that although the NUST students are benefiting from the use of social media for their academic purposes, I also realized that there are also quite a number of challenges that have hindered the NUST students` full beneficiation of social media for their academic purposes as shall be discussed shortly.

5.2.2 Negative Impact (Challenges)

While the NUST students are benefiting from the use of social media for their academic purposes, there were also some concerns (challenges) that were raised by the students which are a stumbling block to their social media experience. To begin with, as mention in the introduction of this thesis and in chapter 3, Zimbabwe is currently facing **severe economic crisis**, and this has led to the majority of the country`s sectors to be weakened. Thus, the education sector in Zimbabwe is also facing a myriad of challenges and this has made e-learning or the use of social media by the students for their academic purposes to be a mammoth task. With

reference to NUST, the **ICT infrastructure at NUST is of poor quality** and it is also not proportional to the students available. For example, the challenges raised by the NUST students pertaining to ICT infrastructure include; **lack of ICT gadgets** to access social media (e.g. computers and smart phones), **lack of computer labs** and **weak Wi-Fi**, only to mention but a few. In addition to these previously mentioned challenges, the majority of the NUST students also lamented that in the event that the NUST Wi-Fi is weak or unreachable (as usual), they are left with no choice but to buy internet data bundles. However, the main problem about these **internet data bundles is that they are expensive**, and most students cannot afford them, hence hindering their social media experience for their academic purposes. In addition, there is also massive electricity deficit in Zimbabwe, and this has led to frequent power cuts (load shedding). Thus, the **power cuts** also disturb the free flow of knowledge acquisition via social media. In short, Zimbabwe's economic hardships have impeded the NUST students in fully benefiting from social media for their academic purposes. Scholars like Shafique et al (2010), Al-Rahmi and Othman (2016), Bosch (2009) and Chitanana et al (2008) also highlighted how a country's economic instability does not only lead to digital inequality but also it hinders the full beneficiation of students from social media for their academic purposes.

Furthermore, the other challenge that was mentioned by the NUST students is that, social media can **act as a distractor** to the students. That is, social media is very exciting and tempting at the same time, if one is not careful, they might find themselves spending a lot of time on social media doing non-academic activities as mentioned by Wu, et al (2011) who defined such students as *Chai-nai* or *RBM*. Basically, what makes social media to be tempting and distractive is that it is a platform that has all the activities (social and educational) in it and in some cases, a student might be doing some academic activities on social media but just a lapse in concentration either by watching a music video on YouTube or chatting to

someone on WhatsApp, they may find themselves hooked up on YouTube and hence abandoning their school work. That's the distractive nature of social media and in all fairness, this is a problem not only for NUST students but for most of the students across the globe (myself included). To back up this assertion, scholars like Mastrodicassa and Metellus (2013), Acheaw and Larson (2015), Asemah, Okpanachi and Edegoh (2013) and Bohl (2005) also talked about this challenge as witnessed in my literature review.

Last but not least, there are also some challenges that NUST students face which I attributed to the 2 main categories mentioned by Dijk (2006). These two main categories have to do with lack of (operational and informational skills). That is, based on some of the responses I got from some of the NUST students, I could straight away tell that they were lacking in these above-mentioned skills. For example, they raised concerns such as **pop ups**, **plagiarism**, availability of **fake information** and **inability to identify which sites to** use in order to access academic information. Although these previously mentioned challenges are genuine concerns for some of the NUST students, however, I strongly believe that they can be easily averted if the students are equipped with the necessary skills postulated by Dijk. Therefore, Dijk (2006) and Guo, Li & Steven (2012) of the STUH framework strongly emphasize that it's not about just possessing ICT gadgets but it's about the ability to make use of these ICT gadgets in a manner that benefits the student academically. Additionally, some scholars in my literature review that include; Miller, Costa, Haynes, McDonald, Nicolescu, Sinanan, Spyer, Venkatraman and Wang (2016) and Boyd (2014) also talked about challenges such as **online harassment** and **cyber bullying** that some students face on social media, however, in my research findings such issues were not that prevalent but that is not to say that they must be taken for granted whenever challenges facing students on social media are being addressed.

5.3 FEASIBILITY

Last but not least, how feasible is the use of social media into the mainstream education system at NUST for academic purposes?

Firstly, for the avoidance of confusion, I felt it was necessary and ideal to clarify what I meant by “feasibility”. In essence, by using this term, I wanted to find out whether the current situation at NUST (by weighing the benefits and the challenges mentioned) allows or can make it possible for social media to be implemented into the NUST’s mainstream education system, just like how other universities in the developed countries have managed to do so. In other words, is it viable? Is it practical or achievable based on the current situation at NUST? Based on my research findings, there is still a long way to go and a lot still needs to be done if the feasibility of the use of social media into the NUST’s mainstream education system is to be achieved. Therefore, this can only come to fruition once the above-mentioned challenges are dealt with. As such, for more information on what needs to be done as far as this issue is concerned, I will provide a couple of recommendations in chapter 6 (last chapter of this thesis) which I believe will play a critical role in dealing with this issue at hand.

CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This chapter is very critical as it enlightens the reader on the possible steps or alternatives that can be taken to address the problematic issues, challenges or concerns that were raised in the research study (Recommendations). In addition, this chapter also offers the reader a clear overview or summary of the key points tackled in the research study (Conclusion). Having said that, I will divide this chapter into 2 parts (Recommendations and Conclusion) with recommendations being the first part to be discussed and then later, I will draw my conclusions.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

As far as the recommendations for my research study are concerned, I first took into consideration the recommendations brought forward by the NUST university students, educators and various scholars who also conducted similar research studies and then narrowed them down to my own recommendations which I felt were suitable for this research subject. As a result, I managed to come up with **4 key** recommendations that will go a long way in addressing the issue at hand. However, it must be emphasized that the recommendations (to be discussed shortly) are not the only ones suitable or available for addressing this research study, but what is undeniable is that, they are among the key recommendations that can be helpful in tackling this matter.

6.1.1 Embrace Social Media At Universities

I strongly believe that, before we start trying to address or putting in place measures that are aimed at ensuring that NUST students fully benefit from the use of social media academically, the first important step to be taken into consideration is to embrace social media at NUST university. By

embracing social media, I mean that all the stake holders (students, educators, parents and other relevant authorities) must first of all accept or acknowledge that social media has become part and parcel of people's lives and it cannot be taken for granted. In other words, social media has become an aspect of one's culture and giving it a blind eye is being short-sighted. Therefore, since education is also part of one's culture, all the stake holders (mentioned above) must come together, embrace social media and find viable ways that can help the university students at NUST benefit from the use of social media for their academic purposes. That is, it must not be the duty of the students alone to embrace social media but everyone as well. As mentioned in the first 2 chapters of my thesis, social media usage has become widespread in most of the universities in the developed countries and it is slowly defying the university's role of being the only primary source of academic information, according to Armstrong and Franklin (2008). As such, social media ought to be embraced not only at NUST university but also in universities that are yet to do so (especially those in the developing countries). In addition, based on the numerous benefits that result from the use of social media for academic purposes as seen specifically in chapter 4 and 5 and throughout this thesis (in general), embracing social media at NUST University becomes inevitable.

6.1.2 Educate Students About Social Media

When social media has been embraced at NUST University, the second step will be to educate the students on how to effectively make use of social media for their academic purposes. Indeed, the university students at NUST are aware of social media existence and the majority of them are making use of it in various ways. However, according to scholars like Bosch (2009), Armstrong and Franklin (2008), Dijk (2006), Gikas and Grant (2013), it is not enough to embrace or to be aware of social media existence, students ought to be taught how best they can make use of

social media in a way that will benefit them academically, thus the “social media education” part comes into play. Students must be educated about *skills access* mentioned by Dijk in order for them to benefit from the use of social media academically and also to avert some of the problems that arise from online activity. For example, when students are educated about *skills access*, they can be in a position to identify suitable sites for conducting their research as well as having general knowledge on the operation of ICT gadgets. In addition, students must be educated on how to use social media to improve their communication skills and *strategic skills* (Dijk) so as to boost their confidence and increase their chances of making it in their academic life as well as in the labor market. Let me also emphasize that the education about social media must not only be limited to the students alone but the educators as well must be taught too, so as to come up with ways that will help assist the students benefit from the use of social media for their academic purposes. This is so because I realized from my research findings that some of the educators I interviewed admitted that they were not making use of social media for academic purposes and some of them were not that well versed on how to effectively make use of it. Therefore, in such incidences, it becomes difficult for the educators to assist the students in fully benefiting from the use of social media for academic purposes since they lack the necessary knowledge or skills. That is why I am emphasizing on the education of both the students and their educators.

Furthermore, education about social media will also help the students in **time management** in the sense that they won't have to spend a lot of time struggling to find which sites to use for their research purposes since they will be equipped with skills access. The issue of spending a lot of time on social media whilst not doing academic purposes was also raised by scholars like Acheaw and Larson (2015), Asemah, Okpanachi and Edegoh (2013), Wu et al (2011) and Bohl (2005). Thus, it is a cause for concern and hence students ought to be educated on how to manage their time on social media in ways that will benefit them academically. Last but not least,

the education about social media must also be aimed at teaching the students how to conduct themselves ethically and not indulge in online misbehaviors that are detrimental to themselves and other students as well.

6.1.3 Put In Place a Viable ICT Infrastructure

As evidenced by my research findings, I am convinced that there is a strong correlation between an ailing country's economy and a poor ICT infrastructure. In other words, if a country's economy is in bad shape, it becomes very difficult to have a viable ICT infrastructure. Thus, scholars like Shafique et al, (2010) and Al-Rahmi & Othman (2016) reiterated that it is of paramount importance for **a country to first fix its economy** in order to pave way for the easy implementation or provision of a viable ICT infrastructure. With regards to NUST university, the economic hardships currently bedeviling Zimbabwe have hampered the provision of a good ICT infrastructure at NUST university. As such, I propose that the government of Zimbabwe must play an integral part in reviving the country's economy so as to aid in the provision of a viable ICT infrastructure at NUST university. By ICT infrastructure, I mean all the necessary ICT requirements or tools that make it possible for the students to use social media for their academic purposes without any difficulties. Such requirements include and are not limited to; the **provision of ICT gadgets** to students (i.e. smart phones, tablets or computers), provision of a **strong Wi-Fi, e-libraries, computer labs** and the **reduction of exorbitant internet data bundles**. All these ICT requirements that I mentioned if put in place, this will go a long way in making the ICT infrastructure at NUST conducive and hence or otherwise improve the students' online experience as far as their academic life is concerned.

6.1.4 Put In Place Security Systems On Social Media

My last recommendation will be aimed at coming up with various ways that ensure that the safety of the NUST students online is guaranteed. It is no secret that on social media there is the existence of bullies and those that are being bullied (victims). Therefore, security systems must be put in place in order to protect the online victims and also to make it difficult for bullies to exercise their bad behaviors online. In addition, non-academic sites that are detrimental to students' academic lives must be banned or discouraged at the university. Alternatively, if the banning of such sites is proving to be a hard nut to crack, the NUST university must at least ration the number of hours a student spends on social media doing non-academic activities. In this way, this will also help the students to focus more on their academics and manage their time or make use of their time on social media wisely. However, it must be pointed out that putting security systems on social media is not an easy thing to do, as such, all the parties involved must play a part in working towards achieving this.

6.2 CONCLUSION

After all is said and done, one can conclude that the advent of social media brought about various changes in the way people live their daily activities, hence the introduction of the term, *digital culture*. Undoubtedly, we are living in the *digital age* and the existence of social media in our lives has made it difficult for us not to make use of it and integrate it in our cultural system. People from across the globe, especially the youths have failed to resist the usefulness of social media leading to them to actually forming human-like bonds with it (media equation theory). On the other hand, scholars like Al-Rahmi and Othman (2016) postulated that what started off as a hobby (social media) eventually became part of one's broader cultural aspect or norm. As such, since education is part of one's culture, thus it

must also be considered in exploring the cultural aspects that have been influenced by social media. Additionally, it is undeniable that the educational culture in the digital age has a lot of differences and advancements compared to the educational culture in the archaic age as mentioned in the preliminary stages of this thesis. Therefore, the thesis delved into one of the ongoing issues in the field of Media Studies (i.e. social media and education) as it sought to '*explore the social media usage by university students in Bulawayo for academic purposes*'. Three fundamental research questions premised on **awareness**, **impact** and **feasibility**, were taken into consideration in trying to understand and address the research topic. That is, the first research question was aimed at understanding whether or not the NUST students are aware of the existence of social media and are they making use of it for their academic purposes. The second research question looked at the impact that social media has on the NUST students' academic lives. It must be pointed out that the social media impact was both negative and positive, that is why the thesis also discussed the challenges and benefits of social media usage for academic purposes under this research question. The last research question mainly focused on the applicability or practicableness of social media into the mainstream education system of NUST. In other words, I did not want to just outline the challenges and benefits of social media usage for academic purposes and end there, but I was also interested in knowing whether the implementation of social media into the education system of NUST was achievable or feasible based on the current social media situation at NUST as mentioned in the research study.

The research study used qualitative data methods (questionnaire surveys and interviews) whereby a total of 285 students from different departments at NUST participated in the questionnaire surveys and interviews were conducted with 7 educators taken from each faculty at NUST. It must be noted that the target population or the unit of analysis was the NUST students, however, the educators were also interviewed so as to strike a

balance and come up with a substantive data evaluation. Besides, the educators play a big role on the students' academic lives and hence I felt that their opinions on this research study ought to be taken into account as well. I'm glad that I got overwhelming cooperation from the respondents of my research study and this made my data collection process to be enjoyable.

When it comes to the conclusions that can be drawn from this research study, one unescapable fact is that indeed social media has become part and parcel of the education set up or the academic lives of the university students, not only at NUST but also across the globe. That is, the use of social media by the university students for their academic purposes has become common, widespread and prevalent to be downplayed. In addition, social media has also changed the tertiary educational culture at NUST whereby the emphasis is now more on electronic learning (e-learning) rather than traditional class learning (face-to-face). This scenario was also mentioned by Dijk (2006) when he argued that because of social media, online communities have become more widespread compared to organic communities. As such, examples of platforms mentioned in the thesis like *MOOCs* and *VLEs*, indeed prove to one that learning has been taken from the physical class setting to online (social media) and the students are making use of these platforms and many others for their academic purposes. As a result, due to social media existence and usage, the university's role of being the primary source of academic information for the students is slowly fading away (Armstrong & Franklin, 2008). Therefore, realizing that the university students heavily rely on social media for their academic purposes, it is high time that the NUST educators, parents and relevant authorities embrace and take the education to where the students are (that is, on social media) rather than spending a lot of unnecessary time trying to fight, denounce or downplay the role of social media in tertiary education.

Furthermore, what was also salient from the research study is that, social media usage for academic purposes by the NUST students has both negative and positive consequences (impact). As far as the negative impacts are concerned, I came to the conclusion that there were 2 types of contributing factors (internal and external factors). By internal factors, I mean challenges that hinder the full beneficiation of social media by NUST students for their academic purposes which are a result of NUST internal shortcomings. Such internal shortcomings include; the student's inability to operate the ICT gadgets (computer illiteracy) in a manner that benefits them academically or simply lack of *usage skills* according to Dijk (2006); and the failure by NUST relevant authorities to provide a conducive environment that will ensure that the students fully benefit from the use of social media for their academic purposes. Thus, in short, internal factors can be solved by the students, educators and the relevant authorities at NUST without having to call for help beyond the confines of NUST.

On the contrary, it was also noted that some of the challenges require external intervention and it was observed that the bulk of the negative challenges that the NUST students face in their social media experience are bent towards the severe economic crisis in Zimbabwe, as also suggested initially in the hypothesis of this thesis. Thus, power cuts, expensive internet data bundles, lack of adequate computer labs and e-libraries, lack of ICT gadgets and a vibrant Wi-Fi connection are all examples of external factors that can be attributed to Zimbabwe's drastic economic hardships. In other words, the economic turmoil in Zimbabwe has led to a poor ICT infrastructure at NUST and this has made it difficult for the students to fully benefit from the use of social media for their academic purposes. Therefore, as recommended earlier on, tireless efforts and viable strategies must be made by the Zimbabwean government in the ICT sector so as to help the NUST university arrest the challenges associated with social media usage for academic purposes. Having said that, this also takes the reader back to the views of Hinton and Hjorth (2013) whereby

they argued that in order to understand and address social media challenges, socio-economic factors must also be understood and discussed as well since they are also equally important.

Furthermore, as it has been stated already, it is unreasonable to solely blame the Zimbabwean government for the challenges facing the students at NUST in their full beneficiation of social media for their academic purposes because some of the challenges don't necessarily require the attention or help of the Zimbabwean government. For instance, what was also witnessed is that some students complained that social media distracts them from focusing on their schoolwork whereas others were finding it difficult to identify the relevant sites for conducting their research. Such problems can be dealt internally (at NUST) by the relevant authorities through educating their students on digital skills (Dijk, 2006) and time management skills. As such, that is why scholars such as Pollara and Zhu (2011) emphasized that it's not about the number of hours a student spends on social media, but it's about what they do with their time on social media (how effective they are on social media). In all fairness, students are not the only ones to be educated about social media, the educators as well must also be involved in the social media education so as to understand and be in a position to help their students with matters related to social media and academic purpose, as also mentioned by Guo, Li and Steven (2012) in their STUH framework. In addition, educators must also come up with new teaching ways or styles that integrate social media into the education set up because social media has become a popular place for their students, hence they have to take advantage of that (Bohl, 2005). Simply put, without understanding social media's role and impact in tertiary education, educators won't be able to assist their digital native students in fully benefiting from social media in their academic purposes and they won't be able to cope up in the increasingly becoming "digital education age".

On a brighter note, despite the availability of challenges associated with social media usage for academic purposes, it was also observed that social media impacted the lives of the NUST students in numerous positive ways. Basically, the students at NUST use social media for various reasons (academic and non-academic), just like any human being would, this is also explained in depth by Blumler and Katz (1974) in their UGT theory. Additionally, this is also the reason why scholars like Pollara and Zhu (2011) stressed that social media is *edusocial*. However, it must be accentuated that this thesis was mainly interested in the cognitive gratification of the use of social media by NUST students (social media for academic purposes). As a starting point, social media has (more often than not) been used as an effective communication platform by the students at NUST to reach out to their educators or other fellow students for academic matters, thus assuming the role of the *facilitator*. As such, this has made the academic lives of the NUST students to be easy, simple and convenient. Alternatively stated, one might want to use the views of McLuhan (1964) on media and society in explaining the positive impact of social media on the academic lives of the NUST students by simply concluding that the media is “extensions of human senses”. The use of social media for academic purposes has also improved the interaction or communication skills of several NUST students, especially those that are shy or less confident to express their views in class. As a result, a student with good communication skills increases their chances of having a strong *social capital* which will then play a fulcrum role in boosting their academic network and exposure to the outside world. In essence, such students with digital skills are what employers in this digital age are looking for, that is why Dijk (2006) also emphasized on the need for students to have *strategic skills* which helps them in fancying their chances of making it in the labor market.

In my closing remarks, having explored the usage of social media for academic purposes by the NUST students, I would like to reiterate that

whether one is a technological determinist or not, at the end of the day technology or social media to be precise, is just a tool. That is to say, social media has the power to make (build) or break (destroy) livelihoods, unify or divide and act as a *facilitator* or *distractor* as was evidenced in this thesis. Therefore, it is up to the social media users to choose to use it for their upliftment, empowerment or benefit, and in this case, it is up for the NUST students to use it for their academic benefits. Thus, this thesis finally concludes that, although there are some challenges that are associated with the use of social media for academic purposes, however, if social media is properly and effectively used, it can go a long way in improving the academic lives of the students at NUST. In essence, we are undoubtedly living in an increasingly becoming digital world, as such, this means that the teaching methods also have to change to digital so as to easily assist the students of today in digital problem-solving skills, structured thinking and blended learning. In summation, just like how Dewey (1944) cautioned, “if we teach today`s students as we taught yesterday`s, we rob them of tomorrow” (p.167).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY FOR NUST STUDENTS

My name is Tafadzwa Musekiwa (student number: N16124230), a student from Hacettepe University in Ankara, Turkey. I am pursuing a Master of Social Science degree in Cultural Studies and Media. As a requirement for the completion of my program, I am conducting a research entitled, “**THE EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE BY NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (NUST) STUDENTS IN BULAWAYO FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES.**” Therefore, I need your sincere cooperation to complete this questionnaire. I would really appreciate it if you spend a few minutes of your time to complete the questionnaire. The data collected from this research will be used for academic and research purposes only. Your participation is strictly voluntary and the data you provide will be strictly confidential. Thank you very much for participating in my research.

Section A: Demographic Data

Directions: Please read each statement carefully and tick your answer.

(PLEASE INDICATE YOUR UNIVERSITY AND DEGREE PROGRAM)

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SEX

Male

Female

AGE19 – 25years 26 – 30years 30 – 35years 36years and above **FAMILY INCOME STATUS**Low income Average income High income **Section B: General Information about the use of Social Media**

1. Are you on Social Media? Yes No

2. Do you use social media for your academic purposes? Yes
No

3. What are the main Social Media platforms that you use for your academic purposes? Please tick from below

- Facebook
- Twitter
- WhatsApp
- YouTube
- Google
- My Space
- Other

If other, specify.....

4. For which academic purposes do you use these social media platforms for?

.....
.....
.....

5. To what extent is social media helping you in your academic life?

Not helping at all lesser extent fairly helping Greater Extent

Section C: Evaluation and Recommendations of Social Media by the University students

6. Are there any possible challenges that you face from the use of social media for academic purposes?

.....
.....
.....

7. Do you think it's ideal for your University to put social media into the mainstream education system?

Yes/No because.....
.....
.....

8. Should parents allow their University students to use social media for academic purposes?

Yes/No because.....
.....
.....

9. What do you think can be done to ensure that University students fully benefit from the use of social media for academic purposes?

.....
.....
.....
.....

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR NUST EDUCATORS

1. First of all, are students using social media for their academic purposes?
What do you think?
2. If yes, what are the main social media platforms that the students use for their academic purposes?
3. In your department, for which academic purposes (e.g. research, sharing of academic material or watching tutorials) do you make use of social media?
4. Is NUST as an institution creating platforms for students to fully benefit from the use of social media for their academic purposes?
5. How feasible is the use of social media by the students at NUST in their academic life?
6. Are there any challenges/benefits that arise from the use of social media for academic purposes?
7. Recommendations – What do you think can be done to ensure that students fully benefit from the use of social media for their academic purposes?