Cape Peninsula
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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING COMMUNICATION FOR INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Technology: Public Relations Management

in the Faculty of Informatics and Design

at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology

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Cape Town

Aug 2019

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ABSTRACT

Several studies have been done showing that universities across the world are using social media platforms, to a lesser or greater degree, in their marketing communication strategies; however, the success of this recruitment method is relatively untested. In order to determine the effectiveness of social media marketing communication on potential university students' selection of a university, first-year students from the University of Johannesburg were studied. Through a quantitative descriptive research study using a non-probability sampling technique and online electronic questionnaire, it was found that potential university students fall mainly within the Generation Z category (14 – 22 years old). Ninety-eight percent of the respondents in this study indicated that they used social media on a regular basis, however only 37.4% used social media in their choice of a university. More than half (58.3%) of the respondents visited university social media platforms prior to applying in order to look for information about the university, with 33% indicating that they visited these platforms to experience the culture of the university. The study has found that potential students do indeed visit multiple university social media platforms to compare university offerings, but that these platforms are currently not in the top five information sources that they consult in their university search process. Facebook is the most consulted social media platform for this purpose, taking the sixth place on the list of information sources consulted. This makes social media a definite contender in the blend of marketing communication tools a university can use to influence a potential student's choice of study destination. The findings about these Generation Z potential university students, their use of social media, and their information requirements when researching higher education institutions, can provide valuable insights for university marketers and communicators.

Keywords: Higher education, universities, marketing communication, social media, Generation Y, Generation Z, higher education choice factors, higher education information sources.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank:

- Dr Rene Benecke for all her guidance, support and encouragement.
- Dr Blessing Makwambeni for his guidance.
- Ms Leslé Ince-Garcia for her constant motivation.
- The University of Johannesburg for making this journey possible.
- University of Johannesburg 2019 first year students who participated in the research.
- My husband, Conrad, for his utmost patience with this all-consuming journey.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Background and rationale

Institutions of higher education worldwide, and also in South Africa, are facing fierce competition for potential students and will have to employ alternative strategies to attract the best candidates (Barnes & Lescault, 2012). This poses a challenge to universities and other institutions of higher learning, as new marketing and communication tools are being introduced constantly with communicators and marketers not always understanding their adoption rate or success levels within their specific key stakeholders – also called Generation Y and Generation Z.

Barnes and Lescault (2011:1) note that "for this 'always-connected' generation, multi-tasking, hand-held devices and nearly constant communication are normal". This generation's involvement with technology generally – and for the purposes of this study, social media specifically – is much bigger than previous generations, challenging those wanting to market to or communicate with this extremely connected cohort of young people (Barnes and Lescault, 2012). In a 2016 study by the Pew Research Centre, it was found that in almost all countries worldwide, Millennials or Generation Y "are much more likely to be internet and smartphone users compared with those ages 35 and older" (Poushter, 2016:7). The challenge to university marketers and communicators is establishing how and where they can connect most effectively with these individuals (Barnes & Lescault, 2011).

According to Page (2011), understanding digital media is about more than merely adopting a new marketing tool or strategy. It is a totally new semantic or language, particularly with the introduction of Web 2.0 which introduced the concept of two-way conversation to social media platforms. Page (2011) also notes that organisations make fundamental errors when they merely adopt social media strategies and start spreading or sharing messages without a good understanding of the language and culture of the key stakeholders.

Stuart (2010, cited in Page, 2011) argues that brands are no longer pushing their customers to Web and mobile sites, but are rather making themselves visible on social media platforms where their target audiences are spending time. These include Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter. Page (2011) notes that the way they do this is, however, very different to the websites of old, as they now have to facilitate conversation and experience rather than merely telling their story. These are the challenges facing communicators and marketers, also in higher education.

A US-based study by the University of Massachusetts' Dartmouth Center for Marketing Research shows that colleges and universities in America are using social media at a growing rate (Barnes & Lescault, 2012). The study also highlights how and to what effect this social media is implemented. Universities in the United States have realised the importance of speaking to the Generation Y target market in this generation's space and on their terms. This is evident in the research results of the above-mentioned study. Social media has become the way to engage with the Generation Y and Z audience.

Sessa (2014) states that it is vital for higher education institutions to include not only social media in their strategy, but to use this tool strategically in order to engage the new generations of students. This highlights the necessity for not only businesses, but also higher education providers to adapt strategies in order to address these new trends.

1.2 Research problem

Social media marketing communication in higher education has grown exponentially with universities across the world, and also in South Africa, increasingly including social media activities in their marketing communication strategies (Barnes & Lescault, 2012; Burdett, 2013; Kelleher & Sweetser, 2012). Many studies have been done on social media use by younger generations (Kale, 2018; Kleinschmit, 2019, Claveria, 2019), and on information sources consulted by potential university students (De Jager & Du Plooy, 2010; Noel-Levitz, 2013; Burdett, 2013; Stoner & Rogers, 2015). However, very little has been done that specifically addresses the role of social media in the choice of higher education institution and whether marketing communication on social media platforms is indeed influencing their decision of where and what to study, particularly in the South African context. This is also the case at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), where the digital media marketing communication strategy forms part of the bigger integrated communication strategy and is used on most platforms, including the Internet, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter. While these tools are monitored to determine click-through rates, no substantive data exists as to which of these social media tools is the most effective when communicating with potential university students.

There is a need to understand the communication preferences of the potential undergraduate student audience – Generation Y and Generation Z. This is essential in order to target communication and marketing messages more effectively, visually and in text that this young audience can relate to. University marketing and communication teams therefore need to know whether a university's presence and messaging on social media is reaching potential undergraduate students and influencing their choice of higher education destination in order to inform future strategy development.

1.3 Research question

The question this research seeks to answer is: How effective is social media marketing communication for institutions of higher education?

1.4 Aim and objectives

1.4.1 Aim

The study aims to understand the role of social media in the recruitment process of higher education institutions, particularly with gaining potential undergraduate university students. There is a need to determine the communication preferences of the younger generations from which universities recruit students – Generation Y and Z – and the influence the universities' social media marketing communication efforts have on these potential students' choice of university. This information can inform future marketing, communication, and, ultimately, recruitment strategies at universities.

1.4.2 Objectives

The primary research objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of social media marketing communication in higher education undergraduate recruitment activities.

The secondary objectives or research questions are to:

1. Explore the target audience universities recruit from – Generation Y and Z – and their use of social media.
2. Identify the information sources consulted, and information sought, by potential university students when choosing a university at which to study.
3. Determine the reasons potential students join and engage with university social media platforms, particularly Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter.
4. Explore the influence of social media on a potential undergraduate student's choice of university.
5. Provide guidelines for social media marketing communication to potential university students.

1.5 Significance of study

Several studies have been conducted showing that universities across the world are using social media platforms, to a lesser or greater degree, in their marketing communication strategies. However, the success of this recruitment method is relatively untested. The findings of this study therefore add to the knowledge of social media use in marketing communication, particularly with reference to potential students' higher education choices.

It provides information about Generation Y's and Z's communication characteristics and social media preferences, also in the South African context. It identifies what this stakeholder group uses social media for, and which social media platforms are most effective when communicating with them. The study also identifies the information sources and subjects or topics which potential students consult during their university research process.

It thus ultimately provides information to universities on ways to optimise their marketing communication to potential undergraduate students, with particular reference to both the role of traditional recruitment methods and the more modern methods of social media platforms, in order to attract students in an increasingly competitive higher education landscape.

1.6 Delimitations of the study

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of social media marketing communication in higher education undergraduate recruitment activities. The Post-Positive Paradigm underpinned the study, and the researcher was guided by various theories: Network Theory and Analysis; Generation Theory; and Social Media Engagement Theory.

The study was descriptive in nature and followed a cross-sectional quantitative approach. Data was collected using an electronic questionnaire and the population for the study comprised 2019 first-year students in South Africa. The sample comprised all 2019 first-year students at the University of Johannesburg to ensure a representative section of the population.

Descriptive statistics were used to classify the data according to nominal, ordinal and interval scales.

1.7 Structure of the study

The dissertation comprises five main chapters:

Chapter 1 presents the background, research problem and research question, as well as the aims and objectives of the study. This is supported by an explanation of the main theories and concepts underpinning this study and highlights the importance of the research.

Chapter 2 contains the literature review. Here, literature regarding the target audience – Generation Y and Generation Z – is reviewed, as well as literature on social media: as a general construct; as a marketing and communication channel; in the South African context; and its use in higher education marketing communication. Choice factors influencing potential undergraduate students with regards to higher education institution and what information/tools they use to inform these decisions are also discussed briefly. Finally, this chapter addresses tools used to measure return on investment in social media campaigns.

Chapter 3 unpacks the research design and methods, as well as provides details on the sampling procedure, data collection and analysis, reliability and validity.

Chapter 4 presents the results and findings of the study conducted and gives a discussion of these results.

Chapter 5 summarises the findings and includes the overall conclusions of the study and makes recommendations based on these findings.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Social media is radically changing the way in which marketers and communicators interact with their stakeholders. For the purposes of this study, this literature review examines the emergence of social media and its prevalence in higher education and the South African context. Information available on the stakeholder group relevant to this research – Generation Y, otherwise known as the Millennials, and the younger Generation Z – is reviewed.

Social media is changing our media and communication landscape and the literature review explores social media as a marketing and communication channel, as well as the application of social media in the South African context and how this differs from global studies that are available. Further, social media in higher education and the value thereof in recruitment activities is investigated, while considering the information sources that university students consult when making decisions about their futures.

Paradigms and theories guide the researcher in understanding the complexity of social media as a communication and engagement platform and are explored in this literature review in order to create an understanding of the effect of social media use by the target audience and the role it plays in influencing their higher education decisions.

2.2 Theoretical framework

"Theories provide complex and comprehensive conceptual understandings of things that cannot be pinned down, namely how societies work, how organisations operate, why people interact in certain ways" (Reeves, Albert, Kuper & Hodges, 2008:1). Reeves and his co-researchers explain that "theories give researchers different 'lenses' through which to look at complicated problems and social issues, focusing their attention on different aspects of the data and providing a framework within which to conduct their analysis" (Reeves *et al*., 2008:1).

Social media has revolutionised the communication and marketing function within business, and organisations need to consider how they include these new and interactive platforms and methods of communication into their integrated communication strategies. The power is now in the hands of the users who are able to create, modify, share and discuss topics on the Internet and social media platforms (Markos-Kujbus & Gati, 2012), taking the power out of the hands of the organisation.

In the review of the literature in this study, various theories relevant to communication and social media provide the framework for the research study: Network Theory and Analysis otherwise referred to as Social Network Theory; Social Engagement Theory; and Generation Theory. These theories guide the researcher to a deeper understanding of the research question at hand.

2.2.1 Network Theory and Analysis or Social Network Theory

Webber (2009) explains that marketing through social media requires a totally new way of communicating with an audience in a digital environment. Marketing with traditional media is all about pushing the appropriate information to the targeted market (Webber, 2009). Social networking is a lot more about creating a relationship and entering into conversation with stakeholders. According to Suliman (2008), social media marketing communication creates opportunities for meaningful engagement and sustainable relationships with stakeholders.

In light of this, **Network Theory and Analysis** (Mouge & Contractor, 2003) can be applied to social media as these media platforms create relationships which can affect the beliefs and behaviours of the person using the medium. Holt-Lunstad (cited in Wright, 2015) refers to this as the **Social Network Theory,** stating that networks can influence a person's attitudes and actions, which can then influence their perception of a particular cause or organisation.

Richardson, Choong & Parker, (2016:25) suggest that "a key goal of social media is to increase the visibility" of a company or organisation and that social network theory can help to understand the effects of social media in communication and marketing. Mass communication is no longer a one-way push process – or linear process – but also involves interaction by the user, becoming a social network of users. Thus, this allow the organisation to form "strong, bidirectional ties" between the various 'actors' or social media users, as proposed by Hoffman and Novak (1996 in Richardson *et al*., 2016:26) in the many-to-many Web communication model. This many-to-many model (MM), combined with the one-to-one Web communication model (OO) advocated by Peppers and Rogers (2015 in Richardson *et al*., 2016:26) – the MMOO social network – gives the organisation the potential to create value and the opportunity for effective collaboration between the marketing and communication functions and the users in order to "foster brand communities" and as such grow the specific brand (Anderson, 2005 in Richardson *et al*., 2016:26).

Richardson *et al*. (2016:27) therefore propose that "the foundation for successful social media marketing is the creation of MMOO social networks by leveraging social media that create strong, bidirectional ties and relationships and integrating the social media platform with

corporate networks" and that relevant content sharing be facilitated based on the viral characteristics of this model.

> *"Social media vehicles including those that empower publishing (such as blogs, webinars, podcasts, articles, and e-books), file sharing (such as videos, photos, and websites), applications (such as online and mobile programs to connect with the firm), and geographic location services (such as maps or other location sensitive programs or services) are then deployed by the firm (Barker et al., 2013). These social media vehicles are strategically selected to maximize the value of the online social network. The strategic selection of social media vehicles can be called the social media mix. As is the case with the promotion mix, the social media mix is selected according to communication objectives and results are likewise measured according to forecasts and expectations."* (Richardson *et al.*, 2016:30)

An organisation such as a higher education institution (HEI) or university can therefore use social media to create a network of formal and informal interactions among users and ultimately the target audience. By a strategic selection of social media platforms and vehicles, the university is able to optimise the effect of its social media strategy using the principles of the MMOO network proposed by Richardson *et al*. (2016).

The research study set out to determine whether UJ's social media presence has created meaningful networks with potential students and whether these networks have affected the audience's perceptions of UJ as a study destination. Creating networks is important in the social media communication model, while effective engagement is also essential to ensure increased participation by stakeholders to achieve marketing communication objectives.

2.2.2 Social Media Engagement Theory

Social Media Engagement Theory suggests the value that social media interactions can add to the marketing and communication process. Generally, the higher the user engagement, the greater the use of the social media platform (Kankanhalli, Tan & Wei, 2005 in Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016; Li & Bernoff, 2008 in Azionya, 2015). The more often participants take part in a variety of activities including contribution to, retrieval of, and/or exploration of information within a social media site, the more value the social media platform has for the organisation and other users, which results in the co-creation of value (Kankanhalli *et al.*, 2005 in Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016; Li & Bernoff, 2008 in Azionya, 2015).

In a study on social media engagement by Di Gangi and Wasko (2016:16), it was found that a "critical mass of social acquaintances" greatly impacted the level of user engagement and use of social media. Companies that use social network analysis can identify and use information gathered on social media use, such as the 'unique characteristics' within groups and 'cliques' that give them influence in the social media space (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016:17). It is therefore important to identify 'influential users' and keep them involved to ensure participation and engagement by their followers or acquaintances on social media (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016:17). Di Gangi and Wasko's (2016) research also indicates that companies need to continually develop and update their presence on social media to keep the audience engaged.

This study aims to determine whether UJ's social media platforms are increasing the engagement levels with this group and adding value to the target audience's higher education choices.

2.2.3 Generation Theory

The focus of this study is on the younger generation – otherwise known as Generation Y and Z – as they are the group from which universities are attracting potential students. Generation Theory is therefore relevant in this study as sheds light on the characteristics of these generations to inform future communications activities. The researcher also aims to determine whether this generation in the South African context is indeed as socially connected as surmised and whether social media is affecting their choices, particularly education choices.

Generation Theory is not a new concept and has its roots in the early 1900s – initially penned by Mannheim in 1927/8 and then republished in 1952. The theory was developed further by Strauss and Howe (1991 in Azionya, 2015:32) who define a "social generation as the aggregate of all people born over a span of roughly twenty years" or about the length of one phase of life from infancy to retirement and beyond. Markert (2004:11 in Padayachee, 2017) writes that the periods used to demarcate a generation can range from anywhere between seven and twenty years.

Based on the work of Mannheim (1952), Generation Theory suggests that a generation is formed during a specific time in history and is shaped by the experiences and events during that period (Codrington, 2014). Simply stated, generational theory explains that the era in which an individual was born impacts on the way in which they develop and how they view the world. A person's value systems are generally shaped in the first ten years of their lives, by their friends, families and communities, while noteworthy events and the specific era in which they were born also have an effect (Codrington, 2014).

It is, however, important to distinguish between a generation and a generational cohort. A generation refers to the time period used to define a group, while a generational cohort is defined by events and circumstances during their adolescent or early adulthood years (Shewe & Meredith, 2004:51 in Duh & Struwig, 2015). Alwin and McCammon (2003:26 in Duh & Struwig, 2015) refer to this as generational cohort theory, and describe this effect as a "distinctive formative experience which members of a birth cohort" share, which defines them. Cohorts are therefore "defined by the external events that occurred during formative years" (Duh & Struwig, 2015:91).

Those in a particular generation share certain experiences – key historical events and social trends occurring at the same time in their lives. Members of the same generation are therefore shaped in lasting ways by the experiences they have encountered as children and young people and therefore often share certain common principles or values and actions or behaviours (Codrington, 2008; Azionya, 2015; Duh & Struwig, 2015; Padayachee, 2017). The specific generation would therefore share an apparent shared character or identity in that specific generation (Strauss & Howe, 1991 in Azionya, 2015). However, it is important to note that South Africa's young generation cannot be treated as a homogenous entity, as they differ greatly in terms of, among others, education levels, lifestyle, economic status and access to resources (Azionya, 2015; Duh & Struwig, 2015; Padayachee, 2017). This is echoed by Padayachee (2017:60) who writes that the Westernised definition of generations "may not be applicable in the South African context".

The following tables give the generational breakdown of ages by various researchers, and also that proposed for the South African context.

Table 2.1: Generation breakdown according to various researchers

	NDP Group (2017)	***Pew Research Centre (Dimock, 2018)***	***Kotler (2016:156/7)***	***Howe (2014)***	***Codrington (2014) South African Perspective***
Baby Boomers	1946 – 1964	1946 – 1964	1946 – 1965	1943 – 1960	1940s – 60s
Generation X	1965 – 1980	1965 – 1980	1966 – 1976	1961 – 1981	Mid 1960s – late 80s
Generation Y	1981 – 1996	1981 – 1996	1977 – 1990	1982 – 2004	1989 – 2008
Generation Z	1997 – 2005		1991+	2005+	2008+

In the South African context, there is little agreement regarding the cohorts for the different generations, with Deal, Stawiski, Graves, Gentry, Ruderman and Weber (2012) proposing that South African generations be classified as the Apartheid Generation (1938 – 1960), Stuggle Generation (born 1961 – 1980), the Transition Generation (born 1981 – 1993) and the Born-Free Generation (born 1994 – 2000). According to Booysens, Combs and Lillevik (2016 in Padayachee 2017:63), this generation breakdown proposed by Deal *et al.* (2012) is aligned, to some degree, to that of the Baby Boomers, Generation X, Net Generation and iGeneration cohorts, as summarised in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Summary of generational cohorts in South Africa and corresponding generations (adapted from Padayachee 2017:64)

South African generations	***Generations***	***Alternate Names***
Apartheid Generation 1938 – 1960 Ages 59 – 81	Baby Boomers 1943 – 1960 Ages 59 – 76	Late Digital Adopters
The Struggle Generation 1961 – 1980 Ages 39 – 58	Generation X 1961 – 1981 Ages 38 – 58	Digital Immigrants
The Transition Generation 1981 – 1993 Ages 25 – 37	Generation Y – Millennials 1982 – 1991 Ages 27 – 36	Digital Natives
The Born Free Generation 1994 – 2000 Ages 19 – 25	Generation Z / Post-Millennials Born after 1991 Age 27 and younger	Net Generation

It is, however, important to remember that "generations are a *lens* through which to understand societal change, rather than a *label* with which to oversimplify differences between groups" (Dimock, 2018:3). Generation analysis is not an exact science but does allow for the identification of characteristics that are unique and distinctive within the specific age group (Taylor & Keeter, 2010; Dimock, 2018).

Graeme Codrington from TomorrowTodayGlobal who has done much research on Generation Theory, says: "As with all such models, it has a bell curve distribution of applicability. There are people who do not fit this (or any other) such model of general human behaviour. So, we should not expect the theory to be perfectly predictive in every situation. It provides a high-level overlay that can assist us to predict general behaviour patterns, but not individual reactions in specific situations" (Codrington, 2010:2).

2.3 Summary of theories for this study

In order to derive maximum value out of this study, it is important to determine how and if the University of Johannesburg is building relationships with its potential students in order to persuade them to study at UJ and what is influencing their decisions. Network Theory and Analysis (Social Network Theory), Generation Theory and Social Media Engagement Theory guides researcher in this study towards determining the effect of social media communication and marketing on the student's decision of where and what to study, as depicted in Figure 2.1.

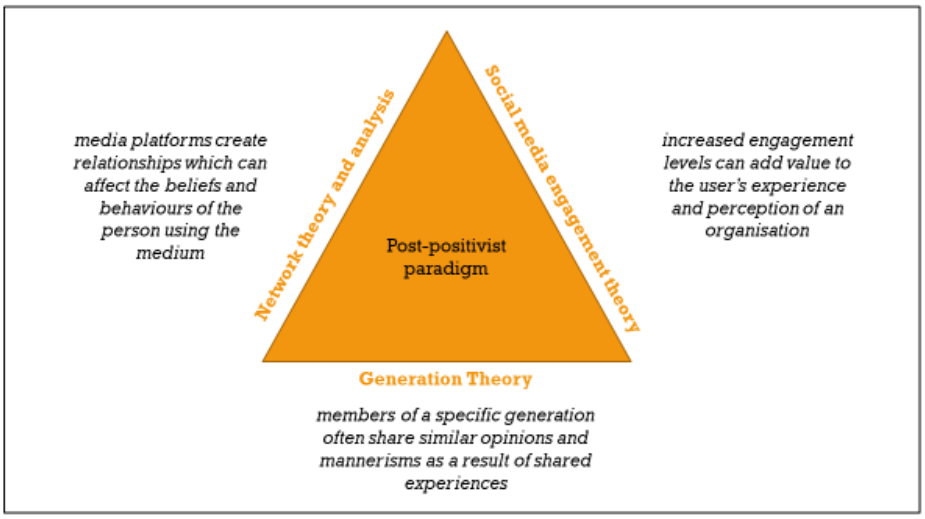


Figure 2.1: Theoretical framework of research study

2.4 Generations relevant to this study

As discussed, the characteristics within specific generational cohorts can influence their preferences and actions. In this study, their use of social media in selecting a university is examined and this section therefore focuses on the generation/s applying to study at a university, in order to determine if social media has affected their choice of university at which to study.

According to Generational Theory, members of the same generation are shaped in lasting ways by the experiences they have encountered as children and young people, and therefore they often have similar convictions and behaviours. Generational characteristics are generally shaped by 'parenting, technology, and economics' (CGK, 2019). The specific generation would therefore share an apparent common affiliation or membership in that specific generation (Strauss & Howe, 1991 in Azionya, 2015).

The following table gives a breakdown of Generation Y, otherwise known as the Millennials, and Generation Z, or the Net Generation. It is proposed that the students considering a university at which to study will come from one of these groupings.

Table 2.3: Generation Y and Z according to various researchers (ages in 2019)

	Generation Y	Generation Z
Pew Research Centre (Dimock, 2018)	1981 – 1996 (Ages 23 – 38)	1997 – tbc (Age 22 and younger)
Kotler (2016:156/7)	1977 – 1990 (Ages 29 – 42)	1991 – tbc (Age 28 and younger)
NDP Group (2017)	1981 – 1996 (Ages 23 – 38)	1997 – 2005 (Ages 14 - 22)
Centre for Generational Kinetics (2019)	1997 – 1995 (Ages 24 – 42)	1996 – tbc (Age 23 and younger)
Howe (2014)	1982 – 2004 (Ages 15 – 37)	2005 – tbc (Age 14 and younger)
Codrington (2014) South African Perspective	1989 – 2008 (Ages 11 – 30)	2008 – tbc (Age 11 and younger)
Deal et al*. (2012)*	1981 – 1993 (Ages 26 – 38)	1994 – 2000 (Ages 19 – 25)

From this data, it is evident that researchers' positions differ widely about where a specific generation starts and end. This is also affected by the country or region in which an individual is born and develops, e.g. first world versus third world, rural versus urban, and particularly for this study, the access the individual has to technology. In the instances of Howe (2014) and Codrington (2014), Generation Y is still very relevant to the Grade 12 group from which universities are currently attracting future students. For the other researchers listed, Generation Z is more appropriate. The following information therefore assesses both of these groups to determine possible differences and similarities in their use of technology and social media, as well as their preferences in communication methods.

For the purposes of this study, the Generation Y and Generation Z age delineation is based on the latest figures as proposed by the Pew Research Centre (2018) and the NDP Group (2017). Generation Z covers ages 14 – 22, while Generation Y includes respondents between the ages of 23 and 37 (Dimock, 2018; NDP Group, 2017).

2.4.1 Generation Y and Z characteristics and preferences

"Technology, in particular the rapid evolution of how people communicate and interact, is a generation-shaping consideration" (Pewresearch.org, 2019:4). Baby Boomers saw the dramatic growth of television, which changed the way in which they connect to the world in a profound way. Generation X had the computer revolution to adapt to, while Generation Y or Millennials faced the birth of the Internet and the massive implications it has brought with it (Pewresearch.org, 2019). In the case of Generation Z, their world has always had computers and cell phones, with social media and other technologies an integral part of their lives (Fourhooks, 2015:4). As concluded by Pewresearch.org (2019:4); research into this new generation is only in the early stages and is crucial to understand how always being connected will influene them.

Swanson (2008) highlights that Generation Y is a group that has had digital technology and media available to them for their entire lives. Lancaster and Stilman (2003:29 in Swanson 2008) note the following: "Millennials is one term sociologists use to designate those youths raised in the sensory-inundated environment of digital technology and mass media at the millennium". Van Skyke (2003 in Swanson 2008) writes that they are often referred to as 'digital natives', as well as, among others, Millenniums, Generation Next, Second Baby Boom, Echo Boomer, and iGen. Internationally, Generation Y is classified as people born between 1977 and 1999 (Kotler, 2016) and 1982 – 2004 (Howe, 2014); however, there seems to be no single period with dates ranging from the early 1980s to the 2000s (Fourhooks, 2015).

According to Codrington (2014) the term Generation Y, in the South African context, includes anyone born as early as 1989 to 2008. Doherty (2017) refers to South African – and African – Generation Y or millennials as Afrilennials and cautions that organisations must realise that they have subtle differences to their first world counterparts. Based on research done by Azionya (2015), South African Millennials cannot be treated as a homogenous entity as they differ greatly in terms of, among others, education levels, lifestyle, economic status and access to resources. However, in a study on Generation Y students in South Africa, conducted by Wessels and Steenkamp (2009), they found that there was very little difference in the comfort level of black and white students when using new technologies. In a small study done by Saunders (2011) on Generation Y in South Africa, the findings also echoed those of the broader global Generation Y grouping with regard to media preferences and social media use. In a study done by TomorrowToday and Ogilvy & Mather "the data indicated that, especially amongst the younger generations, two young people of different racial backgrounds were more likely to be like each other on value issues than either of them was likely to be like their own parents" and that "the pervasive influence of digital and communication technologies is

bringing a homogenisation of cultures to the world" which is most evident in the younger generations (Codrington, 2010). Thus, while there may be generation differences in the older generations, this seems to be shrinking in the technologically connected era, lessening the differences between South African and other younger generations applicable to this study.

Generation Z, on the other hand, has always had this technology on hand and has not had to learn to use it or to adapt to the difference it has made to the world they know. "As the first generation to grow up online, Gen Z never had to learn social media, or at least not exactly. They glided through every iteration: Facebook (2004), Twitter (2006), Instagram (2010), Snapchat (2011) in real time, effortlessly adopting each one. But a life lived in pixels from your earliest age is no easy thing" (Kale, 2018:2). In a study done by Hill Holliday, a US-based marketing company, there is a definite increase in the number of young people who have "quit or are considering quitting at least one social media platform" (Kale, 2018:2). These young people are "becoming overwhelmed with the responsibility of maintaining their social sites and with upholding the somewhat inflated persona many have created with these sites" (Lenhart in Kale, 2018:2). Reasons given for quitting social media – or some social media platforms – include the negative impact it has on schoolwork and/or job; the conflict and drama between users; and an overload of communication. They are seeing it as a waste of their time (Bielby in Kale, 2018). Many in Generation Z have a desire to build genuine, offline relationships (Kale, 2018:3)

Generation Z consume media differently to previous generation – including millennials. While these two generations use the same platforms, they spend differing amounts of time on each. Gen Z's most used devices are smartphone (15.4 hours per week), TV (13.2) and laptop (10.6), while Gen Y spends 14.4 hours per week on desktop, and the same amount of time on their smartphone and watching TV (14.8 hours on each per week) (Kleinschmit, 2019). Both generations are, however, actively avoiding advertisements on the various platforms, with young men being early adopters of software that blocks ads with "a 41% increase in the use of ad-blocking software in the past 12 months" (Kleinschmit, 2019:4). Generation Z values "uniqueness, authenticity, creativity, share ability and recognition" (Kleinschmit, 2019:14). They are seen as a "post-internet generation" that wants to "create and shape" content and not just use it (Kleinschmit, 2019:13)

The following table highlights the various characteristics and differences that can be noted in Generation Y and Generation Z.

Table 2.4: Characteristics and differences between Generation Y and Z (Randstad, 2015; Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Claveria, 2019; Kleinschmit, 2019; Comaford, 2017)

Generation Y		***Generation Z***
	Randstad, 2015:1	
Optimists		Realists
Raised on the Web		Raised on the social Web
Two screens		Five screens
Communicate with text		Communicate with images
Share things		Create things
Present-focused		Future-focused
Want to be discovered		Will work for success
Luxury shoppers		Frugal shoppers
Digital-savvy		Digital-centric
Prepared to juggle multiple careers		Entrepreneurial (want to work for themselves)
Retention drive = money		Retention driver = career advancement
	Francis & Hoefel, 2018	
Idealistic, confrontational, less willing to accept diverse points of view		Less confrontation, more dialogue; value individual expressions; avoid labels
Search for experiences		Search for truth, both personally and in a group setting/scenario; activists; tolerant of brands that make mistakes – if they correct those mistakes
		Ethical
Brands are important		Uniqueness is important; own style
Individualistic/self-oriented		Radically inclusive
		Identity nomads – don't define themselves in only one way; gender fluidity; accept other's differences; value brands that don't classify items as male or female; diversity is important
	Claveria, 2019; Kleinschmit, 2019	
Grew up with economic freedom		Grew up knowing economic turmoil, making them more pragmatic/realistic about job opportunities; less likely to take risks; seek stability and job security
Like brand loyalty programmes		Not keen on brand loyalty programmes
Prefer ads with an emotional appeal		Prefer to see real people in ads – celebrities and athletes, i.e. influencers
Facebook is preferred social media site		YouTube is preferred social media site
Prefer 'cool experiences' over products		Prefer 'cool products' over experiences
		Eight-second attention span
		Want to create content, not just use it
	Comaford, 2017	
Seek purpose – not just a pay-check		Seek job security and money
Want to be coached not bossed		Mentoring, honesty and transparency from their leaders

Ongoing conversations as opposed to annual reviews		Mentored and given feedback on a regular basis – opposed to annual reviews
Collaborative mentality – work together		Independent and want to be judged on their own merits; individualistic
It's not just their job; it's their life		Salary, benefits and how they can advance are important

Another interesting insight about these generations is the platforms on which they prefer brands to communicate with them (Claveria, 2019).

Table 2.5: Generation Y and Z preferred communication platforms

Gen Y	Platform/media	Gen Z
43%	**Email**	33%
29%	**Social media**	34%
16%	**Online ads**	28%
16%	**Regular mail**	13%
9%	**Outdoor ads**	14%
Amazon.com*	**Favourite website**	YouTube

**In South Africa this would be Google.com (Hootsuite, 2019)*

This group has also shown the most dramatic rejection of traditional media. According to a 2006 Arbitron study (Constantinides, 2009), the time spent listening to radio among the ages 12 – 24 years fell by 15% between 1999 and 2006, much higher than all other age groups. Similarly, print media is also seeing a drop in readership from this group. When it comes to doing research on where to study, however, it seems traditional media still plays a substantial role, discussed later in this chapter. In addition, research done by University of the Witwatersrand professor, Jos Kuper (Kuper & Shapiro, 2014), found that this generation is still reading, just differently: "The mobile generation is using the news in a more 'fluid' context – it flows in to them via social media like Twitter and Facebook, online, news alerts, radio, news posters and emails to name some of them".

Bedford (cited in Wronski & Goldstuck, 2016) writes that social media programmes must be built around consumers and not platforms in order to deliver business value, making it essential for the communicator and marketer to fully understand the characteristics and preferences of the audience, in this case Generation Y and Z.

Universities are challenged to understand these generations and find the best way in which to communicate with and market to them, in order to maximise the benefit social media platforms can have on brand value and recruitment efforts.

2.5 Social media

> *"It took 38 years for the radio to attract 50 million listeners, and 13 years for television to gain the attention of 50 million viewers. The Internet took only four years to attract 50 million participants, and Facebook reached 50 million participants in only one-and-a-half years."* (Nair, 2011:46)

Social media allows users to speak to one another, in addition to the traditional role of word-of-mouth communication (Mangauld & Faulds, 2009) and as described in the Social Network Theory section (many-to-many and one-to-one/MMOO). It is a powerful tool that cannot be underestimated by organisations as, where conventional wisdom says that an unhappy customer tells ten others, users on social media have the potential to share their bad news with billions of other users in a few hours, if not minutes (Gillin, 2007).

"The term social media technology refers to Web-based and mobile applications that allow individuals and organizations to create, engage, and share new user-generated or existing content, in digital environments through multi-way communication" (Davis, Deil-Amen, Rios-Agullar & Canche, 2012:1). This fast developing and ever-changing new technology resembles the traditional manner in which people have communicated and interacted (Davis *et al.*, 2012), but in cyber space and without physical personal interaction.

"The commercial Internet has opened a whole new world of opportunities to consumers and organisations by revolutionising business practices and social relationships" (Constantinides, 2009:3). Today, around 4.4 billion users worldwide, and 31 million in South Africa (53.7% of the population), have access to the Internet (internetworldstats.com, 2019) and has become a fundamental part of the commercial and the social landscape (Constantinides, 2009) and 'indispensable tool for today's business' (Yannopoulos, 2011).

The one-way digital communication made possible by the dawn of the Internet changed dramatically with the introduction of Web 2.0 where users could generate their own content quite simply, with a limited knowledge of HTML (Techopedia, 2011). This made the introduction of two-way communication and an 'interactive community' not only possible, but also instant.

> "*The term Web 2.0 is not just about new technology. It's also about a new way of looking at the Internet. Traditional models for disseminating media – print and broadcast, for example – usually generate information from a single entity for consumption by an audience with a limited ability to talk back.*

With an interactive approach to the Internet – and a willingness to let go of control of content – the equation is dramatically changed. The talk-back has become the spine of the media product." (Columbiaedu, 2019:1)

Social media is an innovation of Web 2.0 and provides the platform on which social media functions (Techopedia, 2011). The number of social media users in the world stands at 3.48 billion in 2019, with South Africa having 23 million active social media users, up by 28% (5 million) since 2018 (Hootsuite, 2019). 22 million of these South African social media users access the platforms on their mobile devices (Hootsuite, 2019).

According to Cymfony (2008) and Wïrthman (2013), Web 2.0 and its social media platforms like blogs, photo sites and video sites are no longer seen merely as technological tools but have become a widely accepted societal trend. They add that millions of consumers have embraced these new and influential communication tools to publish an opinion, share an experience, as well as sign up for Internet chats, and that these conversations have affected a lot of companies, some favourably and some negatively, raising the understanding of the power social media has to affect company outcomes. This is evident if we consider the following statistic: 71% of consumers who got quick company response on social networking were likely to recommend the brand to others (Cymfony, 2008; Wïrthman, 2013). Conversely, social media also poses a real threat to institutional/brand reputation, as well as privacy and security (Ristuccia & Rossen, 2015). "Understanding that reputation risk has transcended the conventional business realm and is evolving into the social realm is critical for organisational leaders" (Ristuccia & Rossen, 2015:6).

Social media has various platforms, each with its own rules of engagement and functionality with different platforms being more useful to different groups and new platforms being added on a regular basis (Chaffey, 2019). Brian Solis, co-founder of the Social Media Club and social media thought leader, introduced "The Conversation Prism," on which he describes the various platforms and uses of social media as depicted in Figure 2.2 which he terms "a digital map of the social media landscape" (Solis, 2013:1). The Conversation Prism was first compiled in 2008 and the 2013 version (5.0) is the latest. This clearly shows the complexity communicators and marketers face when trying to navigate the social media landscape.

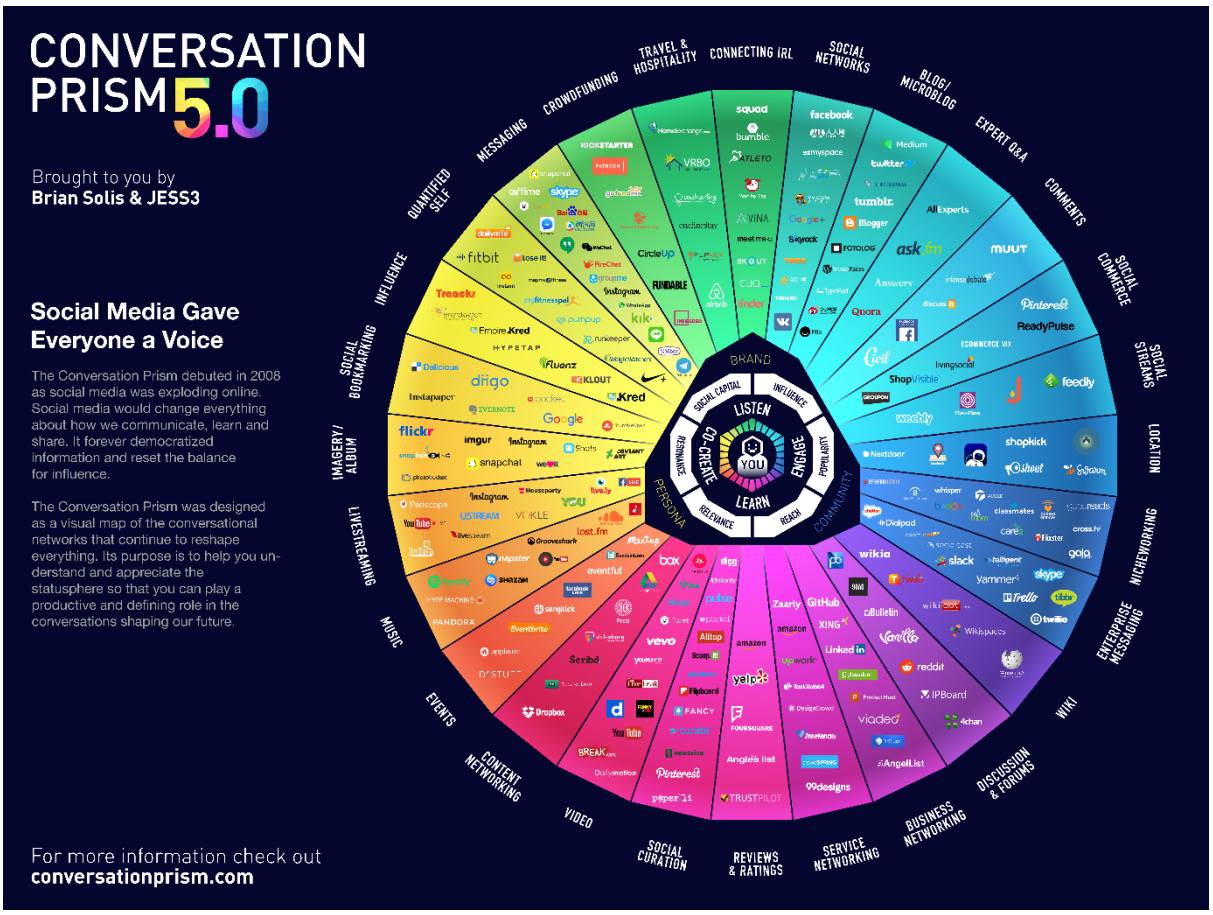


Figure 2.2: Social Media Conversation Prism 5.0 (Solis: 2013:1)

2.5.1 Social media in the South African context

Nielsen (2011) noted that in South Africa, there is a broad divide between those able to access digital media, and those coming from the rural areas where this access is very limited (Nielsen, 2011). From data published by Hootsuite in 2019, as shown in Figure 2.3, it is evident that only 54% (31.18 million) of the South African population has access to the Internet and without access to this platform, access to digital or social media channels is not possible (Hootsuite, 2019:21). Of these, 28.99 million use their mobile devices to access the Internet – 50% of the South African population (Hootsuite, 2019:21). This is slightly lower than the global percentage of people with Internet access (57%), and more South Africans access the Internet on their mobile devices as compared to the 42% in global terms (Hootsuite, 2019:6).

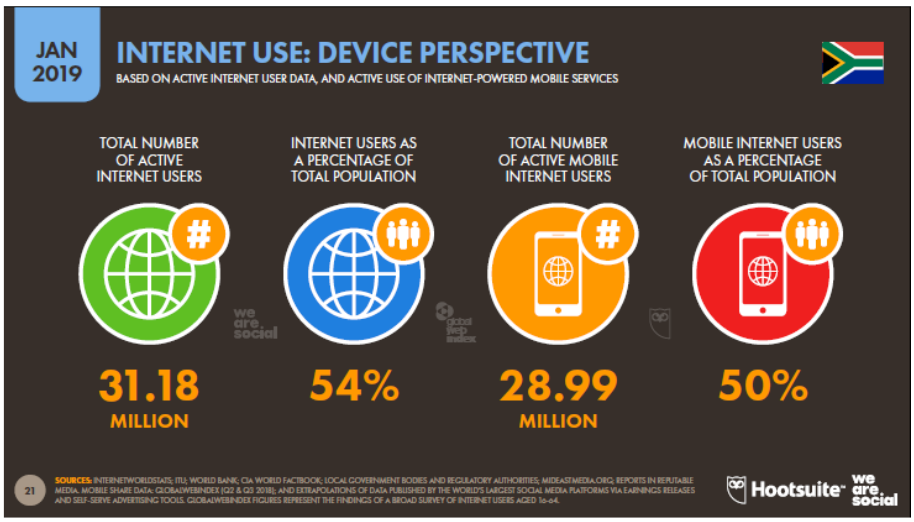


Figure 2.3: Internet and mobile Internet use in South Africa 2019 (Hootsuite, 2019:21)

Berger and Sinha (2012) write that from 2005 to 2009, the number of South Africans owning, renting and/or having access to a mobile phone increased by 20%, and the country experienced 100.48% mobile penetration among its then population of 50 million. In 2019, with a population of 57 million, these figures have grown substantially with 170% mobile penetration (98.05 million) – users with more than one mobile device accounts for this high percentage (Hootsuite, 2019:15).

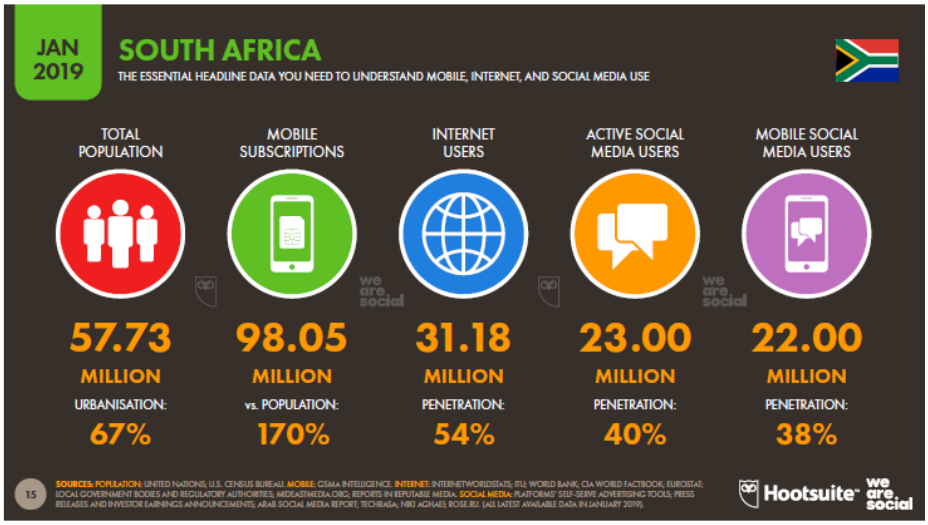


Figure 2.4: Mobile, Internet and social media use in South Africa 2019 (Hootsuite, 2019:15)

Berger and Sinha (2012:3) report that "adolescents and young people have been identified as the first adopters of mobile technology with 72% of 15 – 24 year olds reported as 'having a cell phone' in a survey conducted by The Kaiser Family Foundation and the South African Broadcasting Corporation. With this increase in mobile devices, new opportunities have opened up to adolescents and young people in accessing and consuming digital information via online platforms like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. Figure 2.5 shows how South African

users engage with social media with an average of 8.5 social media accounts and an average of almost three hours per day (Hootsuite, 2019).

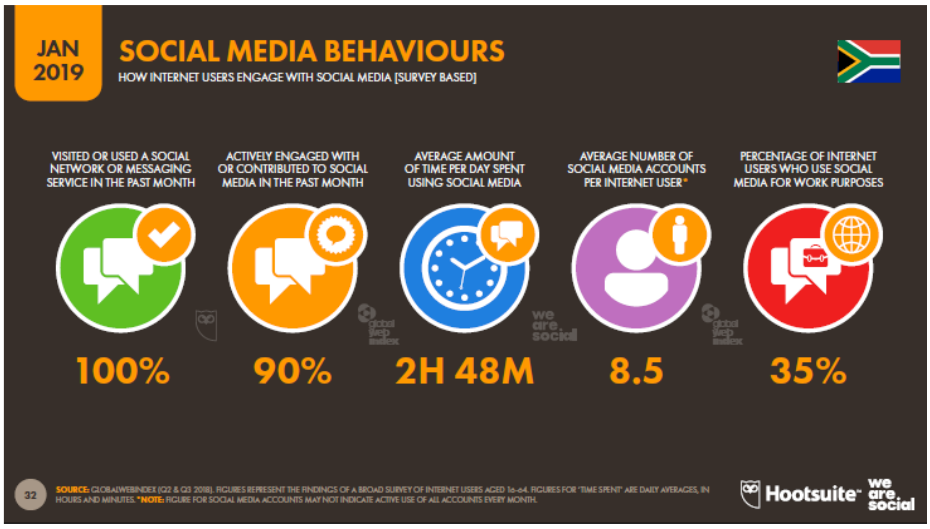


Figure 2.5: How South African Internet users engage with social media (Hootsuite, 2019:22)

The following graph shows South Africa's most active social platforms in South Africa in 2019 (Hootsuite, 2019). This has changed somewhat from data published in 2017 where Facebook was in the lead, followed closely by YouTube and WhatsApp in 2016/17 (Qwerty Digital, 2017). Instagram has moved up from seventh to fifth place from 2016/17 to 2019, echoing the international trend (Qwerty Digital, 2017; Hootsuite, 2019).

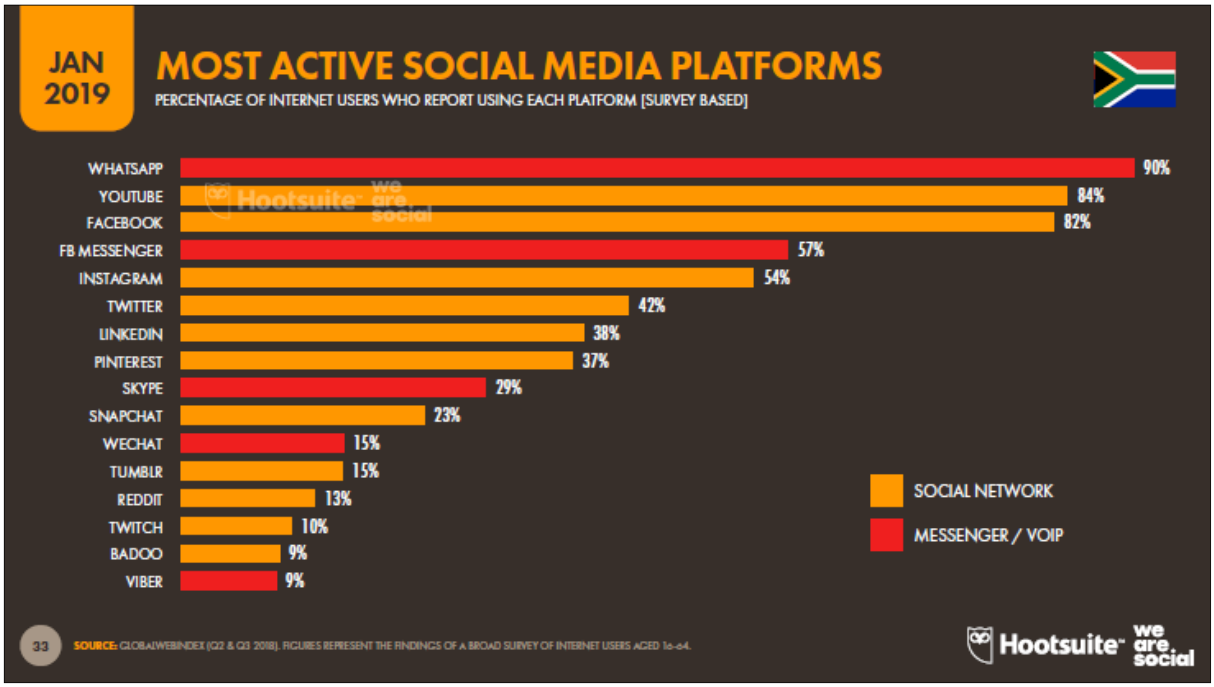


Figure 2.6: Most active social media platforms in South Africa 2019 (Hootsuite, 2019:21)

According to an ICASA report published March 2019 on the state of ICT sector in South Africa, 74% of South African's living in Gauteng have access to the Internet; however, only 16.5% are able to access the Internet from home. The Western Cape has the second highest access level in South Africa, with 70.8% of their population able to access the Internet, and 25.7% able to access it from home, so slightly more than in Gauteng (ICASA, 2019). Figure 2.7 shows the distribution in the rest of South Africa.

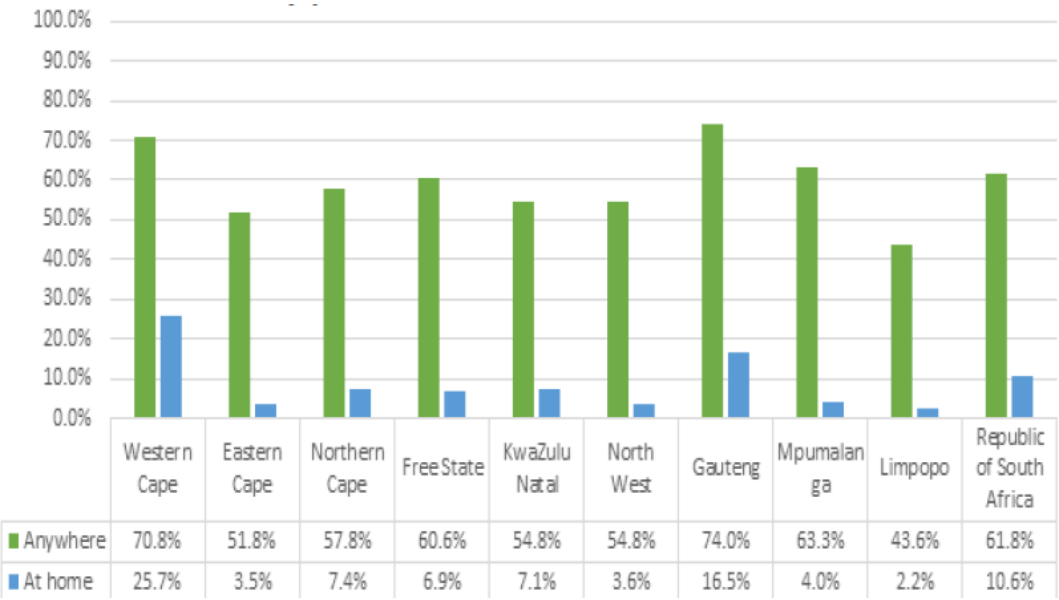


Figure 2.7: Percentage of households with access to the Internet at home, or for which at least one member has access to or used the Internet by province for 2017 (ICASA, 2019).

Table 2.6 shows the household access to the Internet by place of access, geotype and province in 2017 (ICASA, 2019), with access from home in rural areas very low in most provinces: 0.6% in the Eastern Cape; 0.8% in North-West; 1.6% in the Free State; 1.7% in Kwa-Zulu Natal. The highest home access is in the Western Cape (12.8%) and Gauteng (12.2%).

Table 2.6: Household access to the Internet by place of access, geotype and province, 2017 (ICASA, 2019)

Place Internets accessed	Geotype	Province (per cent)									
		WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LP	RSA
At home	Metro	31,3	5,9	NA	12,8	11,7	NA	16,8	NA	NA	17,4
	Urban	14,5	5,3	8,6	5,1	7,4	6,5	14,0	5,8	6,8	8,4
	Rural	12,8	0,6	3,8	1,6	1,7	0,8	12,2	2,6	0,8	1,7
	Total	25,7	3,5	7,4	6,9	7,1	3,6	16,5	4,0	2,2	10,6
At work	Metro	22,3	22,4	NA	13,8	21,3	NA	28,4	NA	NA	25,3
	Urban	19,4	11,9	17,6	11,7	20,3	11,8	25,1	11,5	17,7	16,6
	Rural	9,8	2,0	6,9	1,0	4,7	5,3	13,6	5,8	2,5	4,1
	Total	20,7	11,3	14,7	10,9	15,0	8,5	27,8	8,3	6,1	16,9
Using mobile devices	Metro	69,0	68,7	NA	67,6	55,1	NA	65,9	NA	NA	65,0
	Urban	51,5	56,4	58,5	57,5	62,0	62,7	71,0	73,1	53,3	61,5
	Rural	22,9	32,7	49,7	44,2	39,0	45,0	49,2	52,7	33,5	39,6
	Total	61,5	50,5	56,1	58,6	50,9	53,7	66,4	61,6	38,2	56,9
At Internet Cafes or education al facilities	Metro	12,0	13,9	NA	6,2	11,3	NA	21,5	NA	NA	17,2
	Urban	17,7	10,9	5,3	10,7	7,4	4,5	13,5	4,2	7,0	9,2
	Rural	4,0	1,3	1,6	5,7	5,7	6,5	2,2	6,4	3,5	4,5
	Total	13,2	7,8	4,3	8,7	8,3	5,5	20,4	5,4	4,3	11,5

As discussed, there are a number of challenges to social media adoption in South Africa. These include the digital division between urban and rural areas with little to no Internet connection available in certain urban areas, as well as power supply issues, illiteracy, poverty, the cost of data, and a low Internet penetration rate (Akande & Van Belle, 2014; ICASA, 2019). This poses a challenge to communicators and marketers speaking to the Generation Y and Z audience in South Africa. Lack of access could exclude many potential students, a matter which must be taken seriously if marketing communication efforts with this generation are to be successful and one which requires research to inform strategies followed by university communicators and marketers.

2.5.2 Social media for Generation Y and Z

As the purpose of this study is to determine the effective use of social media marketing communication for institutions of higher education, the focus is on those social media platforms that, according to statistics, resonate mostly with the younger generation – in this instance Generation Y and Z. This global trend is shown in the TopUniversities infographic below – Figure 2.8, which shows the global perspective of social media use in these generations (TopUniversities, 2014).

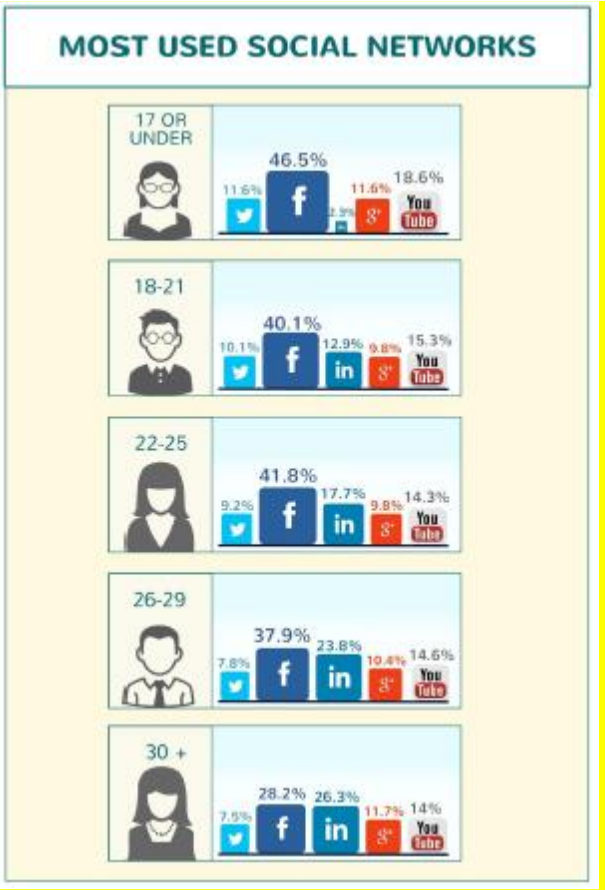


Figure 2.8: Most used social networks internationally (TopUniversities, 2014:16)

Deloitte (2017) surveyed the South African population's social media use per platform which is illustrated in Figure 2.9. This shows that Facebook and Instagram are the most widely used platforms for people aged 16 – 24, with WhatsApp – which is not always seen as a social media platform but rather a messaging app – also in the top three. Facebook Messenger, Snapchat and Imessage also fall into the messaging app category, making Twitter the third most used social media platform in this illustration (Deloitte, 2017).

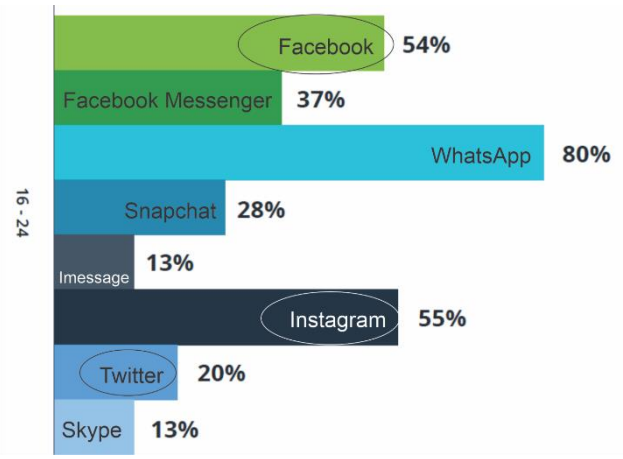


Figure 2.9: Mobile platform usage by South African aged 16 – 24 (adapted from Deloitte, 2017)

While YouTube does not feature in this graphic, the Deloitte report shows that 68% of South Africans aged 16 – 24 use YouTube to watch video material (Deloitte, 2017).

The 2019 Sunday Times Generation Next Youth Brand survey published in June 2019 shows that WhatsApp (27.91), Instagram (16.59), Facebook (13.64), YouTube (9.07) and Tik Tok (6.68) are the top five preferred social media platforms for the youth (aged 8 – 23) in South Africa (HDI Youth Consultancy, 2019).

The Hootsuite (2019) research does not give a breakdown of social media use by age group, but February 2019 Napoleoncat (2019b) statistics show that 26.8% (6.1 million) of South Africans aged 18 – 24 are active on the Facebook platform. Potential students will also be found in the 13 – 17 age group where a further 2.9 million young people are active on Facebook (Napoleoncat, 2019b). On the Instagram platform, 29.8% (1.2 million) of users are between 18 and 24, and 6.7% (270 000) are in the 13 – 17 age group. This clearly shows that the target audience in this study – Generation Y and Z – is using Facebook and Instagram widely. It will be insightful to see if these platforms are influencing decisions about careers and higher education institutions. Similar information is not available for Twitter and YouTube.

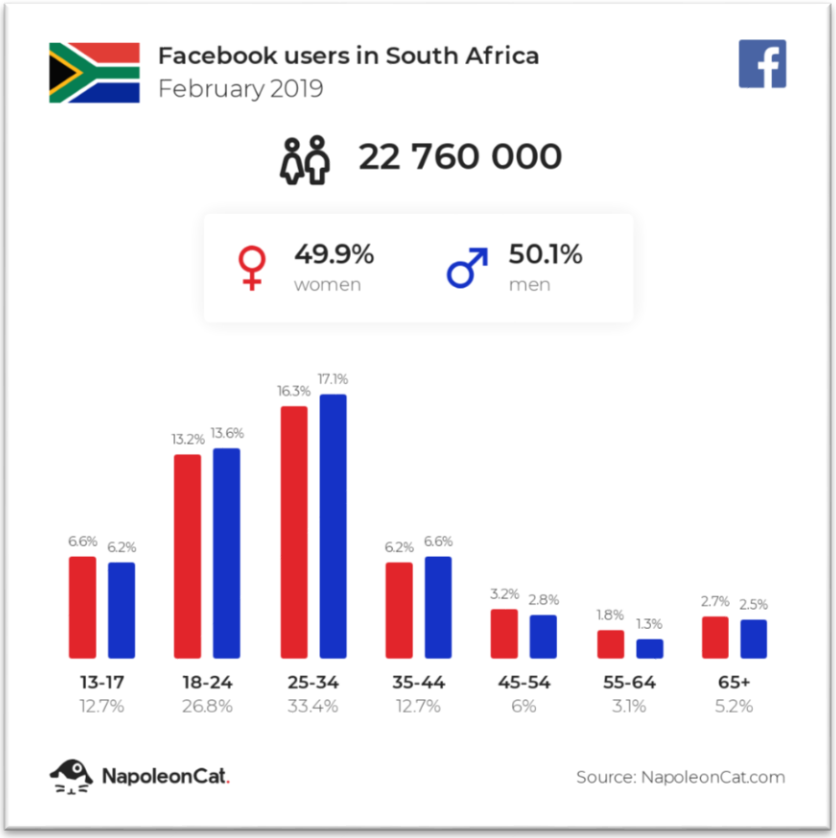


Figure 2.10: Facebook's South African Audience 2019, by age (Napoleoncat, 2019b)

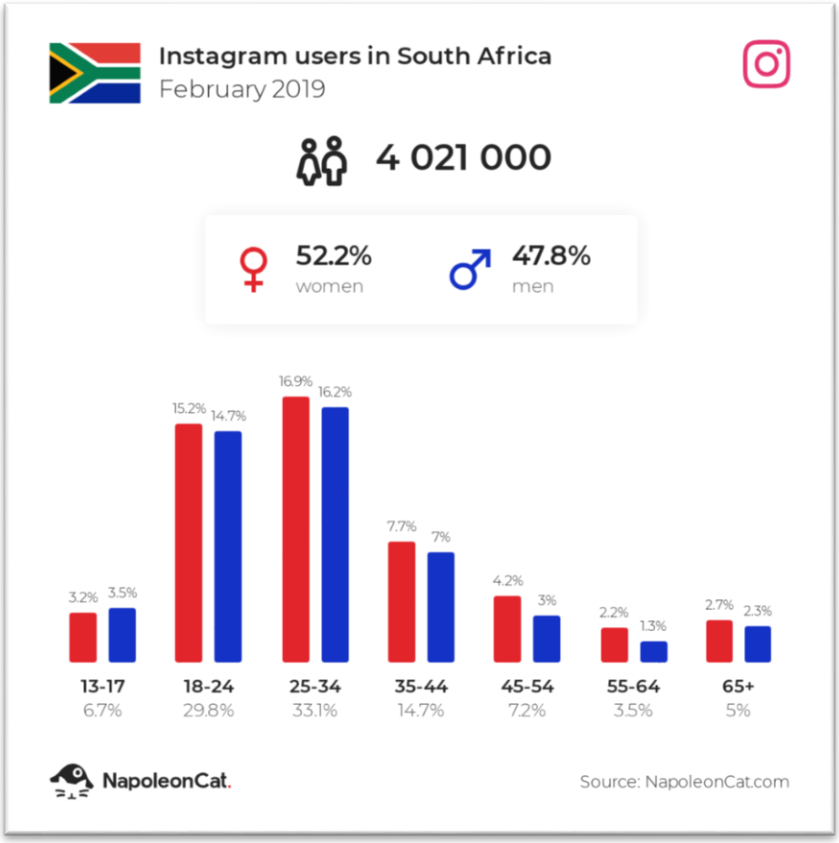


Figure 2.11: Instagram's South African Audience 2019, by age (Napoleoncat, 2019a)

These statistics validate this study's focus on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter as social media platforms used most widely by the target audience – Generation Y and Z – both globally and also in South Africa. However, it is also important to determine whether these social media platforms are also being used by potential university students when making decisions on where to study. These platforms are discussed in more detail below.

Facebook is a social platform allowing people to make virtual friends (people they may have never actually met in person) and connect with people they know from various places, including work, university and the community they live in. People use this platform to stay in touch with friends, upload photographs, share interesting links and videos, and learn more about the people they meet or 'friend' (Reuben, 2008).

Facebook was originally launched in 2004 for Harvard students to communicate with each other and was then extended to other Ivy League universities (Reuben, 2008:3; Davis *et al.* 2012). It is now available to anyone over the age of 13 across the world, except for certain countries which place a restriction on the use of social media platforms. When Facebook launched the 'fan pages' concept in November 2007, many universities jumped at the opportunity to create an official Facebook presence for their university (Reuben, 2008).

Today, all universities in South Africa have Facebook pages as shown in Figure 2.12 (UniRank, 2019).

South African Universities on Facebook

Rank	Likes	University
1	371,498	University of Johannesburg
2	178,860	University of Cape Town
3	173,825	University of the Witwatersrand
4	127,518	University of KwaZulu-Natal
5	120,319	Universiteit van die Vrystaat
6	117,700	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
7	103,493	Universiteit Stellenbosch
8	84,701	Nelson Mandela University
9	66,992	Walter Sisulu University
10	45,843	Tshwane University of Technology
11	44,442	Durban University of Technology
12	43,802	University of Fort Hare
13	38,362	Mangosuthu University of Technology
14	35,017	North-West University
15	34,460	Central University of Technology
16	34,062	University of the Western Cape
17	29,398	University of Zululand
18	27,476	Rhodes University
19	24,542	University of Limpopo
20	15,748	University of Venda
21	14,720	Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University
22	12,162	Vaal University of Technology
23	10,032	Sol Plaatje University
24	3,952	University of Mpumalanga

Figure 2.12: Top South African Universities on Facebook (UniRank, 2019)

Twitter is a "cross between instant messaging and blogging", allowing users to send short (initially 140-character but increased to 280-character in 2017) messages or respond to other Twitter posts (Reuben, 2008:5). Puiu (2008 in Reuben 2008) writes that Twitter can be used for, among others, building awareness of university messaging, branding, promoting content on other sites such as Facebook, getting feedback, finding new audiences, and general communications and marketing. Davis *et al.* (2012) adds that Twitter is being used by universities to announce upcoming events and occasions and is also used effectively for campus emergency alerts.

YouTube is the social media platform that is used by most people across the world to watch videos, and is the Web platform on which they share their own video content (Reuben, 2008). It allows people to easily upload and share video clips across the Internet through digital platforms including social media and the Web. YouTube provides a platform for universities to distribute news and recruitment visual clips or videos cost-effectively to a large audience without the cost and logistical constraints of delivery to the target group (Reuben, 2008). YouTube offers universities the opportunity to share on-campus stories and student life stories with potential recruits in a manner which resonates with this audience – visual information.

Instagram is a social media platform that is used for sharing pictures and short videos with 500 million active users on a monthly basis. Important for this study is the trend among young American's whose use of Facebook declined sharply in 2017 and 2018, with a subsequent increase in Instagram engagement and content sharing (Edison, 2018). Instagram is also growing rapidly in South Africa and is now in the top five social networks (Ornico, 2019). In April 2019, there were 3.5 million Instagram users in South Africa, which accounts for 6.1% of South Africa's population. People aged 18 – 24 make up 31.7% (just over R1.1 million) of the users (Napoleoncat, 2019a).

2.5.3 Social media as a marketing and communication channel in higher education

TNS Media Intelligence (in Cymfony, 2008) notes that social media platforms like Facebook are usually seen just as places where individuals go to associate with friends and find others with comparable interests, but the report reveals that 40% of all social networkers indicated that they use social networking sites to get to know more about brands or products they are interested in. Kelleher and Sweetser (2012), in a study conducted on the adoption of social media among university communicators, write that social media provides a popular set of tools that communicators can use to initiate and grow relationships and get their target audiences involved and engaged in their offerings. Universities can therefore use these platforms or tools to reach the defined stakeholder group and indeed build the brand with this audience.

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter offer completely new ways for organisations and consumers to interact and are therefore important platforms for brands seeking to create customer value. The variety of ways in which consumers engage with the business or organisation on social media has challenged marketing and communication managers to employ social media strategically and create content so that their interactions with consumers lead to the creation of customer value (Schulze, Scholer & Skiera, 2015 in Azionya, 2015).

According to Barnes and Lescault (2012), many universities still lag behind in the area of social media marketing and there is still a heavy reliance on traditional marketing tools. Universities should look to communicate with students in places they are likely to be – it is no longer enough to rely on the prospective student automatically visiting your university's open day or website. Newbold (2012) opines that today's students are bombarded with messages (at the cinema, on TV, on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter), and higher education institutions must try to reach them at each of their own touch points in order to cut through the excess of messaging. Davis *et al*. (2012) and Bradshaw (2011) suggest that social media has become the way to connect with this audience and it has become the primary means of communication and information sharing, particularly for this generation.

What makes these social media communities so appealing for marketers, according to Sau-Ling (2010:39), is the ability to build a 'friends' network of people who are passionate about a brand, in other words, extended brand ambassadors or influencers. Consumers can add a brand as a "friend" and use the brand's visuals, logos, sounds and videos to give their profile a personal look and feel. One of the more thought-provoking outcomes from the Cymfony study (Cymfony, 2008:5) was that "most of the value brands have seen in social networks is from what the report refers to as the 'momentum effect'". This refers to the additional publicity or eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) a brand gets when its friends share the brand story and images with their friends, thus growing the network. The report claims: "The return on investments (ROI) of the momentum effect is so strong, that 'friending is the next advertising'" (Cymfony 2008:5). Adding further value to this "momentum effect" is the credibility added by these friends, namely, "30% of frequent social networkers trust their peers' opinions when making a major purchase decision, but only 10% trust an advertisement", (Riley, in Cymfony, 2008:5). Users can therefore become social media brand ambassadors for the brand (La Rocca, 2015).

Social media is often seen as more trustworthy than normal advertising and marketing messages (Foux, 2006 in Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Additionally, consumer behaviour is being influenced by peer opinions and comparative information gleaned from various sources using these social media platforms (Surowiecki, 2005 in Constantinides & Fountain, 2008).

This is highlighted by Zhu, Wang, Wang and Wan (2016:980) in a study on peer-influence behaviour in social media in which they state that "[t]he goal of social marketing is precisely to rapidly propagate the marketing information in online social media by virtue of users' peer-influence behaviour, such as displaying, recommending and sharing the experiences of goods/services among online friends".

Marketing research shows that while American colleges and universities are using social media at a growing rate (Barnes & Lescault, 2012), the students surveyed were mostly unaware that the university they were considering studying at even had a Twitter or Facebook account (Shaw, 2013). It is therefore essential that universities make their social media presence clearly visible and make use of their brand's social media ambassadors (La Rocca, 2015) to attract the widest possible audience.

A 2011 social media survey done amongst more than 950 institutions in the USA showed that 96% of respondents were using social media, but were struggling to manage it due to its fast-changing nature and their difficultly in fully grasping the tools or platforms (Russel, 2011). Good news in a newer study done in 2012 is that universities are now using a variety of social media tools and are adopting a more strategic approach to their online communications (Barnes & Lescault, 2012).

However, there seems to be a discord between the perception of social media as an effective recruitment aid, with 95% of respondents saying that they are using Facebook successfully, but only 50% of respondents feeling that they could attribute a rise in applications directly to social media efforts (Barnes & Lescault, 2011). This highlights the need for an effective tool to measure and evaluate the success of social media campaigns in student recruitment efforts.

On the higher education front, American universities researched in the Barnes and Lescault (2011) study believe that social media provides value in the recruitment of new students. When asked about the value of specific tools for recruiting, Facebook was cited as valuable by 95%, YouTube by 92% and Twitter by 86% in the 2010/11 study, showing a growth in the majority of platforms (Barnes & Lescault, 2011).

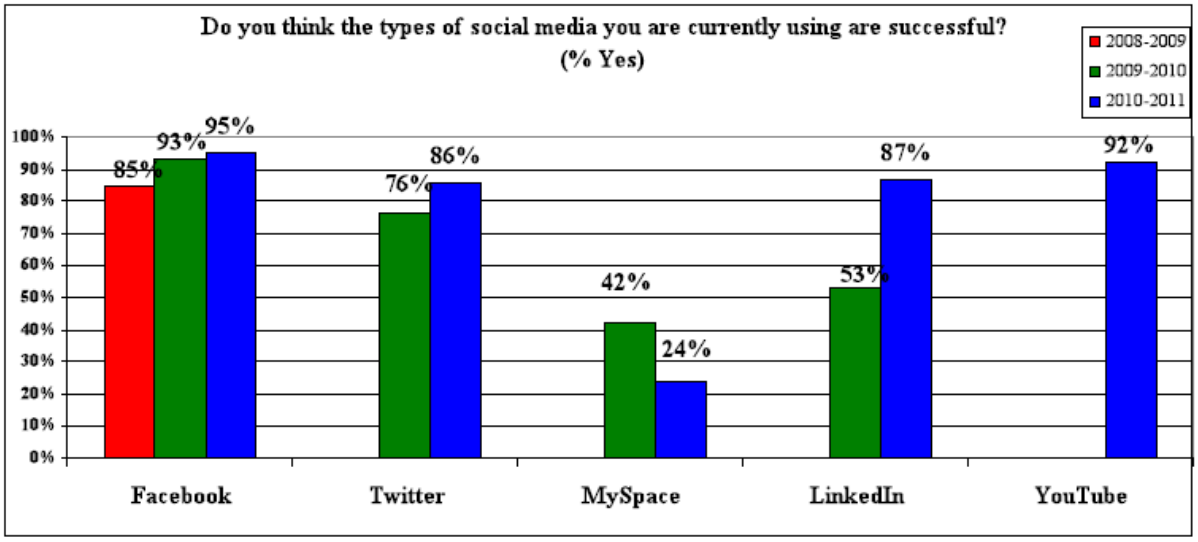


Figure 2.13: Do you think the types of social media you are currently using are successful? (Barnes & Lescault, 2011:8)

The University of Massachusetts Dartmouth's 2011/12 survey, which was done over several years (2009 – 2012) to track the use of social and digital media by universities for marketing and recruitment purposes, indicates that 100% of researched higher education institutions are now using social media to some degree (Barnes & Lescault, 2012). However, reliable data is not available to show if the use of social and digital media is making a difference in the recruitment of students or on the perceived value of the institution by the students using these platforms (Hanover Research, 2017). The recent study indicates the growth in adoption of the various platforms as follows (Barnes & Lescault, 2012:5-10):

- 98% of colleges and universities report having a Facebook page, making it the most regular social media platform being used;
- 86% have a presence on YouTube and/or a YouTube channel;
- 84% report that they have Twitter accounts;
- 66% maintain a blog;
- 41% use podcasting.

A global study published by TopUniversities (2014:5) highlights how university seekers across the world rate social media in their search for a university at which to study, and how prospective students use different online resources for different purposes during their research. Rankings websites are used to compare universities, while social media is seen as a "source of inspiration" in this process. "Prospective students draw on a diverse portfolio of resources at each stage of their research" (TopUniversities, 2014:5).

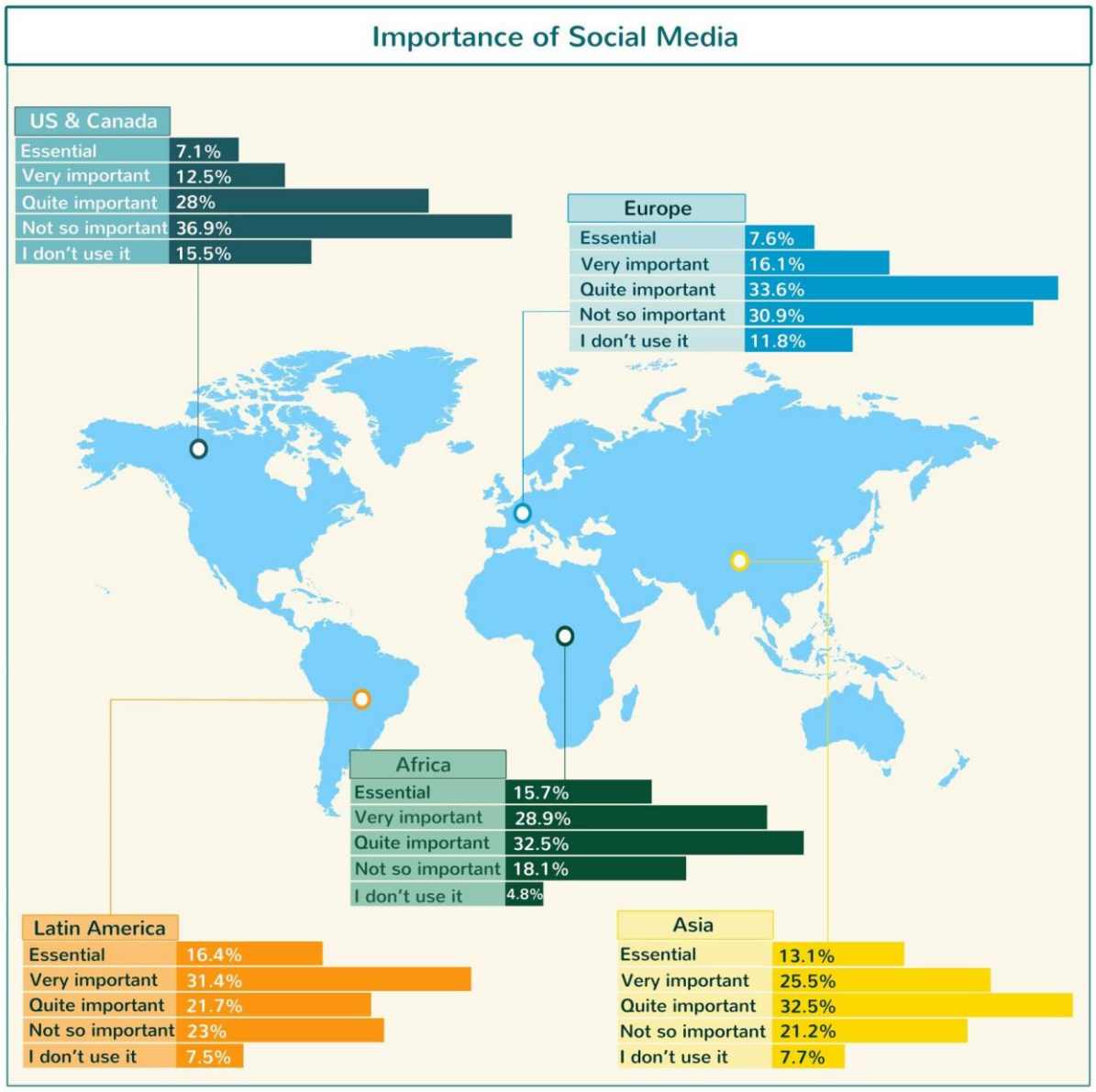


Figure 2.14: Importance of social media when researching universities and courses (TopUniversities, 2014:18)

According to the research study conducted by TopUniversities, digital resources still rank as more important when compared with social media channels when students research a university at which to study – see Figure 2.15 (Tucker, 2014). Institutional and "ranking websites were most commonly associated with comparing universities, while social media and forums were perceived mainly as sources of inspiration" (TopUniversities, 2014:5).

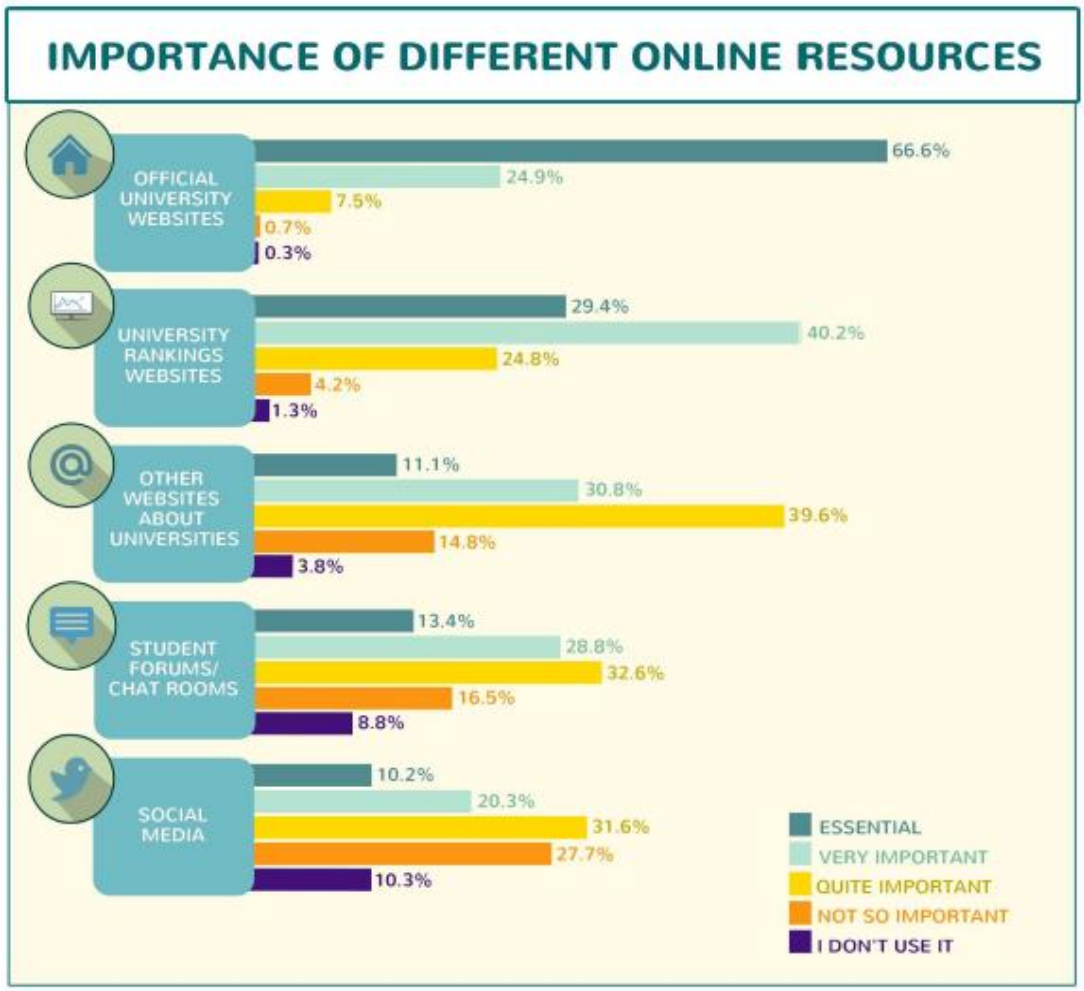


Figure 2.15: Importance of different online resources (Tucker, 2014:12)

In a study conducted for the University of Johannesburg, it was clear that digital media and social media channels are often seen as one and the same thing, making it essential in this study to clearly differentiate these in order to get a true reflection of whether social media channels are influencing university choices (Sohn, 2014). “Respondents confuse ‘website’, ‘search engines’ and ‘social media’. Social media cannot be seen in isolation from the website and other digital assets, and they need to support each other through rich cross linking” (Sohn, 2014:10).

According to the TNS Media Intelligence study (in Cymfony, 2006), traditional methods of marketing, such as newspapers and other forms of print media, have experienced a steady circulation decline and similar trends are visible in the television and broadcasting audiences. Traditional mass media use is dropping, and the Internet and pay-to-view channels see the numbers of their users increasing, as well as their advertising budgets expanding. Fuller (2013) suggests that the traditional marketing platforms used by universities are similarly losing their edge in this newly connected world. This is challenged to an extent by the literature review finding in section later in this chapter (section 2.6) – communication tools consulted when

choosing a higher education institution – where traditional marketing platforms still feature widely in the list of information sources consulted by potential students when considering where and what to study.

In addition to these traditional marketing communication channels of advertising, personal selling, publicity, public relations, sponsorships, direct marketing and e-communication, universities must now add the new platforms introduced with the advent of Web 2.0 – that of social media – to their media platform set (Thackery, Neiger, Hanson & McKenzie, 2008). The user's awareness, opinions and attitudes are being influenced by social media marketing campaigns as it allows the communicator to engage directly with the customer (Gillin, 2007) and in this study, the potential university student.

While it is clear that all the traditional methods of marketing to Generation Y and Z are still important in their search for a university at which to study, social media can give service providers a competitive edge if applied strategically (ICEF, 2012). In the TopUniversities Student Online Global Trends study (TopUniversities, 2014:8), almost two-thirds of the respondents indicated that online and offline resources were equally important in their research of options available in higher or tertiary education (see Figure 2.16). The only exception from this global trend was Africa where almost half (48%) of the participants said that online resources were more important and another 47% believed that online and offline resources were equally important (TopUniversities, 2014:8).

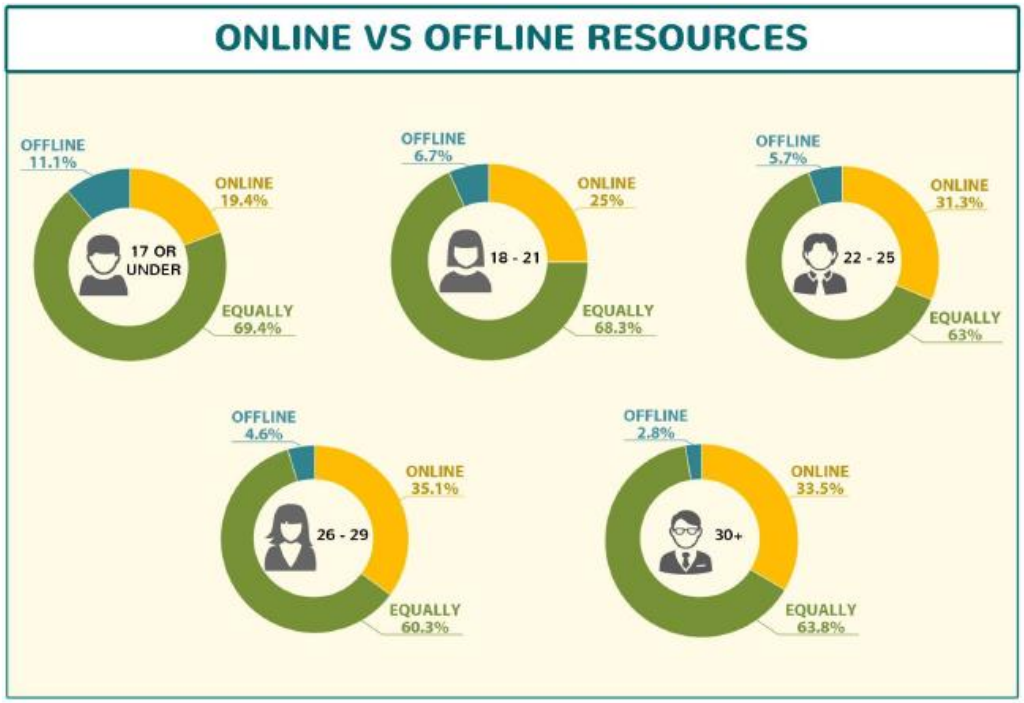


Figure 2.16: Value of online versus offline resources (TopUniversities, 2014:8)

While much research has been done in the field of marketing communication on the gaps that exist between the type of information potential students are looking for and what is being provided by universities (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006), there is little to no research available on how social media can be used to fill this gap. Research has been done on how universities are using social media (Barnes & Lescault, 2011; Barnes & Lescault, 2012), but the success thereof in converting a potential student into a registered student is yet relatively untested, and especially in the South African context.

If being competitive in student recruitment matters, then what matters to potential students is also very important. As can be seen from the review of the literature, online engagement is second nature to this group and social networking is a top priority. Consumers – and clearly this specific target group – are turning to various types of social media before making a purchasing decision (Lempert, 2006 and Vollmer & Prescourt, 2008 in Mangold & Faulds, 2009). They are also listening to what their friends have to say about brands before making a decision, as highlighted in a digital influence research study conducted by Deloitte: "Consumers look to influencers through social media, often friends or family, subject matter experts, or independent bloggers, for their trusted information" (Lobaugh, Simpson & Ohri, 2015:15).

2.6 Information sources consulted when choosing a higher education institution

Barnes and Lescault's (2013) study done among four-year accredited institutions in the United States concludes that it is clear that online behaviour can have important consequences for young people and that these tools can, and will, be used by them to make decisions about people and organisations. This highlights the fact that universities must not only adopt social media as a communication and marketing tool for this market, but that it needs to ensure that it is being done effectively.

The question remains, however, whether social media platforms – and for the purposes of this study particularly Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter – feature on the list of communication tools consulted when making a decision on where and what to study, and the importance associated with each.

In a 2013 study done in the UK by an education specialist consultancy, Communications Management, it was found that traditional communication tools appear most trusted and influential when choosing a university (Shaw, 2013). Of the 305 potential or current students surveyed, 90% preferred the university's own website, 76% open days and 72% chose the university prospectus as trusted tools to influence their decision about what and where to study. This research found that less than one in five students are influenced by university Twitter

accounts and one in four were influenced by the university Facebook pages (Shaw, 2013). Many students seemed to be unaware of universities' social media presence (Harrison, 2013). A study by Burdett (2013) in the US also found that potential students revert to more traditional media when choosing an institution of higher education at which to study.

When reflecting on the tactics that have been used successfully, it is clear that by 2013 these were still very much traditional tools. Noel-Levitz (2013) lists the top ten strategies and tactics followed by higher education institutions in America as seen in Table 2.7, ranked in order of importance to the potential student:

Table 2.7: Strategies and tactics used by America higher education institutions (Noel-Levitz, 2013:4)

RANK	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC
1	Campus open house events	Campus open house events
2	Campus visit days for high school students	Campus visit days for high school students
3	Encouraging prospective students to apply on the admissions website	Encouraging prospective students to apply on the admissions website
4	Encouraging prospective students to schedule campus visits on the admissions website	Weekend visits for high school students
5	Using enrolled students in marketing/recruiting	Encouraging prospective students to schedule campus visits on the admissions website
6	Weekend visits for high school students	Community College articulation agreements
7	Routine contacts by admissions office professional staff to assess student reactions to financial aid awards	Campus visit events designed for school counselors
8	Campus visit events designed for school counselors	Using enrolled students in recruitment/marketing
9	Tele-counseling program to coordinate continuous , regularly scheduled flows of phone calls at a high volume	College-paid trips to campus for prospective students
10	High school visits by admission representatives to primary markets	Off campus group meetings for prospective students and/or their parents

In a later study by Stoner and Rogers (2015), non-digital and digital resources were investigated to determine which resources potential students consult in the university search process before applying to the university or multiple universities, and how important each resource is for them. A total of 1 600 potential students participated in the research, and while it was done in the United States, it provides and insight which can be tested in this study for the South African context.

Table 2.8: Digital and non-digital resources consulted by potential university students (American perspective) in the university research and application process (Adapted from Stoner & Rogers, 2015:5-6)

Non-digital resources consulted	
Campus tours/open days	60%
Printed material	77%
Conversation with faculty at the university	38%
Conversation with admission officer at university	37%
Digital resources consulted	
Official social media accounts	35%
Unofficial social media accounts (students at the university)	31%
University official website	70%
Other university websites	44%
Rankings reports	44%
Online search engines (Google/Bing/etc.)	70%

In the South African context, recruitment tools are similar. A University of Johannesburg annual brand and marketing survey, which has been tracking reputation and other factors at the university for the past seven years, lists the preferred communication tools which potential students consult, and social media is only position at number eight (Sohn, 2015). The prospectus, website, guidance from life orientation (LO) teacher, open days, career expos, university visits to schools and material made available by the LO teacher are all seen as more important sources of communication and information (Sohn, 2014). In the same study in 2015, research looking only at media channels as information sources put social media in the fifth place, and three very traditional media channels in the first three (Sohn, 2015).

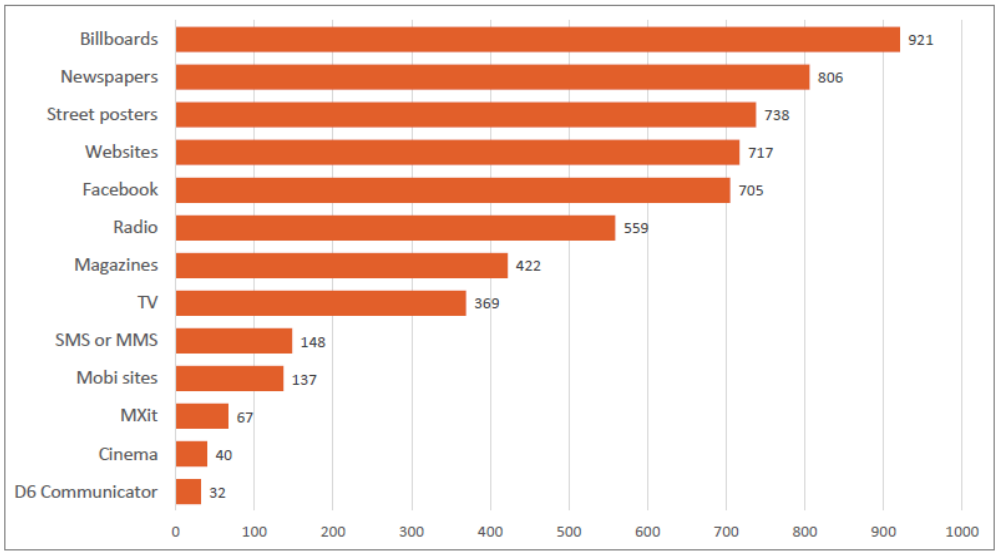


Figure 2.17: Media channel effectiveness in UJ marketing (Sohn, 2015:127)

A study done at the Tshwane University of Technology in South Africa (De Jager & Du Plooy, 2010:65) further supports these observations with social media not featuring on their list at all:

1. University website
2. Campus visits and open days
3. High school teachers
4. University publications
5. Parents
6. Word-of-mouth (friends and other people)
7. Campus events
8. Advertisements in magazines and newspapers
9. Other students (alumni)
10. Radio advertisements

From this evidence, it seems clear that much work must still be done to embed social media as an accepted and reliable communication tool for students looking for information on where and what to study. This research attempts to determine whether potential students do indeed think that social media should play a role in their university selection process and if so, what messaging and methods of communication would be most effective.

2.7 Choice factors influencing decisions

In order for university communicators and marketers to understand how to use social media platforms effectively, it is essential not only to consider where they are looking for information, but also what influences the potential student's decision about where to study.

In a study done by Lubbe (2013) amongst 2 700 grade 12 students in Gauteng, South Africa, the choice factors were as follows: (1) closer to home (30%); (2) reputation (21.9%); (3) availability of courses (21%). The research also showed that other factors influencing the choice of university included the probability of finding a job after studying; international recognition of the university; a non-racial environment; a safe environment; knowledgeable lecturers; good facilities (library and associated resources); and a culture in which the learner would feel at home.

A University of Johannesburg annual brand and marketing survey (Sohn, 2015), which has been tracking reputation and other factors at the university for the past seven years, identifies the choice factors annually and these are relatively consistent every year with academic

standards at the top of the list followed by culture (where I would feel at home/non racist); help and support; course content; facilities and lecturers.

At a conference held at Warwick University in 2013, the following were highlighted as choice factors for students in Britain: course content, academic reputation and quality of academic facilities. A study done by a National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in 1997 listed the five features that make a university more or less attractive to students as academic reputation (82%), teaching record (85%), research status (70%), extra-curricular activities on offer (65%), and type of accommodation available (48%) (Dearing, 1997)

Wiese (2008) did a comprehensive PhD study on choice factors and compiled the following very comprehensive table in her literature review.

Table 2.9: Literature review of choice factors in higher education (Wiese, 2008:171)

	INTERNATIONAL STUDIES					NATIONAL STUDIES		
CHOICE FACTORS EVALUATIVE CRITERIA	Van Dimitrios (1980)	CIRP (Cooperative Institutional Research Programme)	ASQ Plus (Admitted Student Questionnaire Plus)	ASQ (Admitted Student Questionnaire)	Bajsh and Hoyt (2001)	Cosser and Du Toit (2002)	Coetzee and Liebenberg (2004)	Holtzhausen (2005)
Wide choice of subjects/courses		✓	✓	✓				✓
Quality of teaching				✓	✓	✓		✓
Academic facilities			✓	✓				
Entry requirements				✓				
Fees		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Location	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sport programme	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Social life		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Attractiveness of campus			✓	✓				
Safety & security								
Tradition		✓				✓	✓	
Brothers/sister/ parents went there						✓	✓	
Friends						✓	✓	
Academic reputation		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Financial assistance		✓				✓		✓
Language policy								
Links with industry								
Multi-culturality/diversity				✓				✓
Internationally linked								✓
Employment prospects		✓			✓			
Flexible study mode						✓	✓	
Image							✓	✓
Size		✓			✓			
Religion		✓		✓				✓
Personal attention			✓					
On-campus housing			✓	✓		✓	✓	
Access to off-campus facilities			✓			✓		
Research					✓			

Wiese's (2008) research findings support a number of these factors. The South African study conducted among students of six universities in South Africa listed choice factors in the following order of importance:

1. Quality of teaching
2. Employment prospects
3. Campus safety and security
4. Academic facilities
5. International links
6. Language policies
7. Image of the institution
8. Flexible study modes
9. Academic reputation
10. Wide choice of subjects/courses

Table 2.10: Top ten choice factors according to institution attended (Wiese, 2008:284)

	UJ	UP	UFS	UNKZN	UNW	TUT
1	Quality of teaching	Quality of teaching	Quality of teaching	Quality of teaching	Quality of teaching	Employment prospects
2	Employment prospects	Employment prospects	Campus safety and security	Campus safety and security	Employment prospects	Quality of teaching
3	Academic facilities	Campus safety and security	Employment prospects	Employment prospects	Language policy	Campus safety and security
4	Campus safety and security	Academic facilities	Academic facilities	Academic facilities	Campus safety and security	International links
5	Academic reputation	International links	Flexible study mode	Image	International links	Language policy
6	International links	Language policy	International links	Flexible study mode	Image	Wide choice of subjects
7	Flexible study mode	Wide choice of subjects	Image	Academic reputation	Academic facilities	Flexible study mode
8	Wide choice of subjects	Image	Academic reputation	International links	Financial assistance	Image
9	Image	Academic reputation	Language policy	Entry requirements	On-campus housing	Academic facilities
10	Links with industry	Flexible study mode	Wide choice of subjects	Fees	Academic reputation	Academic reputation

From this, it is evident that factors of academic and teaching reputation, employment prospects, safety on campus and quality of facilities must feature in messaging/content of social media sites if they are to make inroads in changing perceptions of potential students.

2.8 Conclusion

In the preceding literature review, the theories that underpin this study were unpacked.. Network Theory and Analysis, Social Media Engagement Theory and Generation Theory will further guide the researcher to determine whether the use of social media by Generation Y and Z is affecting their choice of higher education institution. Network Theory and Analysis (Mouge & Contractor, 2003) argues that media platforms create relationships which can impact on the choices of the person using that medium, while Social Media Engagement Theory states that an increase in engagement levels with a particular audience can add value to their experience and perception of the particular organisation – in this case higher education institutions. Generation Theory groups specific members of society in age groups based on similar world and social experiences which results in certain patterns of behaviour and preference. This provides a lens through which we can observe these groups. Although this is not an exact art as there will always be people whose behaviour and preferences do not fit into their specific generation, there is enough evidence to support the fact that the majority of people in the specific generation share similar traits.

The literature review further unpacks the areas relevant in this research, namely: Generation Y and Z and their preferences, particularly in respect of social media and communication and marketing; social media in the broader sense, and how it is radically changing our media and communication landscape; social media as a marketing and communication channel; social media in the South African context as the level of adoption has been slower than in some other countries due to constraints such as cost and availability; social media in higher education and to what level it has been adopted and the perceived success thereof in recruitment activities. Information sources that university students consult was also included in the literature review and from this it is clear that traditional resources are still being widely used, and that social media is still not one of the top contenders, both nationally and internationally. It was also important to consider the choice factors that influence a potential student's selection of a university in order to provide guidance to university recruiters about messaging on social media platforms that will add value to a student's university research process.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology and methods used to address the objective of this study: to determine the effectiveness of social media marketing communication in higher education undergraduate recruitment activities. Firstly, the research methodology and philosophy that informed this study is discussed, followed by a description of the research design and methods selected, including the sampling, data collection and data analysis. The viability, reliability and ethical considerations taken into account in the study are then outlined.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Research philosophy

"A paradigm is a shared world view that represents the beliefs and values in a discipline and guides how problems are solved" (Schwandt, 2001 in Chilisa, 2011:1). The paradigm selected by the researcher or scholar assists in determining the expectations or assumptions, as well as principles that influence a researcher's perception of a research problem, guiding the researcher in their method of investigating and ultimately answering the research question (Garner, Wagner & Kawulich, 2009). It provides a framework for observing and understanding a research question (Creswell, 2013). For the purposes of this study, the post-positivist paradigm was selected, which is underpinned mainly by philosophies of realism, idealism and critical realism (Chilisa, 2011).

Positivism – also known as logical positivism – holds that the scientific method is the only way to establish truth and objective reality (Garner *et al.*, 2009). The term 'positivism' was created by Auguste Compte to reflect a firm empirical approach in which claims about knowledge are based on direct experience with the emphasis on facts and causes of behaviour (Bodan & Bilken, 2003 in Garner *et al*., 2009). Physicists Werner Heisenberg and Niels Bohr questioned the dogmatic view of positivism, turning the emphasis from absolute certainty to probability. The researcher therefore becomes the one who constructs knowledge rather than simply passively noting the laws of nature (Crotty, 1998 in Garner *et al*., 2009).

Considered a more modern paradigm, post-positivism was developed by critics of positivism. Positivists and post-positivists believe in that there is one reality, however, they concede that we can never fully undertand reality, and our efforts to comprehend this reality are limited, as a result of our sensory and intellectual restrictions or limitations (Guba, 1990). Post-positivist research aims to also predict and explain while remaining objective and neutral, but also acknowledging any biases that may affect the objectivity of the research (Guba, 1990).

In the positivism, as well as the post-positivism paradigm, the objective is predicting outcomes, testing concepts, or discovering the relationships between variables based on a cause and effect correlation (Garner *et al*., 2009). Positivists and post-positivists view reality as being objective and identifiable. The research is based on precise observation and verifiable measurement, with a typical research design therefore including quantitative approaches such as experimental and quasi-experimental research, correlation research and descriptive research (Garner *et al*., 2009).

This research speaks to the post-positivism paradigm; thus the researcher therefore observes and measures, remaining independent of the study, and highlighting any biases or predispositions that may affect the study.

This paradigm, together with a descriptive research design and following a quantitative approach, has been used by a number of social media researchers in order to measure the effectiveness of social media in different environments (Shava, Chinyamurindi & Somdyala, 2016; Cilliers, 2016; Cilliers, Chinyamurindi & Viljoen, 2017; Chinyamurindi & Shava, 2015). The research paradigm informed the research approach, thus a quantitative approach and a descriptive research design was used.

3.2.2 Research approach

Quantitative research seeks to quantify data and allows the researcher to “generalise the results from a sample of the entire population by measuring the views and opinions of a chosen sample” (Atlas.ti, 2019). In this study, the results from a sample of first year students at a South African university – those at the University of Johannesburg – were collected and analysed to measure the views of the entire population of first year students enrolled at South African universities in 2019.

The aim of descriptive research (Wiid & Diggines, 2009) is to describe the research domain precisely and methodically. It answers the “who, what, where, why and how” questions asked in the study (Malhotra, 2010). Shiu, Hair, Bush and Ortinau (2009) and Burns and Bush (2006)

note that this method is effective where data is collected to describe certain characteristics of a defined target population, namely, attitudes, intentions, preferences, purchase decisions, evaluation of products and potential of a product. Descriptive studies aim to determine the "current status of a variable or phenomenon" (CIRT, 2019:1). Finding these answers generally relies on observation and the use of survey methods to gather the descriptive data (Wiid & Diggines, 2009; CIRT, 2019). Descriptive statistics uses data collection and analysis techniques to obtain reports that measure central tendency, deviation, and similarities (AECT, 2001).

For the purpose of this quantitative descriptive research study, a sample of first-year students at a university in South Africa was selected to determine if and how they used social media in their choice of university at which to study. Data was collected as precisely and methodically as possible using an electronic questionnaire to examine their use of social media when choosing a university. A cross-sectional descriptive research design was used to measure the first-year students during a specific time period – from 1 April – 22 May 2019.

Table 3.1: Summary of methodology applied in this study

Paradigm	Post-Positivist Paradigm
Theoretical framework	Network Theory and Analysis; Social Media Engagement Theory; Generation Theory
Research approach	Quantitative cross-sectional descriptive survey
Population	2019 First-year students at universities in South Africa
Sample	2019 First year students at the University of Johannesburg – purposive sampling
Data collection	Electronic questionnaire
Data analysis	Descriptive statistics using data classified according to nominal, ordinal and interval scales

3.3 Research design

Cooper and Schindler (2013) explain that research design is the blueprint for achieving research objectives and finding answers to the questions it poses. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) further define it as a systematic process whereby data is systematically collected and logically analysed in order to address a particular research problem.

Johnson (2001 in Leedy and Ormrod, 2005) state that the term 'survey research' has been used by various scholars to refer to almost any method of descriptive, quantitative research. Survey research more specifically comprises the gathering of data about a group or groups of people by questioning members of the group and tabulating their answers (Leedy & Ormrod,

2005:183). In this way, by surveying a sample group from a select population, Leedy and Ormrod (2005) explain that we are able to compile a descriptive survey. The sample group for this study was selected based on cross-sectional research so as to measure the components or units from a section of the population at a specific time or in a specific time period (Wiid & Diggines, 2009:55-56; Burns & Bush, 2006:122-123). A cross-sectional descriptive research design was therefore followed, as detailed below.

3.3.1 Sampling

Sampling refers to the steps followed to get information from a sample or subsection of a specific population or grouping of people (McDaniel & Gates, 2006). Malhotra (2010) lists the steps followed in arriving at this sample as defining the target population and subsequently identifying the sampling units, elements and size of the group. For the purposes of this study a non-probability sampling method was employed where a sample of the population (first year students) were selected based on the subjective judgement of the researcher, as opposed to a random selection which is used in probability sampling. A purposive sampling approach was followed, as the purpose of the research was clear when selecting the sample for the research study (Trochim, 2006). First-year South African university students comprised the population, as they had recently selected a university at which to study.

Due to costs and logistics involved, it was not viable to conduct this research at all of South Africa's universities. Figures from 2016 (issued in 2018) – the latest available on the Council for Higher Education website – show that South Africa's 26 universities had 985 212 students enrolled (CHE, 2018), of which 158 891 were first-year students. Thus, the target population – or sampling elements – for this study was the first-year student cohort who had enrolled to study at the University of Johannesburg in 2019.

When considering sample size for a specific research study, the researcher must select an appropriate number of elements to include in the study (Malhotra, 2010). The University of Johannesburg, a residential university, annually enrols approximately 10 500 first-year students. For the purposes of this quantitative study, all 2019 first year students at the University of Johannesburg were targeted to ensure a representative sample. A total of 10 415 elements (first-year students) from eight faculties comprised the target population group in 2019. Therefore, a total sample size of 10 415 respondents were selected for the purposes of this study. The cost effectiveness and convenience of this online survey method made it feasible to sample this entire first-year group.

The University of Johannesburg 2019 first-year student group comprised as follows, showing a representative spread across the various demographics:

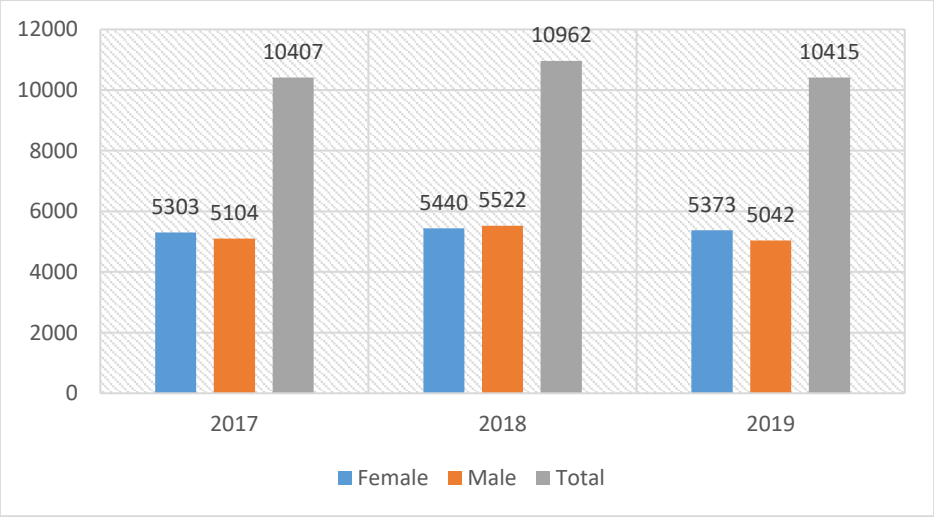


Figure 3.1: UJ 2017 – 2019 first-year students by gender

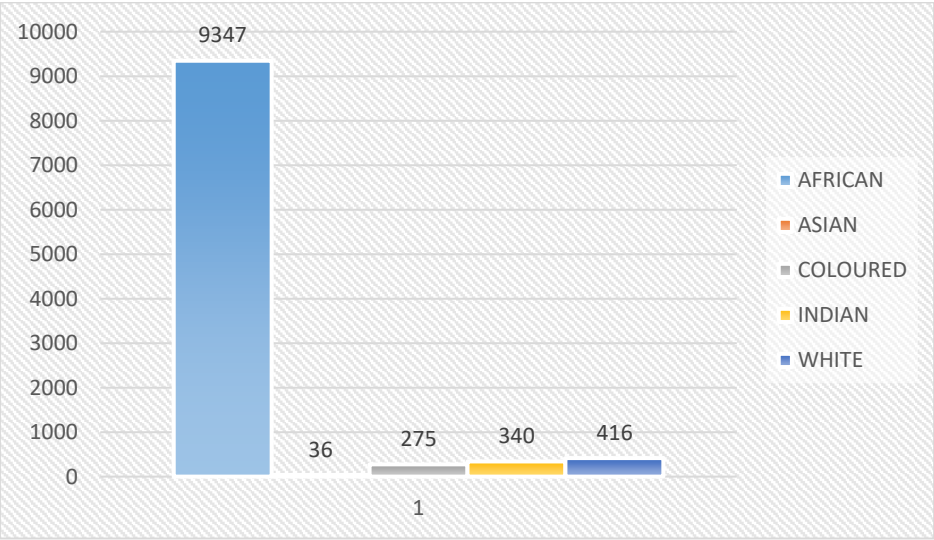


Figure 3.2: UJ 2019 first-year students by race

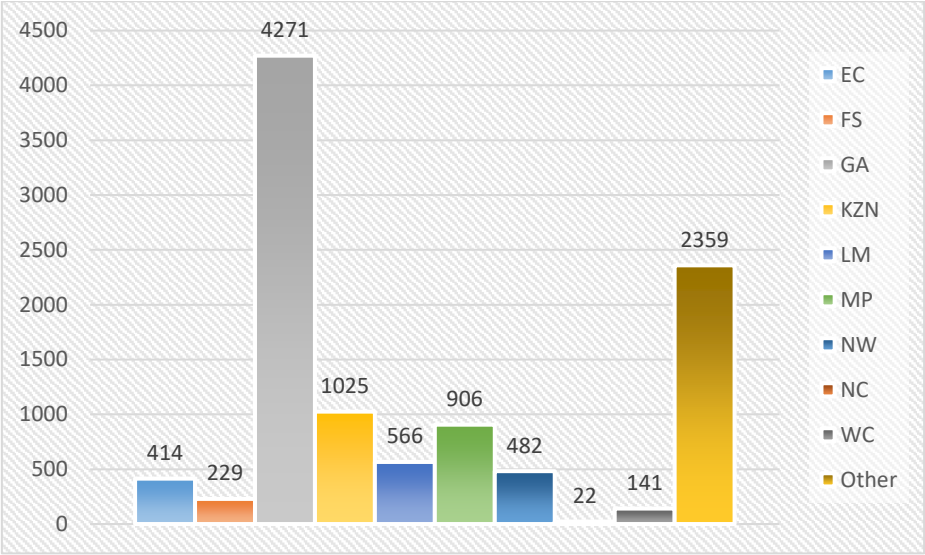


Figure 3.3: UJ 2019 first-year students by province

3.3.2 Data collection

All University of Johannesburg students are given a personal email account and address when registering to study. The preferred method was to distribute the questionnaire to the student emails account directly, to ensure the greatest possible participation. However, the University finally declined to give permission for this method of data collection and the questionnaire was therefore posted on the UJ Student Portal – ULink – with a banner inviting first year students to participate and explaining the relevance and value of the study. A question was built into the questionnaire to address the implication of this decision as all students have access to this portal. Participants had to agree firstly that they are first-year students at UJ; if not, the survey ended for the specific students with a message of recognition for their willingness to participate. The second question was an opt-in or opt-out option, and once again, if the students opted-out at this point, the survey ended and they received an acknowledgement message.

According to SurveyGizmo (2015), surveys you distribute internally – such as in this case to the students – normally have a better response rate than external surveys. Internal surveys normally have a 30 – 40% response rate compared with a 10 – 15% response rate for those conducted externally. With a 30% response rate, the research aimed to have 3 000 responses to this study, making it a robust sample.

3.3.2.1 Survey tool

In terms of the descriptive analysis, research was conducted using the survey technique whereby a questionnaire was designed and tested, after which it was converted into an electronic Web-based survey. An invitation to participate was then distributed to a clearly

defined and specifically demarcated group to ensure a representative group of the population with the specific intention of obtaining specific information from them (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Malhotra, 2010).

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) explain that survey research typically uses one of three interview techniques: face-to-face, telephone or written questionnaire. A questionnaire as a measurement instrument allows the researcher to regulate the process of data collection, allowing for a consistent and uniform manner in which to analyse the data (Shiu *et al*., 2009).

For this study, a questionnaire was compiled using the two quantitative techniques proposed in Leedy and Ormrod (2005), namely checklist and rating scale, to facilitate evaluation and quantification.

The survey was based on a combination of questions grouped into the following main categories:

- *Socio-demographic* questions including multi-choice options informing age, gender, school.
- *Decision parameters* influencing the choice of higher education institution including multiple choice questions, open-ended questions and questions using a five-point Likert scale (disagree to agree).
- *The use of social media* including multi-choice, multiple-choice and questions using a five-point Likert scale (not at all to 3 – 4 hours per day).

Table 3.2 shows how the questions posed in the questionnaire (Annexure 1) were aligned to the objectives of this research to ensure that all of the objectives were sufficiently addressed.

Table 3.2: Research objective and related question/s

Research objective	Question(s) asked to inform answer
Explore the target audience universities recruit from – Generation Y and Z – and their use of social media.	Questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 – 14 • What is your age? • What is your gender? • What school did you go to (and in which province) – This helped determine whether they had been in a school that was likely to have access to Internet/WiFi. • Do you, or have you ever, used social media? • If no: For which reason/s don't you use social media?

	• If yes: How much time do you spend on social media on a daily basis? • Do you use any other social media platforms? • How do you access these social media platforms? • What do you use social media for?
Identify the information sources consulted, and information sought, by potential university students when choosing a university at which to study.	Questions 7, 8, 17, 18 • Which of the following did you consult to help you choose a university at which to study? • How valuable did you find this information? • What information were you searching for on these platforms?
Determine the reasons potential students join and engage with university social media platforms, particularly Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter.	Questions 15 – 18 • Which of the following university social media pages did you visit (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram)? • For what reason did you visit university social media pages? • What information were you searching for on these platforms? • How useful did you find the information?
Explore the influence of social media on a potential undergraduate student's choice of university.	Questions 19 and 20 • Did social media influence your decision-making process when you decided to study at UJ? • How did it influence your decision-making process?
Provide guidelines for social media marketing communication to potential university students.	Questions 17, 18, 20, 21 • What information were you searching for on these platforms? • How useful did you find the information? • How/why did it influence your decision-making process? • Based on your recent experience of choosing a preferred university at which to study, what other information would be valuable to a potential student visiting UJ's social media platforms? • Also informed by literature review and all other questions.

For the purposes of this study, an electronic self-administered questionnaire was designed and distributed using an online assessment or survey tool, SurveyGizmo, to a “clearly defined and specifically delimited group” to ensure a representative group of the population with the specific intention of obtaining specific information from them (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Malhotra, 2010).

Online survey tools have emerged as highly convenient research tools for researchers (Buchanan & Hvizdak, 2009). However, the use of online administration of the survey has, as noted by Knussen and McFadyen (2010), introduced a number of ethical issues which must be addressed by the researcher when conducting online research. These include issues of anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, the right to withdraw from the survey at any time and to omit answering certain questions. The questionnaire was completed anonymously by the participants and no personal information was collected that could allow identification of the particular student. Participants were given the opportunity to exit the process at the start of the questionnaire. Due to the electronic nature of this questionnaire, the students were able to complete this at a time and place convenient to them and were not forced to answer any questions. They were also able to exit the survey at any time.

Buchanan and Hvizdak’s (2009) research proposes that the protocol review of the research should, in the case of online survey methods, also include questions that reflect the policies of the survey tool being used, in order to ensure best practice. They provide a checklist against which to test the ethical and methodological concerns posed by research in general and online research specifically. This includes sensitivity in the type of data being collected, privacy offered by the tool, storage of data, anonymity of participants, and avoiding spamming participants. The survey tool, SurveyGizmo, was investigated prior to the research being conducted, and it provided the options to ensure best practice. It allowed for anonymity, secure transmission and provided an opt-out facility.

The survey was pre-tested with five students from the target population. The questionnaire was available in English – the language understood and spoken by all respondents.

3.3.3 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data in this quantitative study. Descriptive statistics offer very simple summaries about the sample group and what you are trying to measure (Trochim, 2006). “Together with simple graphics analysis, they form the basis of quantitative analysis of data” (Trochim, 2006:1). According to Cooper and Schindler (2013), descriptive statistics therefore help describe, show or summarise data in a meaningful way so that configurations or patterns might be observed from the data. Leedy and Ormrod (2005)

note that descriptive statistics can be used to analyse data in three ways: measures of central tendency, measures of validity, and the degree to which variables are related to one another.

Wiid and Diggines (2009) explain that the data collection and analysis differs for a Web-based questionnaire as the data is already captured in an Excel spreadsheet once questionnaires are completed, simplifying the process. This spreadsheet is then read into a Statistical Package for Social Sciences, abbreviated to SPSS, which can manipulate and analyse highly complex data with simple instructions (Wiid & Diggines, 2009).

In this Web-based study, the data captured in the spreadsheet was read into SPSS and analysed according to nominal and ordinal variables. Nominal variables identify or mark a sequence of values, while ordinal scales provide necessary information about the structure or sequence of choices, as you would find in a customer satisfaction survey (My Market Research Methods, 2019). “Interval scales give us the order of values and the ability to quantify the difference between each one” (My Market Research Methods, 2019:1). In this study, data can be classified as nominal, ordinal and interval as shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Measurement of variables (adapted from Wiese, 2008:213)

Question no.	Variable	Level of measurement	Scale design
1-2	First year student/opt-in or opt-out	Ordinal	Level of Agreement
3	Age	Ordinal	Rank Order
4	Gender	Nominal	Category
5	High school attended	Nominal	Category
6	Province	Nominal	Category
7	Sources of information	Nominal	Category
8	Value of information	Interval	Likert scale
9	Social media use – yes/no	Ordinal	Level of agreement
10	Social media use	Nominal	Category
11	Time on social media	Ordinal	Likert scale
12	Other social media platforms	Nominal	Category
13	Access to social media platforms	Nominal	Category
14	Use of social media	Nominal	Category
15	Social media pages visited	Nominal	Category
16	Why visit social media pages	Nominal	Category

17	Information sought on social media pages	Nominal	Category
18	Usefulness of information	Interval	Likert scale
19	Did social media influence decision	Ordinal	Level of Agreement
20	How did it influence decision	Nominal	Category
21	Other information	Nominal	Category

3.4 Validity and reliability

According to Creswell (2013), validity is best understood by determining whether we are indeed measuring what we think we are measuring – "how accurate are the results and do the results actually measure what was intended to be measured?" (CIRT, 2019). It is concerned with "the degree to which a question measures what it was intended to measure (and not something else)" (Siniscalco & Auriat, 2005:76). The following questions enable the researcher to answer whether the measures are valid: Does the researcher fully understand what value the data that has been captured adds to existing knowledge; and will another experienced researcher obtain the same or similar results when posing the same questions or using the same methods? (Creswell, 2013). The survey is valid in that it comprises an accurate sample of the population being researched, first-year students in the South African context. The validity of the content was also tested to determine the accuracy of what was being researched in this study. This is delineated in Table 3.1 where each question was evaluated against the desired outcome for this study.

According to Creswell (2013), reliability is the extent to which the same finding will be obtained if the study is to be repeated at another time by another academic – "the strength of the conclusions that are drawn from the results" (CIRT, 2019). Malhotra (2010:318) writes that "reliability refers to the degree in which consistent results are produced by an instrument when measurement is repeated". Will the same results be obtained "if the study is repeated using the same participants in the same conditions?" (Siniscalco and Auriat, 2005:77). If the same finding can be obtained again, the instrument can be considered consistent or reliable. In order to ensure reliability in this study, the exact same questionnaire was completed by all participants. The sample was representative of the South African stakeholder group (first-year students) being targeted in this study. The reliability of the code frames and the interpretation of the open-ended questions was facilitated through a rigorous coding approach.

3.5 Ethical considerations

The researcher attended to the necessary ethical issues before the survey was issued and the data collected. Permission to undertake this research was obtained from the Faculty Research Committee, Faculty of Informatics and Design, Cape Peninsula University of Technology and the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Johannesburg. No student was obligated to participate in this research study. First year students were invited to participate in the research and gave consent digitally by means of an opt-in and opt-out option at the beginning of the questionnaire.

Participation in the research was done on a voluntary basis and the anonymity of the students was guaranteed. No rewards were promised for participation in the survey, so there was no coercion. In terms of data protection, the data collected has been stored in a safe electronic storage facility at the University of Johannesburg.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the research methods followed in this quantitative study, providing the theoretical platform for the research findings and recommendations to follow. The research problem and research objectives were used to inform the research design. Finally, the sampling and data collection were explained, followed by the data analysis method, validity and reliability, as well as ethical considerations.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses and interprets the results obtained during the empirical research phase of the study. The primary research objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of social media marketing communication in the higher education sector in South Africa, using the University of Johannesburg as a case study. The results are reported according to the objectives of the study, followed by a discussion of these results.

4.2 Response Rate

As the purpose of this study was to to determine the effectiveness of social media marketing communication in higher education undergraduate recruitment activities, first-year University of Johannesburg students comprised the population as they had recently selected a university at which to study.

For the purposes of this quantitative study, all 2019 first-year students at the University of Johannesburg comprised the target population to ensure a representative sample: a total of 10 415 elements (first-year students). The electronic questionnaire was posted onto the UJ Student Portal – ULink – with an invitation to first year students to participate. Initially it was planned to send this questionnaire directly to first-year students' email addresses, but permission could not be obtained from the university to use the email addresses. The fact that the questionnaires were not submitted via email as originally planned impacted the response rate initially expected and an invitation to participate in the questionnaire was later posted onto the UJ Facebook page, but this did not increase participation. When posted onto a closed Facebook page created for top first-year students – the Orange Carpet Facebook page – there was a slight increase in participation.

During the research period, 1 487 students started the process, of which 1 168 identified themselves as first-year students. The difference of 319 students said that they were not first-year students and they were not able to continue with the survey. Students were also given the option to opt-in or opt-out of the research at the start of the questionnaire. Ninety-two students opted out and left the survey at this stage. After the data cleaning and quality checks, a sample size of 700 remained on which the analysis was done.

Table 4.1: Analysis of responses

Response counts	1 487
Opened the questionnaire but didn't continue to question one	346
Not first-year students	319
Number of opt-outs	92
Other – eliminated during process of data cleaning	30
Final number of participants (n)	**700**

The following tables and figures report the findings of the descriptive statistics survey method used to report the responses to the questions in the electronic Web-based questionnaire.

4.3 Understanding the target audience – Generations Y and Z

The information that follows provides insight into the target audience which universities recruit students from, using Generation Theory as lens, allowing for the identification of characteristics that are unique and distinctive within the specific age groups (Dimock, 2018:3). As highlighted in the literature review, the most likely generations from which universities will attract potential students is Generation Y and Generation Z. In order to answer the first research question and meet the secondary objective, the questions in this section seek to determine if Generations Y and Z are indeed the target audiences for universities to recruit students from, and if and how these specific generations use social media.

4.3.1 Age of respondents

Table 4.2: Number of respondents by age

Age	Number
17	27
18	227
19	201
20	83
21	43
22	38
23	21
24	9
25	10
26	5
27	3
28	1
29	4
30	0

Age	Number
31	2
32	5
33	1
35	3
36	4
38	1
39	2
40	1
41	1
42	1
44	2
47	1
56	1

n = 700 (3 responses missing)

4.3.2 Generational breakdown – Generation Z and Generation Y

As indicated in the literature review in Chapter 2, the Generation Y and Generation Z age delineation in this study is based on that proposed by the Pew Research Centre (Dimock, 2018) and the NDP Group (2017). Generation Z covers ages 17 – 22 as the youngest respondent was 17, while Generation Y includes respondents between the ages of 23 and 38. The balance of the respondents were part of the Generation X age group of 39 – 58 (Dimock, 2018; NDP Group, 2017), which did not form part of this study.

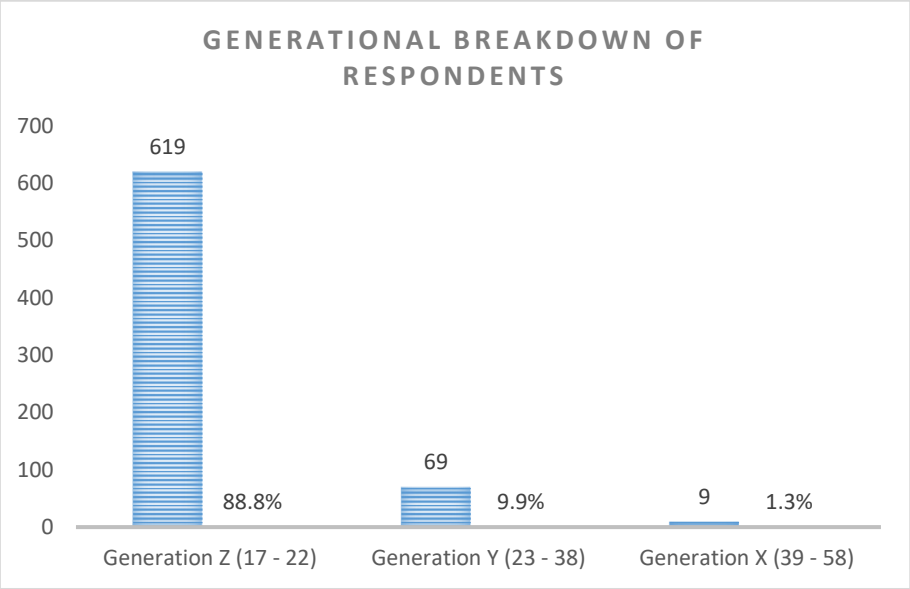


Figure 4.1: Generation breakdown of respondents in this study (age in 2019)

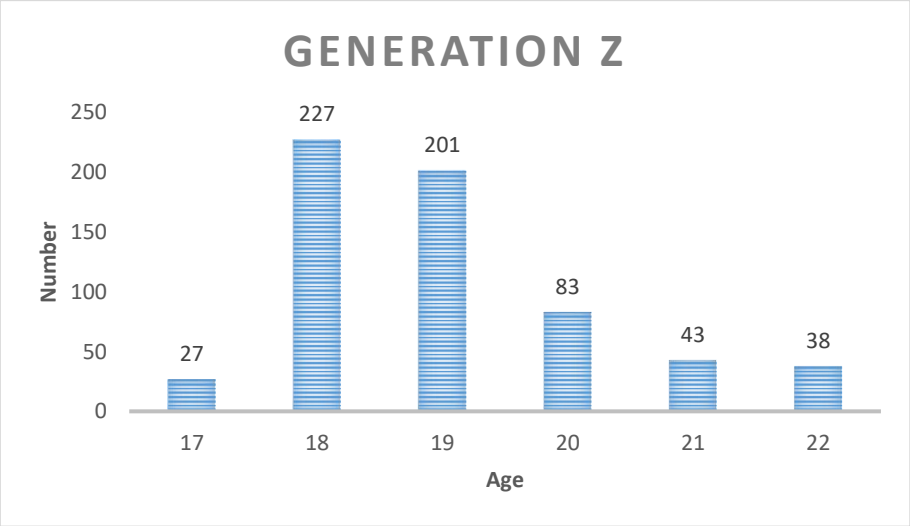


Figure 4.2: Generation Z respondents

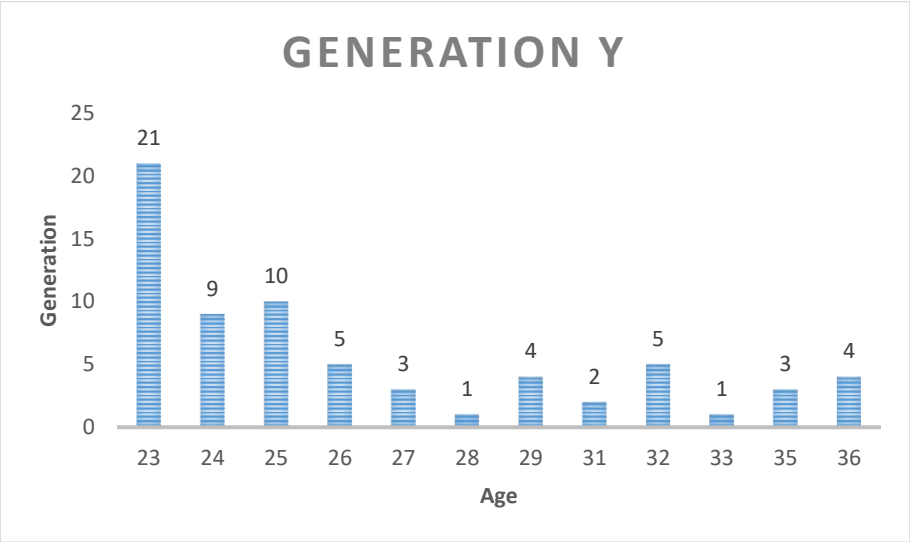


Figure 4.3: Generation Y respondents

Of the 700 first-year students who opted-in to continue with the research, 697 answered the question on age. Generation Z made up the biggest proportion of the survey sample – 619 (88.8%), while 69 (9.9%) respondents fell into the Generation Y category and nine (1.3%) respondents were between the ages of 38 and 56. Of these, the biggest majority of these were 18 (227) and 19 (201) years old, with a good representation of 20-year-olds (83).

This shows that university students are currently predominantly being drawn from the Generation Z cohort, with a small number still coming from Generation Y. As research has only recently started appearing on Generation Z, target audience information specific to universities was not evident in the studies consulted during the literature review.

4.3.3 Gender

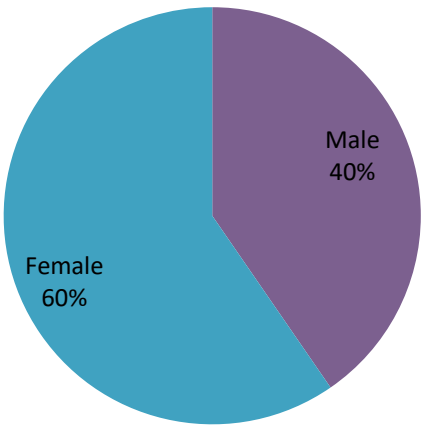


Figure 4.4: Gender of respondents

n = 700 (4 missing responses)

Figure 4.4 indicates that 60% of the respondents were female as opposed to 40% who were male. The UJ first-year cohort for 2019 comprises 52% female and 48% male. A slightly smaller portion of females therefore completed the questionnaire, and the proportion is similar to the UJ breakdown by gender. There was therefore a representative spread across gender in this study.

4.3.4 Province

The majority of students came from Gauteng (350), followed by Limpopo (85), KwaZulu-Natal (67) and Mpumalanga (60), which are the main feeder areas for the University of Johannesburg. However, there was representation from all provinces. The students in the 'other' category all hailed from countries in Africa – one from Ghana, one from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the balance from SADC countries. This shows a representative spread of respondents in line with the UJ feeder areas from which potential students are drawn.

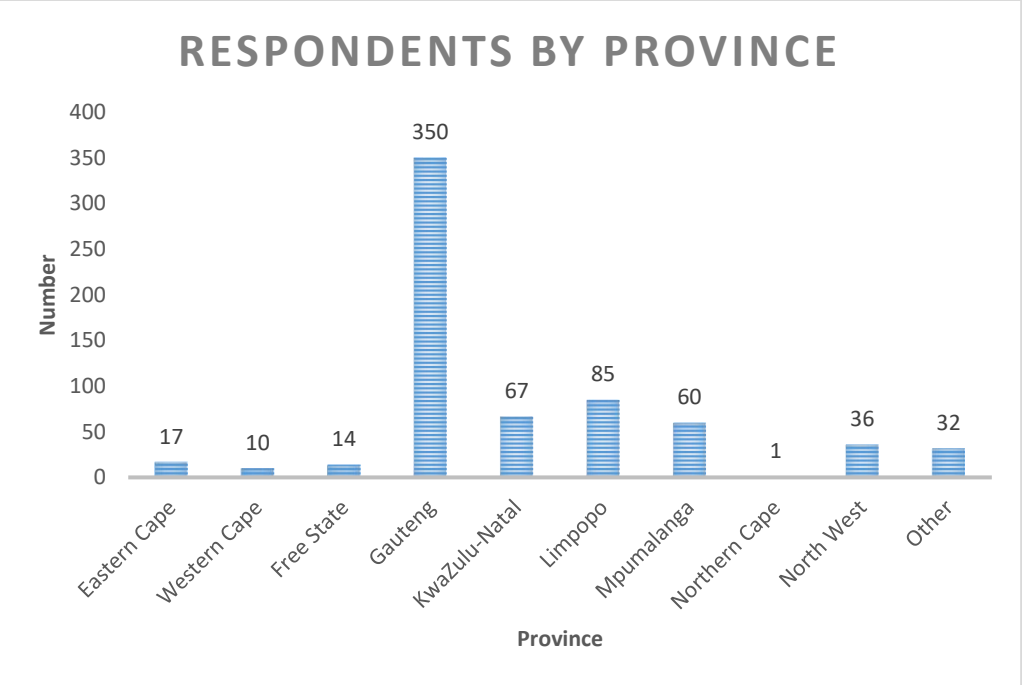


Figure 4.5: Province

n = 700 (28 responses missing)

4.3.5 High school

This question was specifically asked to determine the quintile of the school in order to determine the probability of data availability to the student. In order to guarantee anonymity in this study, this was the only way in which to gather this information. Schools in the poorest

areas are classified as Quintile 1, as opposed to Quintile 5 which is a school in the wealthiest areas, as categorised by the Department of Basic Education. Learners in schools in the Quintile 1 and 2 categories have a lesser chance of having access to data that high school students in Quintile 3 – 5 schools have. Each quintile accounts for 20% of the population, i.e. the poorest 20% are in Quintile 1 schools and the richest 20% in Quintile 5 schools (DBE, 2019).

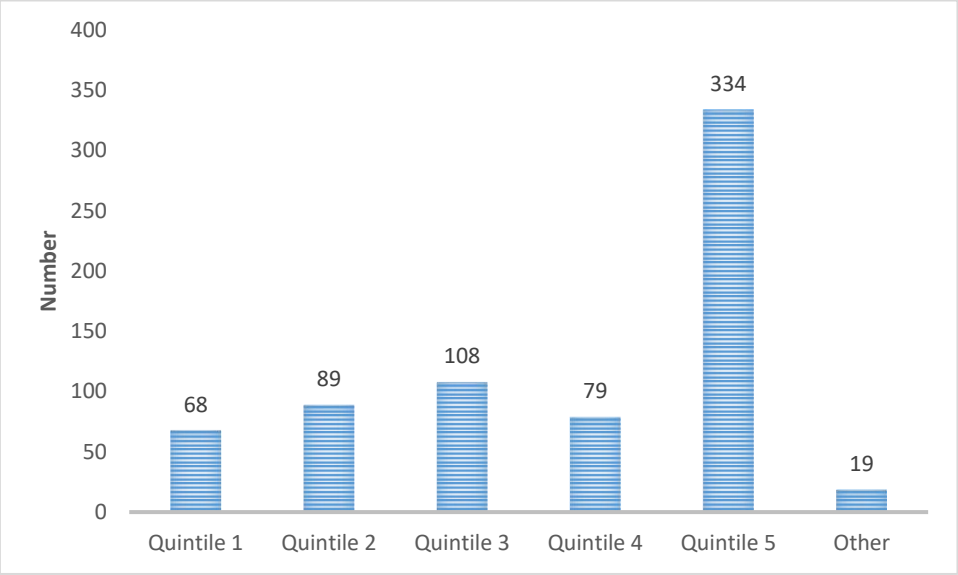


Figure 4.6: High school quintile level

n = 697 (3 missing responses)

Figure 4.6 shows that the biggest grouping of respondents fell within the Quintile 5 category (334), which aligns to the fact that the biggest grouping also came from Gauteng. Gauteng is seen as the richest province, with 31.4% of schools in the Quintile 5 band and 21.9% Quintile 4 schools (DBE, 2019). This could account for the higher percentage of Quintile 4 and 5 schools in this survey, as 52.1% of the respondents were from the Gauteng province. However, only 16 (2.4%) respondents said that they did not use social media (Figure 4.7) and only four of these stated that they did not have a smartphone and two did not have money for data. This would indicate that lack of access to data is not a great impediment to social media use in this specific group, as was considered in the literature review. Considering that 38% of respondents are in Quintile 1 – 3 schools, it would seem that being in a poorer school in a poorer area in South Africa has not been a barrier to the majority of that population having access to the Internet.

4.3.6 Social media use by respondents

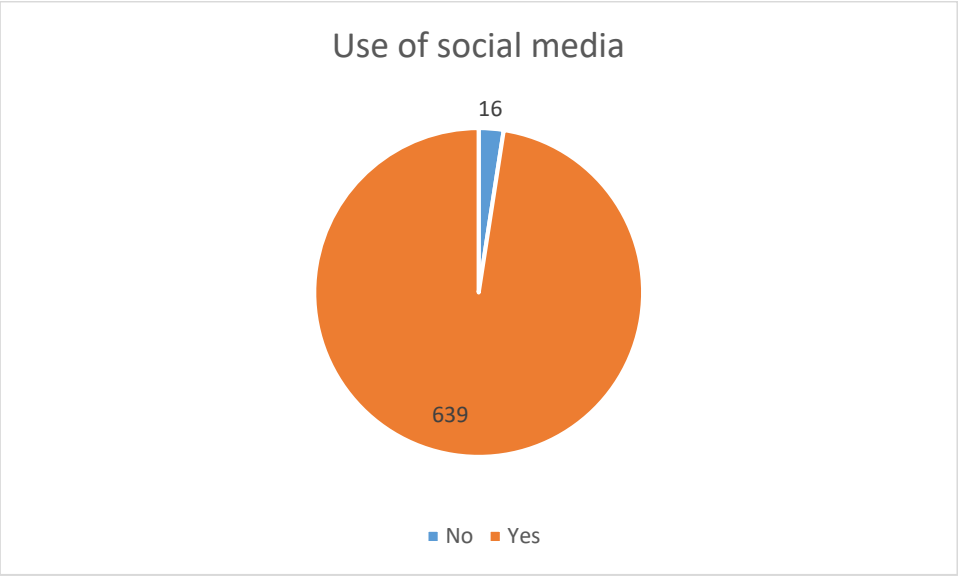


Figure 4.7: Social media use

n = 700 (45 missing responses)

Respondents were asked whether they use social media or not. Figure 4.7 indicates that 97.6% (639) of the respondents used social media. The overwhelming majority of first-year students are therefore active on social media, although 45 respondents did not complete this question. This supports the findings in the literature review that social media forms an integral part of Generation Y and Z's daily lives (Fourhooks 2015:4). This medium can therefore effectively be used to create a network of formal and informal interactions within these target groups, as highlighted in Social Network Theory (Richardson *et al.*, 2016).

4.3.7 Reasons respondents do not use social media

Of the 2.4% who do not use social media, the reasons are as follows:

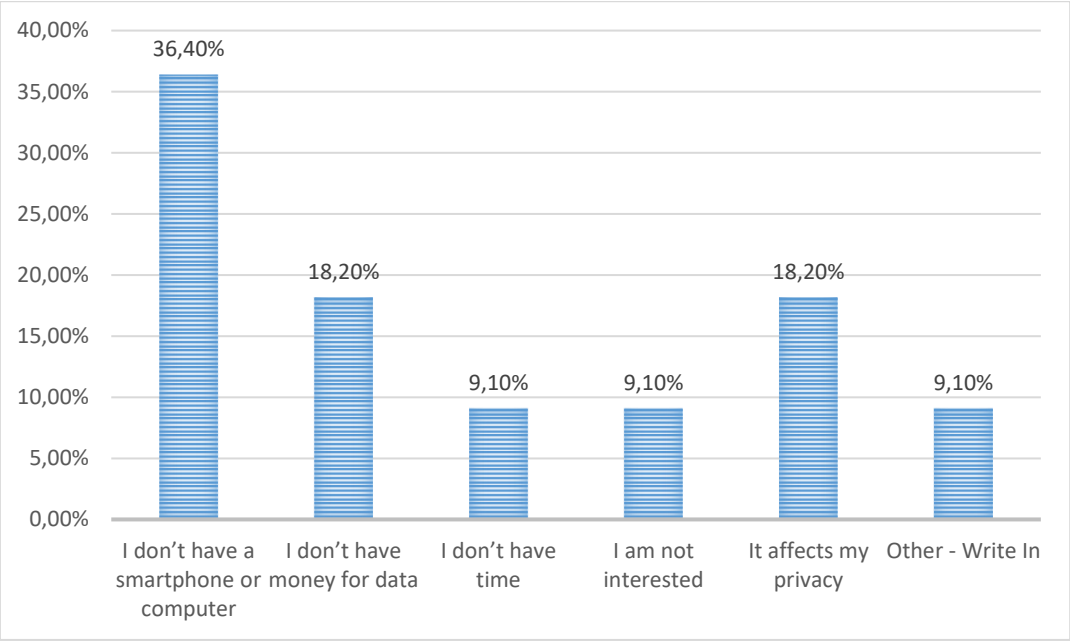


Figure 4.8: Reasons for not using social media

Figure 4.8 shows that of the 11 respondents who said they do not use social media, the majority (4 or 36.4%) don't have a smartphone or computer, while others don't have money for data (2 or 18.2%) or feel that it affects their privacy (2 or 18.2%). One person indicated a lack of interest and another a time factor. One person completed the 'other' option stating that social media did not have any information they needed. This does not support, as yet, the finding that more Generation Z individuals are quitting social media (Bielby in Kale, 2018).

4.3.8 Time spent on social media

Table 4.3: Time spent on social media

Time Spent	Social Media				Total
	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	Instagram	
None	102	295	54	167	618
Less than one hour	227	141	117	150	635
One to two hours	126	69	183	120	498
Three to four hours	74	29	141	63	307
More than four hours	86	29	100	75	290
Total	615	563	595	575	2348

Table 4.3 shows the amount of time respondents spend on the various social media platforms on a daily basis.

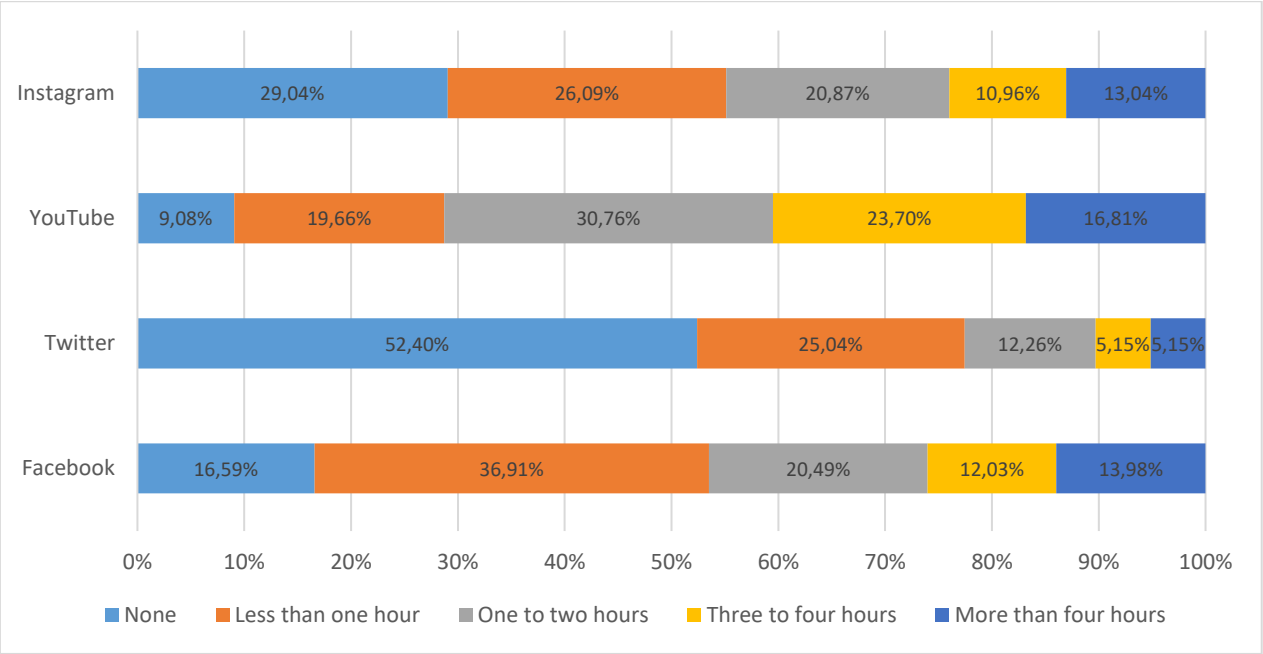


Figure 4.9: Time spent on social media daily

Figure 4.9 shows the research group's use of social media daily, with 91% of respondents indicating that they spend some time on YouTube, followed by 83% on Facebook, 71% on Instagram and 48% on Twitter. The group researched spend more than one hour per day on YouTube (71.3%), followed by Facebook (46.5%), Instagram (44.9%) and lastly Twitter (22.6%).

Facebook

The majority of respondents spend less than one hour on Facebook daily (36.9%), with 20.5% spending one to two hours on this platform. A total of 83.4% of respondents spend time on Facebook daily.

Twitter

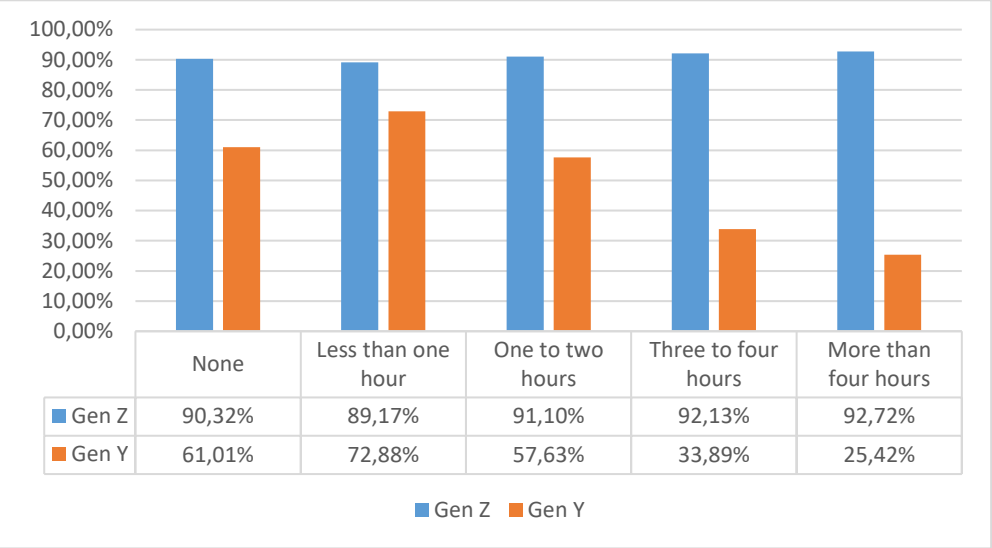
The majority of respondents (52.4%) do not spend any time on Twitter on a daily basis, while 25% spend less than an hour and 12.3% spend one to two hours per day on this platform.

YouTube

The majority of the respondents spend between one and two hours per day on YouTube (30.8%), while 23.7% spend three to four hours per day on this platform. The most time daily is spent on the YouTube platform and 89.9% of respondents spend some time on YouTube daily.

Instagram

The data shows that 26.1% of respondents spend less than one hour per day on this platform, however, 71% spend some time on Instagram daily. A total of 20.9% spend between one and two hours on Instagram and 11% between three and four hours.



	None	Less than one hour	One to two hours	Three to four hours	More than four hours
Gen Z	90,32%	89,17%	91,10%	92,13%	92,72%
Gen Y	61,01%	72,88%	57,63%	33,89%	25,42%

Figure 4.10: Time spent on social media daily by generation

From Figure 4.10 it is evident that the majority – over 90% – of Generation Z spends more than four hours per day on social media platforms, varying per platforms as discussed. Generation Y spend much less time on social media with the majority – 72,8% – spending less than one hour on these platforms. In the literature review it was found that South African users spend an average of almost three hours per day on social media platforms (Hootsuite, 2019:22), showing that Generation Z will be found on these platforms more often than the average user.

4.3.9 Other social media platforms used by respondents

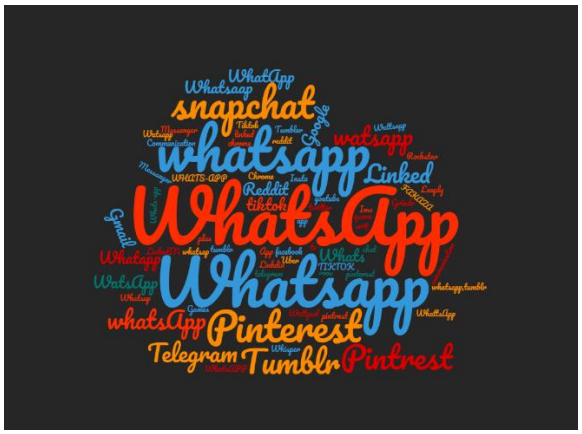
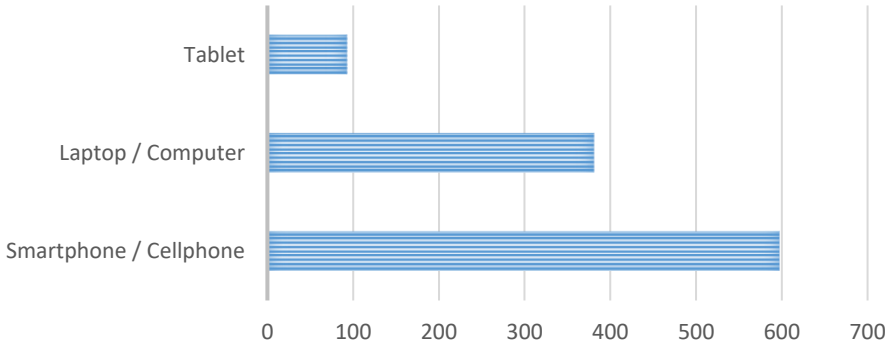


Figure 4.11: Word cloud of other social media platforms frequented by respondents

When asked in an open-ended question what other social media platforms respondents frequented, WhatsApp was mentioned by most, showing that they classify this as a social media platform. Tumblr, Reddit, Snapchat, Pinterest and Telegram were also mentioned as other social media options. This supports what was found in the literature review: that most people classify WhatsApp as a social media platform; and that it is seen as the most popular social media platform. 90 percent of South Africans rated WhatsApp as their number one social media platform where they spend the most time (Hootsuite, 2019:21) with the 16 to 24 year old group indicating that they spend 80 percent of their social media time on WhatsApp (Deloitte, 2017).

4.3.10 Access to social media platforms



	Smartphone / Cellphone	Laptop / Computer	Tablet
Number	597	381	93
Percent	55,74%	35,57%	8,68%

Figure 4.12: Device used to access social media

Figure 4.12 shows that most respondents used their smartphone to access social media (597), followed by a laptop or computer (381). Only 93 used a laptop; and 371 respondents use more than one device to access social media. This supports the finding by Kleinschmit (2019) that Generation Z's device of choice is the smartphone.

4.3.11 Reasons for using social media

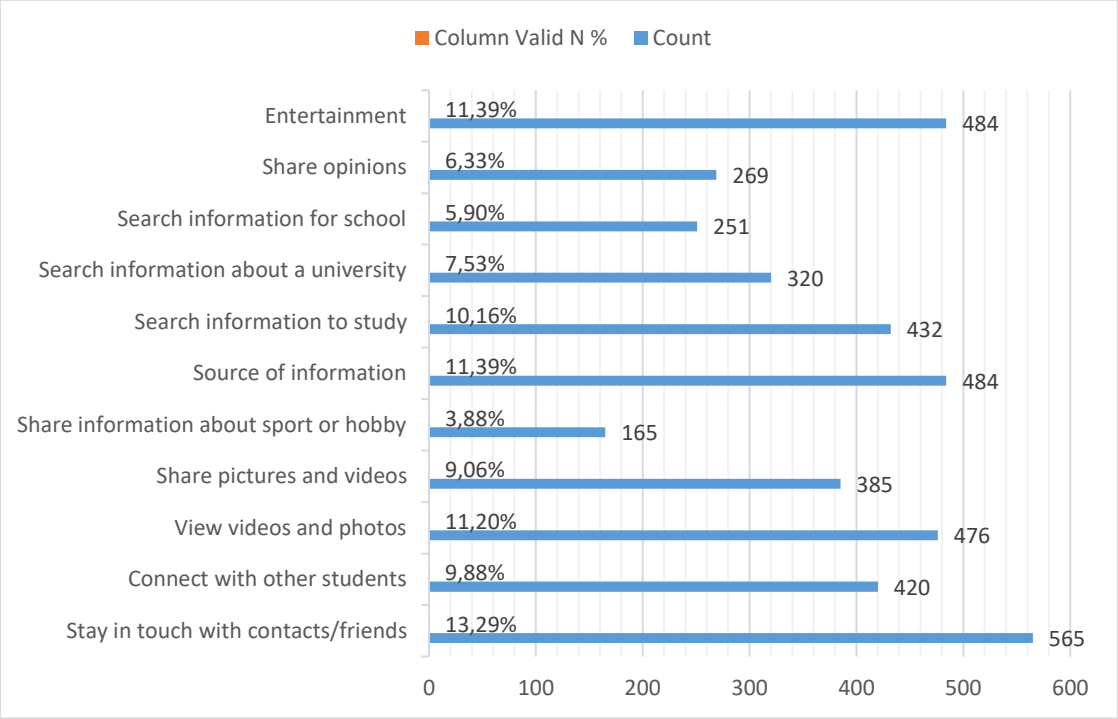


Figure 4.13: Social media use

As shown in Figure 4.13, the most popular use of social media amongst respondents is to stay in touch with contacts and/or friends (13.3%). It is seen as a source of information, as well as an entertainment platform by 11.4% of respondents. As shown, 11.2% of the respondents use social media platforms to view video's and photographs.

In line with the objective of this study, 10.2% of the respondents indicated that they used social media platforms to search for information for their studies, while 7.5% used these platforms to search for information about a university. Roughly 9.9% used social media to connect with other students, allowing for the creation of a network of formal and informal interactions among users (Social Network Theory) and thereby increasing their engagement levels (Social Media Engagement Theory), and giving the university the opportunity to influence the user's perception and knowledge of the institution (Holt-Lunstad in Wright, 2005). This reiterates the observation by Kelleher and Sweetser (2012), that social media provides a popular set of tools that communicators can use to initiate and grow relationships to get their target audiences involved and engaged in their offerings. It also provides the opportunity to build a 'friends' network of brand ambassadors who are passionate about the brand, as proposed by Sau-Ling (2010:39).

4.4 Information sources

Research question 2 sought to identify the information sources that potential students consult when researching universities at which to study, and also the types of information that adds value to them in this search.

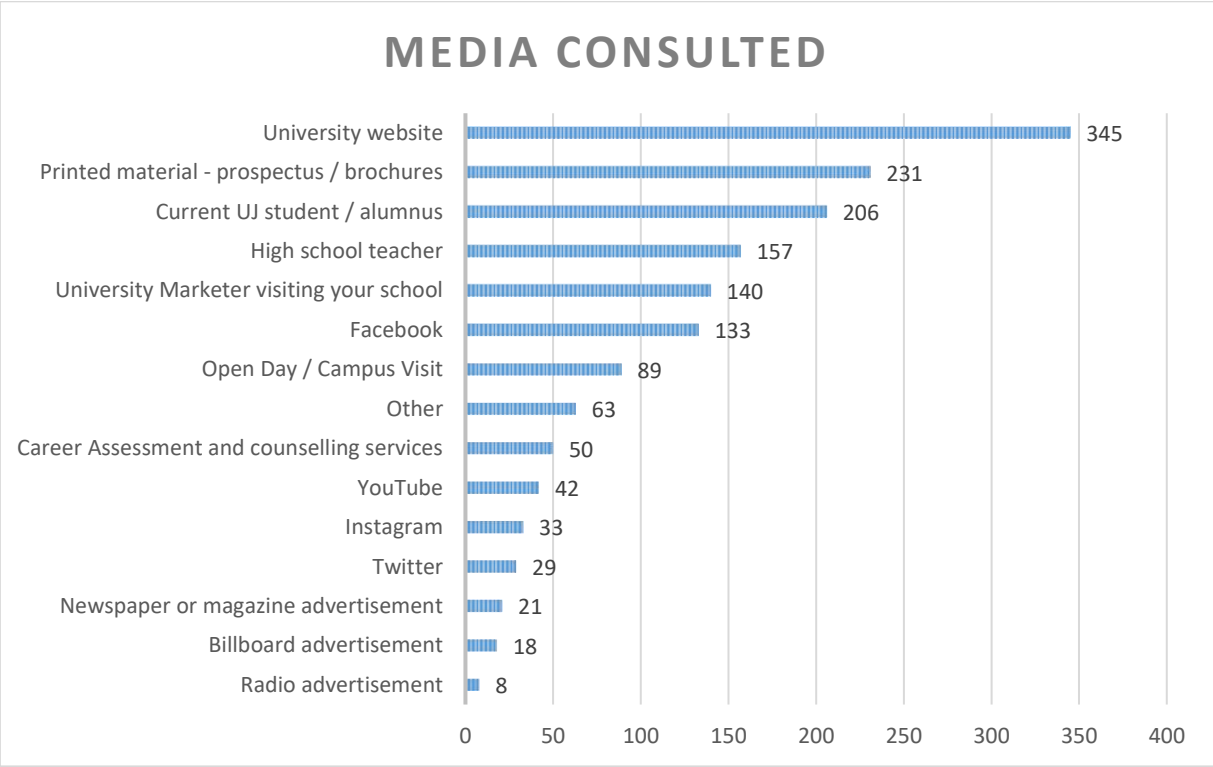


Figure 4.14: Media students consult when selecting a university

Figure 4.14 clearly shows that the university website (22%) is the most frequently used platform when choosing a university at which to study. Printed material (14.8%) and current UJ students/alumni, i.e. word-of-mouth (13.2%) are in the second and third place respectively. In the social media category - 35.2% over the four platforms – Facebook is consulted the most (8.5%), followed by YouTube (2.7), Instagram (2.1%) and Twitter (1.9%).

The ‘other’ category completed by respondents included Google, Internet, WhatsApp, courses, and bursaries offered.

These findings are comparable with those found in a 2013 UK study which found that the website, open days and printed material (prospectus) were the most trusted tools when researching a university and that only 25 percent of students were influenced by a university Facebook page (Shaw, 2013; Burdett, 2013). In a South African study (De Jager & Du Plooy, 2010:65), the website, open days, high school teachers and printed material also top the list, with social media not featuring at all in this study.

Table 4.4: Usefulness of information sources consulted

Information Sources Consulted			Usefulness of Information Sources Consulted						Total	
			Not useful at all		Slightly useful		Very useful			
Frequency	%age	Information Sources	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age
345	22,04%	University website	12	2,47%	89	18,31%	385	79,22%	**486**	**9,77%**
231	14,76%	Printed material - prospectus / brochures	11	2,64%	62	14,90%	343	82,45%	**416**	**8,37%**
206	13,16%	Current UJ student / alumnus	35	8,97%	84	21,54%	271	69,49%	**390**	**7,84%**
140	8,95%	University Marketer visiting your school	56	15,38%	68	18,68%	240	65,93%	**364**	**7,32%**
157	10,03%	High school teacher	51	14,01%	101	27,75%	212	58,24%	**364**	**7,32%**
89	5,69%	Open Day / Campus Visit	55	14,55%	112	29,63%	211	55,82%	**378**	**7,60%**
133	8,50%	Facebook	81	22,07%	142	38,69%	144	39,24%	**367**	**7,38%**
50	3,19%	Career Assessment and counselling services	62	21,60%	88	30,66%	137	47,74%	**287**	**5,77%**
42	2,68%	YouTube	89	29,18%	108	35,41%	108	35,41%	**305**	**6,13%**
33	2,11%	Instagram	121	40,20%	101	33,55%	79	26,25%	**301**	**6,05%**
29	1,85%	Twitter	117	40,21%	97	33,33%	77	26,46%	**291**	**5,85%**
8	0,51%	Radio advertisement	104	37,82%	96	34,91%	75	27,27%	**275**	**5,53%**
21	1,34%	Newspaper or magazine advertisement	109	38,65%	108	38,30%	65	23,05%	**282**	**5,67%**
18	1,15%	Billboard advertisement	105	37,50%	111	39,64%	64	22,86%	**280**	**5,63%**
63	4,03%	Other	66	35,29%	68	36,36%	53	28,34%	**187**	**3,76%**
1565	**100,00%**	**Total**	**1074**		**1435**		**2464**		**4973**	**100,00%**
		Total %age	**21,60%**		**28,86%**		**49,55%**		**100,00%**	

Table 4.4 gives a breakdown of the tool/platform usage and the usefulness levels thereof. Figure 4.15 ranks the tools/platforms and their usefulness level.

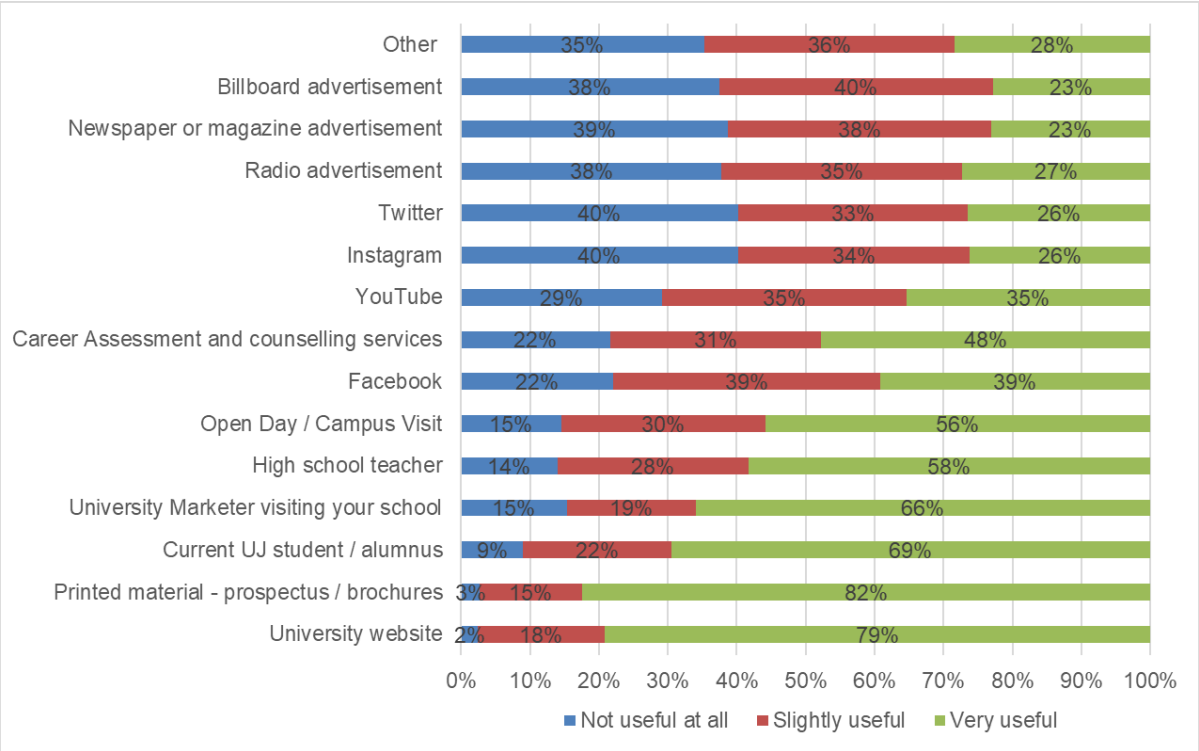


Figure 4.15: Usefulness of information sources consulted

From Table 4.4 and Figure 4.15, it is clear that the university website, printed material and current students/alumni are the most consulted tools/platforms, as well as the most useful in the search for a university at which to study. University marketer and high school teacher are

also highly rated as consultation tools/platforms in the search for a university. The most useful of the information sources consulted was printed material (prospectus/brochures), followed by the university website, word-of-mouth (current students/alumni), university marketer at school and high school teacher. Radio, newspaper, magazine and billboard advertisements were the least useful information sources when researching higher education institutions.

On the social media list, Facebook makes it to the top six tools/platforms consulted, but it is only in eighth place (39% finding it very useful) on the very useful scale, and while YouTube was only used by 42 of the respondents, it was ranked just under Facebook in the very useful category (35%). Twitter and Instagram were rated 'not useful at all' by 40% of respondents and 26% found them very useful.

For the purpose of this study, and because similar information is not available as yet, this topic was also broken down by generation to see if there is a marked difference between the two generations. The university website is the platform most used to search for information across the generations: Generation Z (50.6%) and Generation Y (60%). Figure 4.16 gives a breakdown of the top platforms consulted by these two generations in this study.

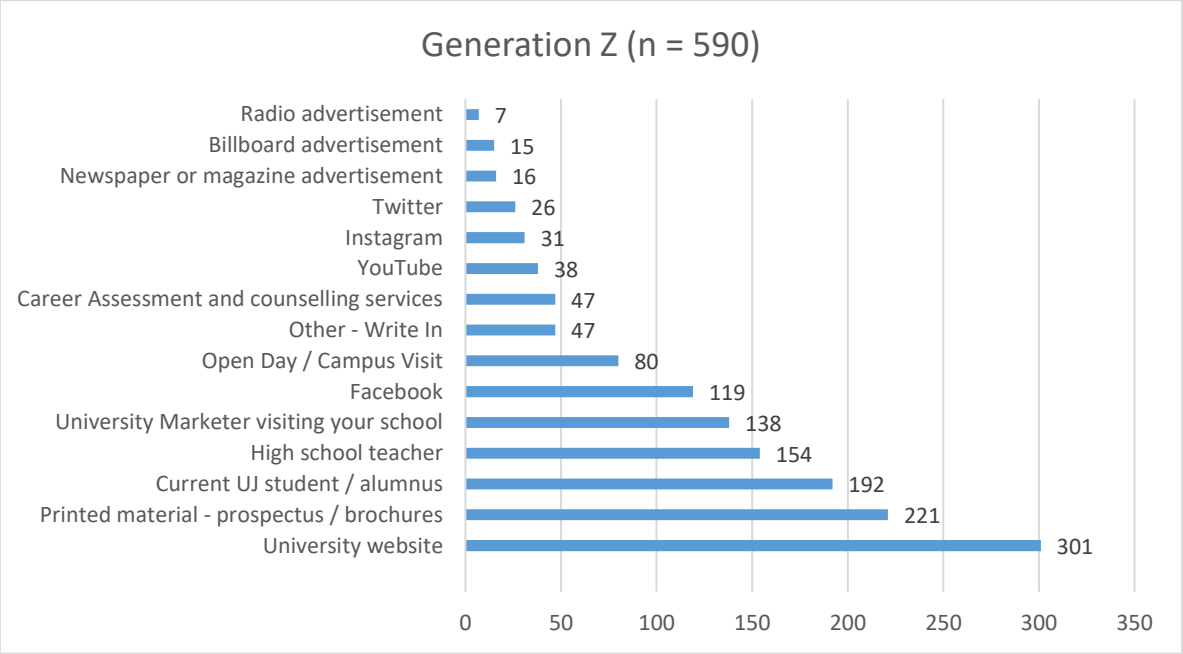


Figure 4.16: Media students consult when selecting a university – Generation Z

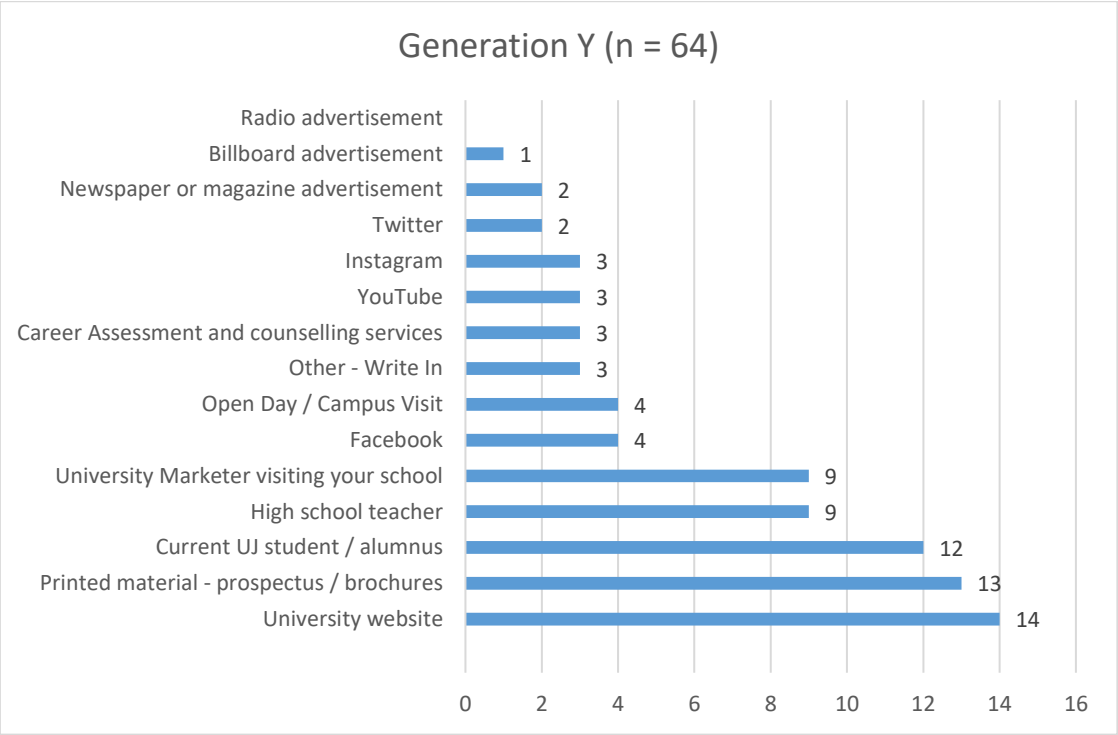


Figure 4.17: Media students consult when selecting a university – Generation Y

The university website remains the platform most consulted by potential students of both generations, with printed material in second place for Generation Z, and Facebook in second place for Generation Y. Current UJ students/alumni, i.e. word-of-mouth, was the third consulted for both Generation Y and Z. High school teacher also rank highly for Generation Z, with university marketer ranking higher for Generation Z than Generation Y. The information sources consulted are, however, very similar between these two generations.

Table 4.5: Social media sources consulted by generation

	Generation Z	Generation Y
Facebook	20.2%	21.9%
YouTube	6.4%	6.3%
Instagram	5.3%	3.1%
Twitter	4.4%	4.7%

When looking at social media, it is interesting to note that Facebook and YouTube are consulted more by Generation Y than Z, Instagram a bit more by Generation Z and Twitter more by Generation Y when looking for information about a university or comparing universities. Facebook currently remains the most consulted social media platform for both generations.

Facebook and YouTube, however, both make it into the top ten information sources consulted by Generations Y and Z when selecting a university, but barely featured in the studies consulted as part of the literature review. Social media is therefore an important communication tool for these generations, also when researching universities.

4.5 Reasons for joining and engaging with university social media platforms

Research question 3 sought to determine why potential students join and engage with university social media platforms before enrolling at their chosen university. The questions specifically focused on the following four platforms, as informed by the literature reviews: Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter.

Table 4.6: University social media platforms visited

	Response	
	N	*Percent*
University of Johannesburg	539	19.3%
University of Witwatersrand	336	12.0%
University of Pretoria	312	11.2%
University of Cape Town	193	6.9%
University of the Free State	140	5.0%
University of South Africa	130	4.7%
Tshwane University of Technology	130	4.7%
North West University	115	4.1%
University of Kwazulu-Natal	110	3.9%
Stellenbosch University	99	3.5%
Vaal University of Technology	88	3.2%
Nelson Mandela University	86	3.1%
Rhodes University	82	2.9%
University of Limpopo	71	2.5%
Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University	57	2.0%
University of the Western Cape	47	1.7%
None	42	1.5%
University of Mpumalanga	39	1.4%
Cape Peninsula University of Technology	36	1.3%
University of Fort Hare	34	1.2%
Other	30	1.1%
Durban Institute of Technology	21	0.8%
Central University of Technology Free State	20	0.7%
Walter Sisulu University	15	0.5%
Mangosuthu University of Technology	14	0.5%
Sol Plaatje University	6	0.2%
Total	**2792**	**100.0%**

Table 4.6 shows that respondents generally visited more than one university social media platform, with 42 respondents saying that they had not visited any of the university social media platforms listed. The University of Johannesburg pages were visited the most (19.3%), followed by Wits University (12%), the University of Pretoria (11.2%), the University of Cape Town (6.9%), University of the Free State (5%) and the Tshwane University of Technology (4.7%).

A number of other university or higher education institution social media platforms were mentioned under 'other': University of Venda, University of Zululand, Monash, Pearson's Institute, Varsity College and the African Leadership University.

The majority of respondents were from the Gauteng region, as shown in Figure 4.5 earlier in this chapter, which could explain why the universities in this province were the top three most visited.

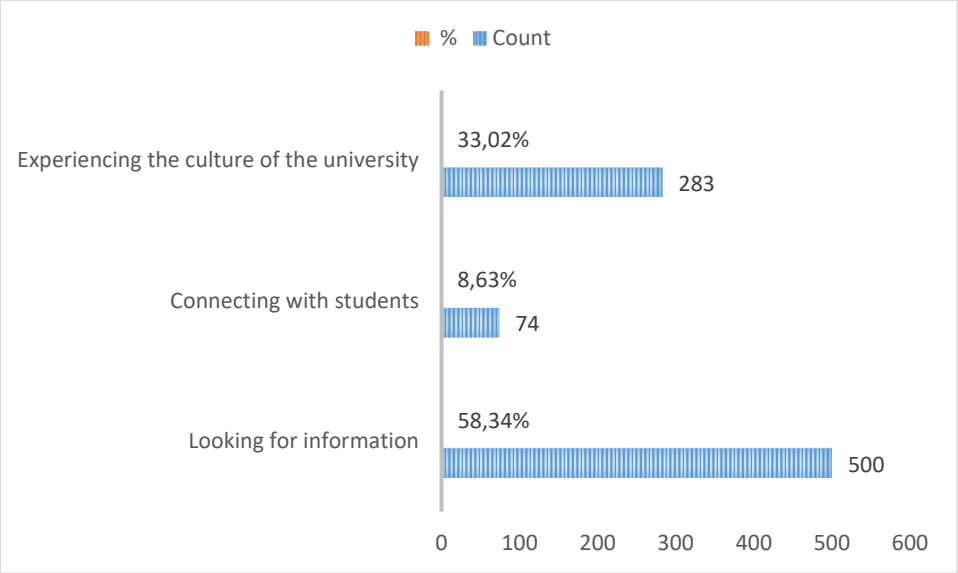


Figure 4.18: Reasons for visiting university social media platforms prior to enrolling at UJ

Figure 4.18 indicates that the majority of respondents visited university pages to look for information (58.34% or 500), while 33.02% (283) visited to experience the culture of the university and 8.63% (74) wanted to connect with students. This again highlights the networking and engagement potential of social media platforms which can be used to create relationships which can impact the choices of the potential university student and increase their engagement levels to add value to their experience and perception of the university (Mouge & Contractor, 2003; Kankanhalli *et al*., 2005 in Di Gangi & Wasco, 2016).

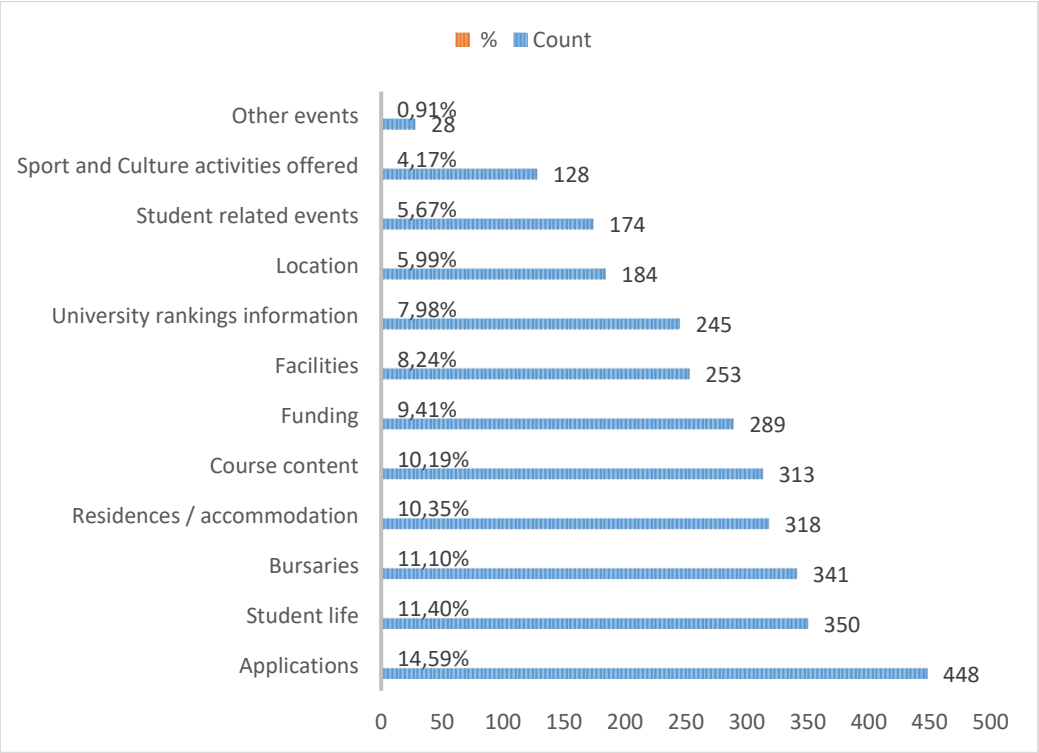


Figure 4.19: Information sought on social media platforms

Figure 4.19 and Table 4.7 highlight the list of information that students are looking for when visiting university social media platforms. Both show that potential students are, first and foremost, looking for information relevant to their studies, followed by information about student life and culture on campus. Funding issues are also very important in third place with information on how to prepare for life at university also very important. It was also clear that potential students are looking for information that will assist them in preparing for life at a university, both on a social and academic level.

Table 4.7: Based on your recent experience of choosing a preferred university at which to study, what other information would be valuable to a potential student visiting a university's social media pages (open-ended question)?

Valuable information on social media	Percent
Course information / prospectus / APS information	40.4%
Student life / Culture	21.1%
Funding / bursaries / NSFAS / financial planning	20.0%
How to prepare for life at university (social and academic)	16.8%
Facilities (campuses / disabled / libraries / WiFi)	15.7%
Accommodation (on and off campus)	13.6%
Application and registration process	11.1%
Career guidance / counselling	10.7%

Extramural activities (sport / art / culture / community engagement)	8.9%
Ranking / reputation / awards	7.1%
Online chat / responses to requests / two-way communication	6.4%
Video content	5.7%
Events (graduations / open days / other)	5.0%
Graduate achievements	4.3%
Faculty specific information	3.2%
Safety on campus	2.9%
Transport / travel (to and on campus)	2.1%
Job opportunities / internships	2.1%
Top Achiever Programme	1.1%

The usefulness of this information on the university social media platforms was probed further in order to determine the potential student's satisfaction levels with the information available to them.

Table 4.8: Usefulness of information searched for prior to enrolling at UJ

Information Searching for		Information	Information usefulness									
			Could not find this information		Not useful at all		Somewhat useful		Very useful		Total	
Frequency	%age		Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age
448	14,59%	Applications	7	1,41%	15	3,01%	115	23,09%	361	72,49%	**445**	**9,65%**
184	5,99%	Location	15	4,26%	24	6,82%	76	21,59%	237	67,33%	**438**	**9,50%**
253	8,24%	Facilities	24	6,38%	25	6,65%	119	31,65%	208	55,32%	**431**	**9,35%**
313	10,19%	Course content	41	9,51%	40	9,28%	114	26,45%	236	54,76%	**498**	**10,80%**
318	10,35%	Residences / accommodation	39	9,24%	70	16,59%	112	26,54%	201	47,63%	**376**	**8,15%**
245	7,98%	Rankings information	37	10,34%	37	10,34%	117	32,68%	167	46,65%	**314**	**6,81%**
350	11,40%	Student life	25	5,64%	63	14,22%	151	34,09%	204	46,05%	**352**	**7,63%**
289	9,41%	Funding	59	13,26%	34	7,64%	166	37,30%	186	41,80%	**358**	**7,76%**
174	5,67%	Student related events	42	12,84%	48	14,68%	116	35,47%	121	37,00%	**422**	**9,15%**
341	11,10%	Bursaries	54	12,33%	48	10,96%	179	40,87%	157	35,84%	**443**	**9,61%**
128	4,17%	Sport and Culture activities offered	43	13,69%	60	19,11%	111	35,35%	100	31,85%	**327**	**7,09%**
28	0,91%	Other events	56	27,05%	30	14,49%	75	36,23%	46	22,22%	**207**	**4,49%**
3071	**100%**	**Total**	**442**		**494**		**1451**		**2224**		**4611**	**100,00%**
		Total %age	**9,59%**		**10,71%**		**31,47%**		**48,23%**		**100,00%**	

Table 4.8 shows that prior to enrolling at UJ, respondents were mainly looking to find information on applications (14.59%), student life (11.40%), bursaries (11.10%), course content (10.19%) and residences (10.35%). Funding, which can be closely aligned with bursaries, made up 9.41%, so together, financial information accounted for 20.5%, showing how important this issue is for potential students. Sport and culture activities, events and location were not as high on their priority list.

Table 4.8 and Figure 4.19 illustrates the respondents' opinions on the information usefulness prior to enrolling at UJ. The most useful information according to the respondents of that question was about applications, which was rated 72.49% very useful and 23.09% somewhat useful. This was followed by 67.33% (very useful) and 21.59% (somewhat useful) for information about location. Information about the facilities and course content were rated third and fourth very useful information, with 55.32% and 54.78% respectively.

Information on applications, location, course content and facilities were deemed most useful, while applications, student life, bursaries and course content were viewed as the most important information the respondents were looking for.

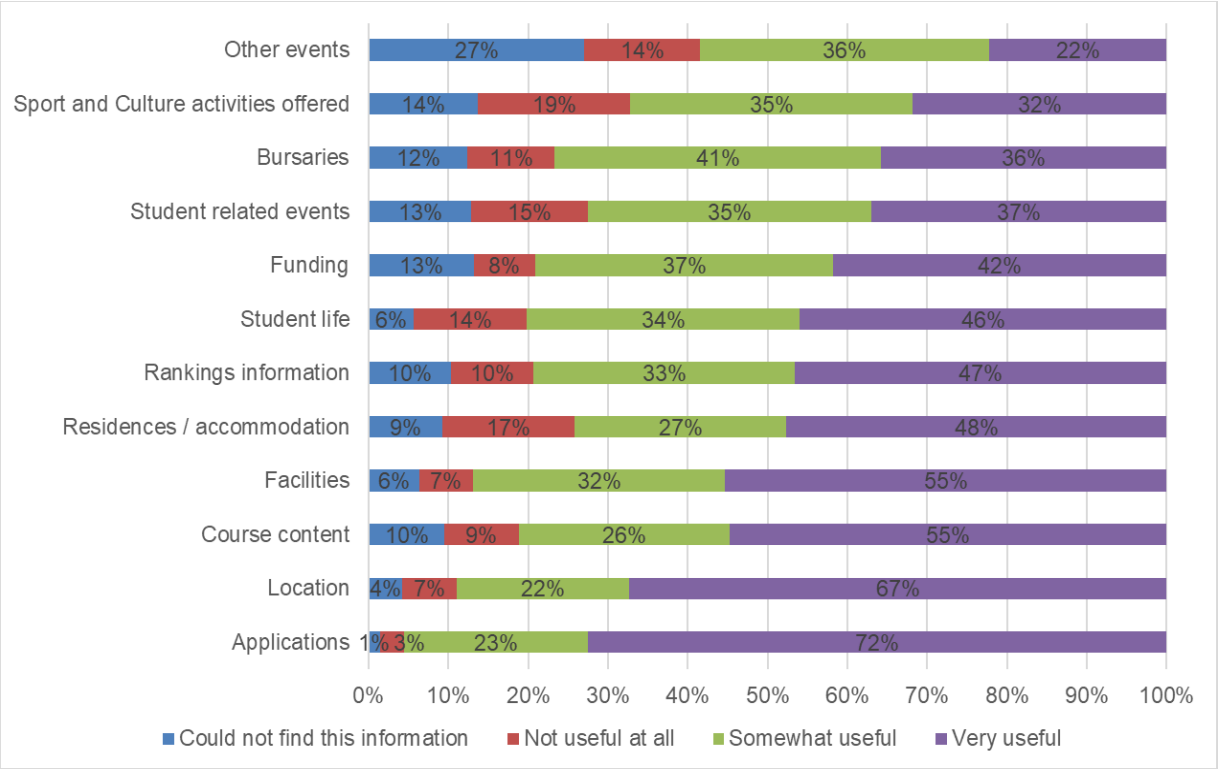


Figure 4.20: Information usefulness prior to enrolling at UJ

4.6 Influence of social media on university choice

Research question 4 sought to determine whether respondents believe that their interactions on social media influenced their decision about where to study, and if so, how it had influenced their choice.

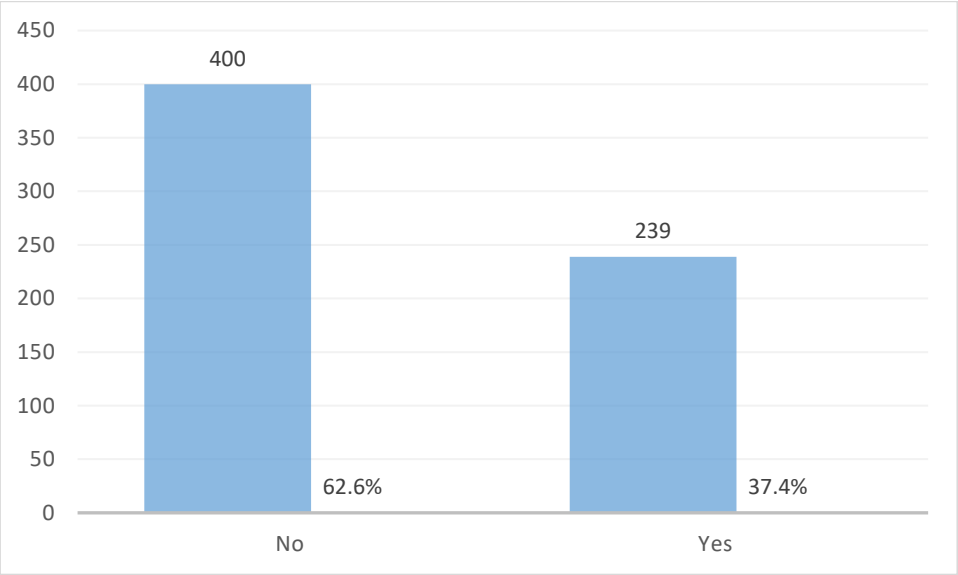


Figure 4.21: Social media influence on choice of university

Figure 4.21 indicates that social media did not influence the majority of students' decision about which university to study at, with 62.6% saying that it did not influence their decision as opposed to 37.4% who felt that it did influence their decision. While similar data is not readily available, a TopUniversities (2014) study found that students mainly used social media channels to compare universities and as a source of inspiration. This same study showed that 28.9 percent of respondents in Africa felt that social media was very important when researching universities, as opposed to 25.5 percent in Asia, 12.5 percent in the US and Canada and 16.1 percent in Europe. They did not, however, report on the influence level of the medium.

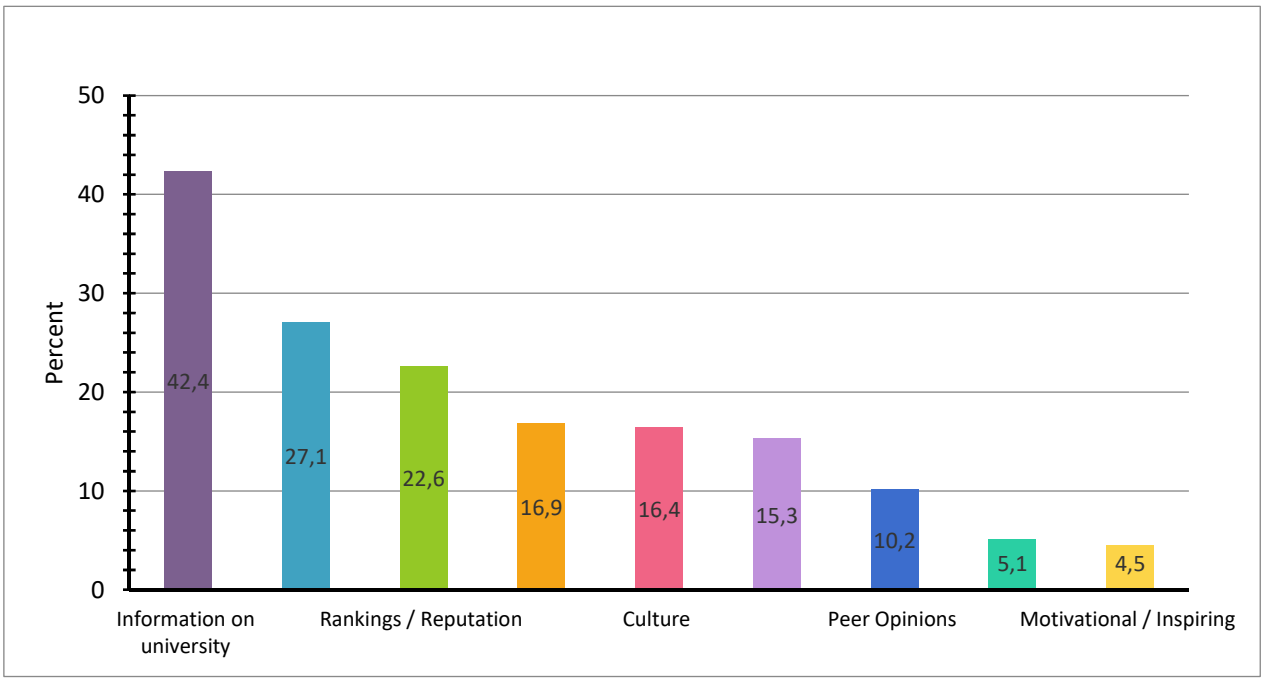


Figure 4.22: How social media influenced their decision (open-ended question)

When asked how or why social media influenced the potential student's choice of university, the top responses related to information about the university (42.4%), experience of campus life or student life (27.1%) and information on rankings, i.e. reputation (22.6%) which aligns to the information they look for when visiting university social media platforms. The other responses related to study choices, culture ("where do I fit in?" as opposed to campus life), a comparison of different universities, peer opinions, convenience and motivation ("it inspired me").

4.7 Discussion of findings

This study set out to determine the effectiveness of social media, and particularly Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter, in marketing communication efforts to potential students of higher education institutions. Students at the University of Johannesburg were surveyed early in their first year, to determine the effect of social media in their recent choice of university.

4.7.1 Understanding the target audience – Generation Y and Z

The majority of the respondents were from the Gauteng province, followed by Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga, which are the main feeder areas for UJ. There was also representation in all the other provinces and also 32 respondents from countries in Africa. Based on the Quintile system used to classify schools in South Africa according to wealth/poverty levels, there was also a representative spread across the quintiles.

It was hypothesised at the start of this study that potential university students would be found in the Generation Y and Z cohorts as discussed in the literature review, and this was verified in the findings. It was found that 88.8% of the respondents fell within Generation Z and were between 17 and 22 years old, while 9.9% fell into the Generation Y cohort (23 – 38 years in 2019). There was a very small component of Generation X first-years (1.3%) who would have joined the university at an older age and not directly from school. Generation Z is therefore the cohort that makes up the main target audience for university marketing communication for now, and for a number of years to come, and the information collected and literature review therefore provides valuable insights into their preferences of marketing communication tools and their social media use. It further highlights what is important to them when selecting a higher education institution at which to study.

4.7.2 Information sources

It was clear that the university website was the preferred and most useful tool that the respondents had consulted, followed by the more traditional tools of printed material (prospectus/brochure), word-of-mouth (current student/alumnus), high school teacher and university marketer at school. Facebook was the preferred social media platform in sixth place on the list of information sources consulted.

Radio, newspaper, magazine and billboard advertisements were the least consulted and least useful information sources for all respondents. This shows that these truly traditional methods of marketing communication with potential students – which were still ranking highly in earlier studies – has lost field in place of digital media with the social media platforms also outweighing these platforms in use and usefulness.

Aligning these findings with current literature, the university website remains the platform or information source most consulted by potential students of all generations. In this study, printed material is in second place for Generation Z, and Facebook in second place for Generation Y. Current UJ students/alumni, i.e. word-of-mouth, was the third most consulted for both Generation Y and Z. High school teachers as an information source also rank highly for the younger Generation Z, with university marketer ranking higher for Generation Z than Generation Y.

On the social media list, Facebook makes it to the top six tools/platforms consulted, but it is only in eighth place (39% finding it very useful) on the very useful scale. While YouTube was only used by 42 of the respondents, it was ranked just under Facebook in the very useful category (35%). Twitter and Instagram were rated ‘not useful at all’ by 40% of respondents, while 26% found them very useful.

This echoes the findings of a 2013 study (Harrison, 2013) which found that traditional communication tools appeared most trusted and influential when choosing a university. Since the advent of the Internet, websites have become increasingly important in this list of information consulted in a 2010 (De Jager & Du Plooy, 2010) study and also in a later study by Stoner and Rogers (2015). University social media platforms have not featured widely on these lists, and were only previously mentioned in the University of Johannesburg’s 2015 study (Sohn, 2015).

Social Network Theory explains that social media platforms will need to be used to create a relationship and conversation with the potential student if they are to create meaningful engagement with these young individuals. If we consider three of the top five information sources consulted, these are all based on personal engagement and influence, i.e. current students/alumni, high school teacher and university marketer. It will therefore be important to give the social media platforms a 'voice' where potential students can engage with marketers from the university and with fellow social media users, and not just receive information, if they are to compete with traditional information sources. The research findings show that one-way push communication will not achieve the meaningful engagement this target audience is seeking. This engagement creates relationships among users that will enable the university to "foster brand communities" as highlighted in the many-to-many and one-to-one model advocated by Richardson and Choong (2016:26).

When looking at social media, it is interesting to note that Facebook and YouTube are consulted more by Generation Y than Z, Instagram a bit more by Generation Z and Twitter more by Generation Y. Facebook currently remains the most consulted social media platform for both generations.

The following table gives a review of the top six information sources by usefulness level.

Table 4.9: Ranking of top six tools/platforms and their usefulness level

	Most used (top six, in order of use)	**Very useful (top six, in order of usefulness)**	**Slightly useful (top six, in order of usefulness)**	**Not useful at all (top six, in order of least usefulness)**
1	University website (22%)	Printed material (82.45%)	Billboard advertisement (39.64%)	Twitter (40.21%)
2	Printed material (14.8%)	University website (79.22%)	Facebook (38.69%)	Instagram (40.20%)
3	Current UJ student/alumnus (13.2%)	Current UJ student/alumnus (69.49%)	Newspaper or magazine advertisement (38.30%)	Radio advertisement (37.82%)
4	High School Teacher (10%)	University marketer visiting your school (65.93%)	Other (36.39%)	Newspaper or magazine advertisement (38.65%)
5	University marketer visiting your school (8.9%)	High school teacher (58.24%)	YouTube (35.41%)	Billboard advertisement (37.50%)
6	Facebook (8.5%)	Open day (55.82%)	Radio advertisement (34.91%)	YouTube (29.18%)

The findings of this study clearly show that the Generation Y and Z cohorts were active on social media, with 97.6% of respondents stating that they used social media. They accessed social media using their smartphone (56%) and laptop (36%), with tablets only being used by 8.8% of respondents. Many of the respondents used more than one of these devices to access social media. This is useful data, as first-year students are encouraged to purchase tablets for their study purposes by the university, but this shows that a laptop would be preferable for this purpose.

In the literature review, the possibility of limited access to data in the South African context was discussed, but the data collected from the respondents refutes this assumption, as only four of the 700 respondents listed this as a reason they are not active on social media. Cost of data also did not appear to be a hindrance to social media use, as only two of the 700 respondents indicated that they did not have money for data. This is tested in the question on which high school they had attended in order to categorise these into the various quintiles according to the Department of Basic Education's classification. Quintile breakdown in Figure 4.6 shows the quintile breakdown with Gauteng having more Quintile 5 respondents, but a reasonably equal spread across the rest of the quintiles: Quintile 1 accounted for 9.8% of respondents; Quintile 2 – 12.8%; Quintile 3 – 15.5%; Quintile 4 – 11.3%; and Quintile 5 – 47.9% of respondents.

The respondents spent a variable amount of time on the four tested social media sites – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. YouTube was most used by the respondents, followed by Facebook and Instagram. It would appear, as found in the literature review, that Instagram is fast catching up with Facebook in popularity with this group of young people. Twitter is not as popular, which echoes the results of the Deloitte (2017) study where 20% of 16 – 24-year-old South African's indicated they use Twitter, and an international study (TopUniversities, 2014) which showed that between 9 and 10% of people aged 18 – 25 use Twitter. When asked what other social media platforms they use, WhatsApp was mentioned by the majority of the respondents. As discussed in the literature review, it is therefore clear that WhatsApp is seen as a social media platform and this needs to be added to the marketing communication mix to determine how it can be used to add value to the potential learner's search for a university. Some other social media platforms received mentions, but this was very limited and not worth pursuing.

The respondents used social media mainly to stay in touch with friends and contacts, but it was also seen as a source of information and an entertainment platform. Viewing videos and photographs was also quite high on their list of uses. University communicators and marketers should take this into consideration when preparing material for potential students, particularly

in light of the fact that Generation Z prefer to communicate with images, as opposed to Generation Y which prefers to communicate with text (Randstad, 2015). Source of information was the third choice after keeping in contact with friends and entertainment, indicating that universities could use these tools for marketing communication purposes, but will need to do it in a manner that resonates with this stakeholder group.

4.7.3 Reasons for joining and engaging with university social media platforms

The majority of respondents visited more than one university's social media page, with 15.3% indicating that they had used social media to compare universities in their decision-making process. The universities in the Gauteng area received the most social media traffic from these respondents: University of Johannesburg (19.3%); Wits University (12%); and University of Pretoria (11.2%). Private institutions and universities in Africa also featured on the list of higher education social media platforms visited.

Respondents visited university social media platforms before enrolling, firstly to look for information (58%) and then in an effort to experience the culture of the university (33%). This provides the ideal platform then for universities to provide relevant information and to recreate the university experience for these university seekers.

The respondents indicated that they visited university social media platforms looking mainly for information on applications, funding, student life, course content and residences. They also indicated that they had found the information of applications, location, course content and facilities very useful. Information on residences/accommodation, rankings, student life and funding was a little less useful.

4.7.4 Influence of social media on university choice

When asked, however, whether social media had influenced their choice of university, 62.6% of respondents said no, and 37.4% said yes, it had influenced their decision. There is therefore much work to be done to increase the information value of social media platforms if they are to become information sources potential students consult and find useful in future.

In an open-ended question, respondents were probed about social media influence factors and again information on the university, campus life and student experience, ranking or reputation and study choices topped the list. They were then probed further in another open-ended question about what they would like to see on social media, and the following new themes were identified: How to prepare for life at a university; career guidance; online chat, i.e. two-

way communication; video content; and safety on campus. This, together with the listing and importance levels discussed earlier, must inform messaging and packaging of messages in future social media marketing communication strategies.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings and interpretation of the data collected during the research process in order to meet the objectives set for this study. The study explored the target audience which universities recruit from and investigated this group's use of social media, further probing their use of social media to inform and influence their choice of university at which to study. Preferred information sources and choice factors were investigated, as well as the type of information potential students would like to see on social media in order to assist in their decision-making process. The following – and concluding chapter – provides guidelines for a social media strategy, informed by these findings.

CHAPTER FIVE
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STRATEGY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The findings have shown that a university's potential student audience is found particularly in the Generation Z cohort, with a small group currently still represented in Generation Y. It is evident from the study that both these generations are very active on social media and if applied strategically and in line with the potential students' needs and communication preferences, as identified in the study, social media platforms could become key components of the marketing communication mix when speaking to the potential students. Based on these findings, this chapter provides recommendations and guidelines for future social media marketing communication strategies for institutions of higher education, unpacks the limitations in the study and provides information on future studies based on the outcomes of this research.

5.2 Recommendations for future strategy

Based on the Generation Theory discussed in the literature review and the subsequent study, it is evident that Generation Z is currently the main pool from which universities and other institutions of higher education are recruiting for potential students (14 – 22 in 2019). A small portion of potential students can still be found in Generation Y and very few in Generation X. It is therefore recommended that the focus in future marketing communication efforts be addressed to Generation Z as the primary audience and Generation Y the secondary audience, taking their preferences and characteristics into consideration.

Since the inception of the Internet, as found in the social media section of the literature review, the university website remains the most important source of information for potential students as it is the repository of information on the university and the various options each university offers. This is supported by the findings in this study. In order to make social media a key part of the marketing communication mix, however, the divide between the website and the social media platforms will need to be bridged, creating a social network which, according to Social Network Theory, can affect the choices and behaviours of the target audience.

If social media can be used to drive potential students to university platforms – particularly the university website - to find the information they are seeking, this can add value to the marketing communication effort. If social media can further be used to bridge the gap between school and university, depicting what life at a university campus is like, this will add further value to

the student recruitment process. From the responses in the open ended questions in the questionnaire, it was evident that many potential students have a need to start experiencing what life on campus will be like before they actually arrive – pre-orientation. It is recommended that social media platforms be used to share this bridging experience with future students. By delivering on these potential student needs, social media can become an integral and strategic function within the marketing communication mix to attract potential students to engage with, and ultimately select, the university as their first choice higher education destination.

This seamless digital and social media strategy will need to be supported by what was also highlighted as an important source of information for these potential recruits – printed material and word-of-mouth (current students or alumni). Online word-of-mouth can therefore become an important tool in the social media strategy, where online brand ambassadors can play a vital part. This supports the finding of Sau-Ling (2010) that social media platforms have the ability to create spaces where online friendships are formed and where online brand ambassadors – those passionate about the brand – can positively influence followers with more credibility than a pure marketing communication message.

Social media can also be used to support the university marketer and teacher function, by providing a live chat session, possibly on a weekly basis, where potential students can interact or engage with a marketer or career counsellor on a social media platform. Career guidance and counselling can potentially be supported by linking students to the online career guidance platform that many universities subscribe to. This system enables students to do online assessments to facilitate their career choices.

The literature review and subsequent research show that Facebook and Instagram are the two leading social media channels for Generation Z. WhatsApp, of which there are differing views as to whether it is indeed a social media platform or only a messenger tool, is also at the top of the list of what Generation Z sees as a social media platform. The role that WhatsApp can play in the marketing communication strategy, in addition to the digital and known social media platforms, must be investigated as it is consistently chosen as a social media tool when it comes to what this audience views as social media platforms, and can prove to be very valuable to the marketing communication team. This can increase not only one-to-one interaction, but also engagement levels. Social Media Engagement Theory has underlined that increased social media interactions generally leads to higher user engagement, which can ultimately increase the value of these platforms for the user, i.e. the potential student in this instance. Optimising the use of WhatsApp in the marketing communication strategy can therefore be beneficial to the universities engagement efforts with this target audience.

As informed by the literature review and the subsequent research, video is also one of this generation's preferred communication methods. YouTube plays and important role as the repository of an institution's video material and messaging in video format and short visual messages can therefore become key in the strategy when communicating with this audience, which is reported to have an eight second attention span (Claveria, 2019; Kleinschmidt, 2019). As it is now also possible to stream video content on Facebook, audio visual content needs to be optimised to reach this young audience in their preferred format. This would be an ideal format for the 'bridging experience' potential students are looking for – video's that depict life on campus through the eyes of a current student.

From the literature review it is evident that Generation Z is emerging as a generation of passionate activists. Universities would benefit from incorporating an educational element of this into their strategy and messaging, and be seen supporting relevant issues such as protection of the planet and sustainability. This could provide an ideal opportunity to engage them in a dialogue which will increase engagement levels. Generation Z values the truth, dialogue and uniqueness, wanting to develop their own style as opposed to blindly following brands, while brand loyalty programmes do not excite them. Another interesting observation of this generation is that they are "identity nomads" (Francis & Hoefel, 2018:1) where the acceptance of differences between individuals is a priority. Diversity in any shape or form is their accepted norm. These characteristics of this generation will need to be clearly considered in order to communicate with them in a format that resonates with them.

The research, supported by the material gathered in the literature review process, clearly identifies the information sources consulted and choice factors for these potential students. If these are built into the strategy, this could guide the marketing communication team to provide the type of information that these university seekers are looking for. The main information being sought by potential students is listed below, in order of importance, and would need to make up the key components of the messaging strategy:

- Application information
- Student life (to introduce them to the university and assist in bridging the gap between school and university)
- Bursaries and funding (including financial management)
- Residences and accommodation
- Course content
- Facilities
- Rankings/reputation

The study has provided a number of guidelines for communicating and marketing to the generation from which universities are recruiting potential students. This can guide higher education marketing and communication teams in their strategy development. Social media, while already on the list consulted by potential students, has the potential to become one of the top sources in the recruitment process if messaging is created in line with the needs and preferences of this audience, as determined in this literature review and primary research study.

5.2.1 Social media guidelines for university marketing communication

Based on the findings in this study, the following guidelines are proposed to inform future university strategies when communicating with and marketing to potential Generation Z and Generation Y students.

This encompasses a seamless digital and social media strategy where the university website becomes the information hub to which students are directed in all communication, as represented visually in Figure 5.1. Facebook, Instagram and YouTube are used in a variety of ways to inform potential students about the university, in line with the information they are seeking, as found in this study. Facebook can be used as a two-way chat platform with a live session held weekly to address the topics that potential students are interested in, while giving them the opportunity to participate in the discussion. Instagram and YouTube can be used to give a visual representation of life on a university campus. Short videos about a day in the life of a student can be hosted on YouTube, providing pre-orientation of what the potential student's life will be like once they enrol at the university. WhatsApp has emerged as a very important communication platform for these generations, and it is proposed that WhatsApp broadcast lists be created in order to push select messages to interested potential students and in turn encourage dialogue and participation. Electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) can be achieved by using current students and alumni, who can participate in these Facebook live chats and video material, again encouraging engagement with fellow social media users and the university.

Figure 5.1 further provides high level information on the most important information sources potential students consult while at school to make their decision about a future university, as well as the topics that are most important to them when making this decision. This will inform the communication to these stakeholders and increase engagement levels with them.

Based on the findings in the study, it is important to note that the digital and social media elements proposed be supported by select traditional information sources in order to address the needs of Generation Y and Generation Z. These include printed material, university marketers visiting schools, open days and campus visits.

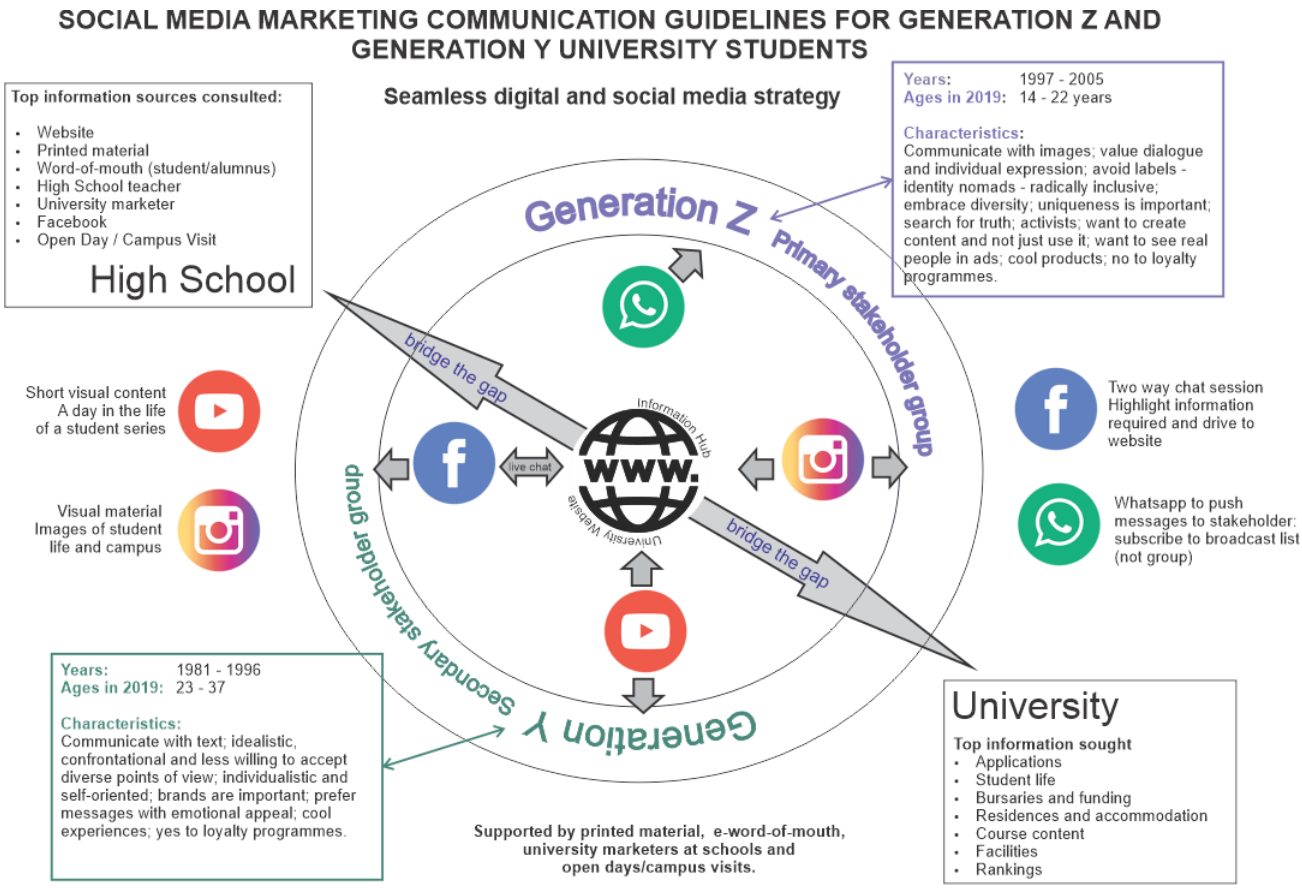


Figure 5.1: Social media guidelines

5.3 Limitations

Participation in this study was greatly impacted by the University of Johannesburg's refusal to grant permission for the questionnaire to be distributed to first-year students via email, as was originally planned. The survey was therefore published on the student portal and not specifically directed at first-years. There were therefore almost 1 500 respondents who started the process but more than 50% did not continue with the questionnaire of which 319 indicated that they were not first-years. Another 346 did not continue after opening the questionnaire, however, did not give a reason for not continuing. There were also a number of opt-outs (92) and 30 completed questionnaires were eliminated during the data cleaning process. The participation ratio was therefore 6.7% as opposed to the 10% that would have been preferred.

The study was conducted in Johannesburg, and while all provinces and even international students were represented in the respondent list, the numbers were limited and could affect regional representation. The findings in this study are time sensitive as they will be impacted by the generation entering universities, which changes periodically. Due to the quantitative nature of the study, it was also not possible to gain deeper insights or test findings regarding Generation Y and Z characteristics in this study.

5.4 Proposed future research

Similar research at other universities in South Africa and abroad would be useful to test possible regional differences in the findings regarding social media use by potential students when choosing a university at which to study. It would also be beneficial to conduct this research on a regular basis to identify changes and their possible effects within this fast changing environment of social media.

The study looked at a specific audience profile – potential university students. Further research of other university stakeholder groups will add to the knowledge of social media more broadly. These include current students, alumni, postgraduate potential and current students, teachers and parents in order to customise messaging and platforms for each stakeholder group.

A qualitative study on the characteristics of Generation Z would be useful to test the information which is currently available, and which is included in the literature review in this dissertation, as this is a relatively new generation and limited academic research could be found about them.

5.5 Conclusion

The research objective of this study was to determine how effective social media marketing communication is for institutions of higher education. The research has shown that the current primary stakeholder group for university student recruitment is Generation Z, with a small group still coming from Generation Y. The characteristics and communication choices of these generations were investigated, as well as their communication preferences when doing research about a university at which to study. This has resulted in the development of guidelines to inform future marketing communication strategies for universities when communicating with Generation Z as primary audience and Generation Y as secondary audience.

From the study it is clear that social media is a definite contender on the list of marketing communication tools a university or higher education institution can use to influence a potential student's choice of study destination. In order to achieve this, the messaging methods and content will need to be applied strategically in order to resonate with the relevant audience, as can be seen from the research findings.

This study has added to the body of knowledge about social media and its impact on higher education marketing communication particularly. However, it has also provided insights into a new and challenging communication platform which is constantly changing and growing and which is challenging the traditional way in which universities – and organisations at large – communicate with their stakeholders. This study looked particularly at the younger generations providing insight into their communication preferences and general use of social media, which adds value to anyone communicating with these generations.

The insights derived from this study can add value to university marketing communication teams in their future strategy development, particularly when communicating with potential students, but also to other organisations who want to communicate with and market to these generations.

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APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE

Social Media Effectiveness

Social media and its role in your choice of university

Dear UJ First Year Student

My name is Lesmarie Bentley-Steyn and I am studying towards my Masters Degree in Public Relations Management. As part of the requirements for my studies, I need to complete a mini-dissertation. In my study I would like to determine whether potential university students use social media when selecting an institution at which to study.

As a first year student who has chosen UJ as home for the next few years, you are in the perfect position to share with me if and how you used social media in your search for a higher education institution and I would greatly appreciate your participation. This information will assist UJ - and other universities - to fine tune their social media strategies to the benefit of future applicants.

Participation in this survey is completely voluntary – you are not compelled in any way to continue. No personal information will be collected, and you will remain completely anonymous.

I realise how precious your time is - this survey will only take about 8 minutes to complete.

Thank you in advance for your time!

---

1) Please confirm that you are a first year student at UJ*

[ ] Yes

[ ] No

2) I am willing to participate in this research*

( ) Yes

( ) No

3) How old are you?*

[ ] 18

[ ] 19

[ ] 20

[ ] 21

[ ] 22

[ ] 23

[ ] Other - Write In: _____

4) What gender are you?

( ) Male

( ) Female

5) Name of the high school at which you completed matric/grade 12?*

_____

_____

_____

_____

6) In which South African province is this? International students please complete the 'other' option.

( ) Eastern Cape

( ) Free State

( ) Gauteng

( ) KwaZulu-Natal

( ) Limpopo

( ) Mpumalanga

( ) Northern Cape

( ) North West

( ) Other - Write In: _____

7) Which of the following did you consult to help you choose a university at which to study (choose as many as necessary)?

[ ] Open Day / Campus Visit
[ ] YouTube
[ ] Facebook
[ ] Twitter
[ ] Instagram
[ ] University Marketer visiting your school
[ ] High school teacher
[ ] University website
[ ] Printed material - prospectus / brochures
[ ] Billboard advertisement
[ ] Newspaper or magazine advertisement
[ ] Radio advertisement
[ ] Current UJ student / alumnus
[ ] Career Assessment and counselling services
[ ] Other - Write In: _____

8) How valuable did you find this source of information?

	Very useful	**Slightly useful**	**Not useful at all**
Open Day / Campus Visit	( )	( )	( )
YouTube	( )	( )	( )
Facebook	( )	( )	( )
Twitter	( )	( )	( )
Instagram	( )	( )	( )
University Marketer	( )	( )	( )

visiting your school			
High school teacher	( )	( )	( )
University website	( )	( )	( )
Printed material - prospectus / brochures	( )	( )	( )
Billboard advertisement	( )	( )	( )
Newspaper or magazine advertisement	( )	( )	( )
Radio advertisement	( )	( )	( )
Current UJ student / alumnus	( )	( )	( )
Career Assessment and counselling services	( )	( )	( )
Other	( )	( )	( )

Comments:

9) Do you, or have you ever, used social media?

( ) Yes

( ) No

10) For which reason/s don't you use social media?

[ ] I don't have a smartphone or computer

[ ] I don't have money for data

[ ] I don't have time

[ ] I am not interested

[ ] It affects my privacy

[ ] Other - Write In: _____

11) How much time to you spend on social media on a daily basis?

	None	**Less than one hour**	**One to two hours**	**Three to four hours**	**More than four hours**
Facebook	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Twitter	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
YouTube	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Instagram	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

12) Do you use any other social media platforms? If so, please list them here.

_____

_____

_____

_____

13) How do you access these social media platforms (select as many as you need to)?

[ ] Smartphone / Cellphone

[ ] Laptop / Computer

[ ] Tablet

14) What do you use social media for (select as many as you need to)?

[ ] Stay in touch with contacts/friends

[ ] Connect with other students

[ ] View videos and photos

[ ] Share pictures and videos

[ ] Share information about sport or hobby

[ ] Source of information

[ ] Search information to study

[ ] Search information about a university

[ ] Search information for school

[ ] Share opinions

[ ] Entertainment

15) Which of the following universities' social media pages did you visit (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram)? Choose as many as you need to.*

[ ] Nelson Mandela University

[ ] University of the Free State

[ ] University of South Africa

[ ] University of Cape Town

[ ] University of Kwazulu-Natal

[ ] University of Pretoria

[ ] Rhodes University

[ ] University of Johannesburg

[ ] University of Witwatersrand

[ ] Cape Peninsula University of Technology

[ ] Stellenbosch University

[ ] University of Fort Hare

[ ] University of Limpopo

[ ] North West University

[ ] University of Mpumalanga

[ ] Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University

[ ] University of the Western Cape

[ ] Tshwane University of Technology

[ ] Central University of Technology Free State
[ ] Durban Institute of Technology
[ ] Mangosuthu University of Technology
[ ] Vaal University of Technology
[ ] Sol Plaatje University
[ ] Walter Sisulu University
[ ] None
[ ] Other - Write In: _____

16) Prior to enrolling at UJ, why did you visit university social media pages (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram)?

[ ] Looking for information
[ ] Connecting with students
[ ] Experiencing the culture of the university

17) Prior to enrolling at UJ, what information were your searching for on these platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram)?

[ ] Funding
[ ] Bursaries
[ ] Applications
[ ] Course content
[ ] Location
[ ] Facilities
[ ] University rankings information
[ ] Sport and Culture activities offered
[ ] Student life
[ ] Residences / accommodation
[ ] Student related events
[ ] Other events
[ ] Other - Write In: _____

18) How useful did you find the information?

	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Not useful at all	Could not find this information
Funding	( )	( )	( )	( )
Bursaries	( )	( )	( )	( )
Applications	( )	( )	( )	( )
Course content	( )	( )	( )	( )
Location	( )	( )	( )	( )
Facilities	( )	( )	( )	( )
Rankings information	( )	( )	( )	( )
Sport and Culture activities offered	( )	( )	( )	( )
Student life	( )	( )	( )	( )
Residences / accommodation	( )	( )	( )	( )
Student related events	( )	( )	( )	( )
Other events	( )	( )	( )	( )

19) Did social media influence your decision-making process when deciding on a university at which to study?*

[ ] Yes

[ ] No

20) How/why did it influence your decision-making process?

_____

_____

_____

_____

21) Based on your recent experience of choosing a preferred university at which to study, what other information would be valuable to a potential student visiting a university's social media pages?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank You!