

DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

**STUDENT ENGAGEMENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE OF
DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY'S BUSINESS SCHOOL STUDENTS**

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by

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(MBA)

DUT BUSINESS SCHOOL: FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract

In this modern era, social media platforms have become an integral part of the academic regime. This study investigated the influence of social media platforms on academic engagement and collaboration among MBA students at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) Business School. In response to the growing integration of digital tools in higher education, the research aimed to assess how platforms such as WhatsApp and LinkedIn impact academic collaboration. In addition, the study aimed to assess the impact of engagement, and perceived effectiveness in an MBA context. The study employed a quantitative research design using a structured questionnaire distributed to all registered MBA students (N=83), employing the census sampling method. The data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

The study reveals that social media significantly fosters academic collaboration by enabling students to share resources, engage in group discussions, and maintain flexible communication. Students who regularly engaged on these platforms reported greater participation in academic activities such as, class discussions and group assignments. Moreover, respondents perceived social media as an effective medium for enhancing academic engagement, improving access to information, and strengthening communication with peers and lecturers. The results indicate that social media tools, when used purposefully, can complement formal learning environments by promoting flexibility, peer support, and timely knowledge sharing. It is recommended that institutions leverage social media as a strategic tool in postgraduate education, particularly for part-time students navigating academic and professional commitments.

Declaration

I, Kamlyn Govender, hereby affirm that this mini-dissertation is my original work, and that all sources used have been correctly cited and fully referenced. A comprehensive bibliography is included within the dissertation. The views expressed herein are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Durban University of Technology.

In addition, I confirm that this dissertation, whether in full or in part, has not been previously submitted for the award of a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree at any other tertiary institution, either locally or internationally.

Furthermore, I grant permission for this work to be copied and/or reproduced for purposes such as inter-library loan, and for the title and abstract to be made accessible to other academic institutions and students.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved family. Words cannot fully express my heartfelt appreciation for your unwavering support, encouragement, and prayers throughout every step of this journey. Your belief in me, even during the most challenging times, has been a constant source of strength and motivation.

To my parents, thank you for instilling the values of perseverance, hard work, and integrity in me. Your sacrifices and unconditional love have laid the foundation for everything I have achieved. To my siblings, thank you for your encouragement, patience, and for always being there to uplift me when I needed it most. Your profound influence has shaped the person I am today, and your steadfast presence has carried me through moments of doubt and fatigue. I wholeheartedly acknowledge that reaching this milestone would not have been possible without the love, guidance, and moral support you have selflessly given me. You have been my rock, my motivation, and my safe haven. I am eternally grateful for the immeasurable love and strength you continue to provide. This accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine.

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List of Abbreviations

DUT	Durban University of Technology
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
MBA	Master of Business Administration
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
SM	Social Media
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
EFF	Effectiveness of Social Media Engagement
REL	Student Participation in Academic Activities
ROLE	Role of Social Media in Academic Collaboration
COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease 2019	
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
N	Population Size

n	Sample Size
SD	Standard Deviation
M	Mean
t-test	SPSS one sample t-test
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Chapter 1: Overview

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the study by introducing the background, context, and significance of the research. It outlines the core problem being investigated, presents the research aim and objectives, and defines the key research questions guiding the study. The chapter also explains the structure of the dissertation, offering a roadmap of the chapters to follow. The focus of this study is to explore how social media platforms influence academic engagement and collaboration among Master of Business Administration (MBA) students at the DUT Business School, particularly within the broader context of digital transformation in higher education.

1.2 Context of the research

As technology continues to transform the global business landscape, digital literacy has become an essential competency for students in higher education (Morgan, Sibson and Jackson 2022). This shift is particularly evident in the increasing integration of digital platforms, especially social media into learning, communication, and professional development (Luo, Stefaniak and Freeman 2020). Social media is no longer just a personal communication tool, it now plays a vital role in academic collaboration, knowledge sharing, and career networking. In this evolving educational environment, it is important to understand how these changes affect different groups of students.

Part time MBA students represent a unique cohort within higher education. Unlike traditional full-time students, they are often working professionals who must balance academic responsibilities with career demands. As such, they are not only consumers of digital tools in the classroom but also use these tools in professional settings (Siva Sankar Ramnath 2025). Their success, both academically and professionally often depends on how well they can navigate digital platforms to access information, connect with peers, and expand their networks (He *et al.* 2023). Digital engagement, particularly through platforms like WhatsApp and LinkedIn, enables flexible learning, quick communication, and opportunities for career advancement (Mogan Ram 2025). Overall, platforms help students manage time constraints, collaborate across distances, and stay informed about industry trends.

Education methods and materials keep adapting and evolving to meet the needs of society (Baruti-Sylejmani *et al.* 2025). Unfortunately, the South African education system is not keeping pace with the developments and innovations in the education space. The South African government spends approximately 20% of the GDP on education, which is one of the highest in the world. However, there is no noticeable the return on investment reflected across the skilled labour workforce (Fuchs 2024). This research is particularly relevant as it addresses the need for business education to adapt to technological advancements. This will ensure that MBA students are well-prepared to navigate and succeed in a technology-driven environment. Social media, as a significant component of these advancements, plays a pivotal role in shaping the educational and professional experiences of MBA students. While the study focuses on a specific population group, its findings have broader implications for MBA programs globally.

Previous studies by several authors have explored the role of social networking in various educational contexts, highlighting its impact on collaboration, knowledge sharing, and transition into the workforce (Del Cura Rodriguez 2024; De Schepper, Clycq and Kyndt 2023; Putnik *et al.* 2023). While these studies provide valuable insights, there remains a gap in the literature regarding how social networking influences academic engagement specifically among MBA students in KwaZulu-Natal. This study seeks to address the gap by examining the role of social media in fostering engagement and collaboration among MBA students at DUT Business School.

1.3 Problem statement

Although social media platforms are widely used in higher education, there remains limited understanding of how it specifically supports academic engagement and collaboration. In particular among part-time MBA students who face unique challenges in balancing professional and academic responsibilities. This disconnect highlights the need to explore how platforms like WhatsApp and LinkedIn are integrated into educational experiences and whether they meaningfully enhance learning and interaction within MBA programs. At DUT Business School, it is unclear whether the social media platforms used effectively enhances student interaction, collaboration, and overall engagement in their academic pursuits. This lack of clarity may result in missed opportunities to leverage social media platforms as a tool

for improving academic outcomes and fostering a collaborative learning environment within the MBA program.

A similar study was conducted to analyse the influence of Facebook as a social media platform to enhance group communication on the writing skills of post secondary students. The study revealed that above 1/5th of the participants indicated that Facebook should be included as a part of schools' academic curriculum and found Facebook an effective tool for schools as it enhanced participants' learning experiences (Shaaban-Nejad 2022).

Researchers Ibrahim, Shafie, and Rahim (2023) explored the use of TikTok for learning the English language. The study suggested that TikTok can be an effective supplement to traditional language learning methods, providing learners with a fun and engaging way to develop their language skills.

The above research suggests that social media platforms can be an effective tool for learning and collaboration in the academic community. The MBA cohort, however, is a dynamic group of students, and it will be advantageous to understand the effects of social media platforms in this specific academic community.

1.4 Aim and objectives

1.4.1 Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to investigate how social media platforms influence the level of engagement and academic collaboration among MBA students at DUT Business School.

1.4.2 Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study will be to:

- I. To assess the role of social media in fostering academic collaboration among MBA students at DUT Business School.
- II. To analyse the relationship between social media engagement and student participation in academic activities.

- III. To explore student perceptions of the effectiveness of social media platforms as a medium for enhancing engagement in the MBA program.

1.5 Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

- I. How does social media usage facilitate academic collaboration among MBA students at DUT Business School?
- II. What is the relationship between social media engagement and student participation in academic activities at DUT Business School?
- III. How do MBA students at DUT Business School perceive the effectiveness of social media platforms in enhancing their engagement with the program?

1.6 Rationale of the Study

In a digitally connected world, the integration of social media into education presents opportunities to improve collaboration, engagement, and learning outcomes. For MBA students, particularly those who are part-time and balancing employment with studies, these platforms may offer practical solutions to overcome time and accessibility challenges. However, there is a lack of empirical research exploring how these platforms function within South African postgraduate business education. This study is necessary to understand how MBA students use social media in academic settings, and whether it contributes meaningfully to engagement and academic collaboration. Insights gained will inform educators and institutions on how to optimise digital tools to support student success.

1.7 Delimitations of the Study

This study is limited to MBA students enrolled at the DUT Business School in KwaZulu-Natal. It specifically focuses on part-time students due to their unique experiences managing both professional and academic commitments. The scope of the study is limited to the influence of social media platforms on academic engagement and collaboration, with primary attention given to platforms like WhatsApp and LinkedIn. It does not include other

digital learning tools such as institutional learning management systems (e.g., Moodle) or examine social media platforms used in non-academic contexts.

1.8 Layout of the research project

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. A brief description of the contents of each chapter is as follows:

Chapter 1: The general outline of the mini dissertation will be introduced and stated in this chapter. The problem and research objectives of the study will also be outlined.

Chapter 2: This chapter will look at existing literature on the subject and explore its theoretical foundation.

Chapter 3: Chapter 3 is predominantly focused on research design, the population and sample. It includes the research instrument (questionnaire) and describes the procedures for data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4: Chapter 4 reveals the findings from the fieldwork, with the data analysis included.

Chapter 5: This chapter will conclude and make recommendations based on the findings and analysis of the study.

The appendices will include the reference list and all supporting data relevant to the study.

1.9 Summary of the chapter

This chapter presented an overview of the research study by discussing the context, background, and significance of the investigation into social media's influence on academic engagement among MBA students at DUT Business School. The chapter also outlined the problem statement, aim and objectives, and research questions. Additionally, it provided a layout of the dissertation, followed by a discussion of the rationale and delimitations of the study. The next chapter will present a review of the relevant literature and theoretical frameworks that support the research inquiry.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of existing literature relevant to student engagement on social media in higher education and other institutions. Chapter 2 aims to critically examine the theoretical underpinnings of the use of social media practices in higher education to engage students. This chapter will explore empirical studies related to the use of social media platforms in higher education realm to identify gaps establishing the foundation for the research questions posed in Chapter one.

2.1.1 Brief history of DUT and the formation of DUT Business School

DUT is a leading public university in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, formed in 2002 through the merger of Technikon Natal and ML Sultan Technikon. In line with its Envision2030 strategy to foster innovation and socio-economic transformation, DUT established the DUT Business School under the Faculty of Management Sciences (Durban University of Technology 2025). The School was officially launched on 24 August 2022. Its flagship MBA programme commenced in July 2021 with an inaugural cohort of 17 students (Zuma 2022). The MBA programme is accredited by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and registered with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), designed as a two-year part-time programme focused on applied business and leadership skills to address real-world challenges (Durban University of Technology Business School 2021). Mobile friendly and flexible delivery modes cater to working professionals balancing academic, career, and personal commitments. In this context MBA students at DUT Business School frames the population and creates the ideal setting for investigations into how social media platforms influence academic collaboration, engagement, and participation.

As an applied, practice oriented University of Technology, DUT's MBA programme attracts a diverse cohort of part-time and working professionals (Rawjee 2021). Understanding how these students harness social media tools for academic purposes is critical for optimizing learning outcomes and fostering a collaborative environment.

2.1.2 Introduction to Social Media in Education

Social media refers to digital platforms that enable users to create, share, and interact with content and communities online (Zhou et al. 2023). These platforms vary widely in function and format, ranging from instant messaging tools (WhatsApp), professional networks (LinkedIn), and microblogging sites (Twitter/X), to content-sharing networks (Instagram, TikTok) and community forums (Facebook groups). In the context of higher education, these tools have evolved into powerful mediums for supporting academic communication, collaboration, and knowledge sharing (Romero-Hall 2020). In the context of information technology, a social network is considered a platform or service that enables individuals to connect, interact, and share information with others in a digital environment (Mola *et al.* 2023). Social networks such as Facebook, X, TikTok, LinkedIn, and academic-specific platforms, reshape social interactions and transform traditional educational practices. Platforms that were once primarily social are now embedded in academic workflows, enabling students to exchange ideas, share resources, collaborate across time zones and geographical boundaries (Zeler and Capriotti 2023).

2.1.3 Academic Collaboration Through Social Media

Social media platforms have revolutionized how students and educators interact. This has created new opportunities for academic collaboration, engagement, and participation (Manca and Ranieri 2019). Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp are increasingly used to foster communication and collaboration among MBA students (Mehra 2023). Studies have shown that private Facebook groups foster a sense of community among tertiary students, enabling them to collaborate on assignments and exchange ideas effectively (Facebook in tertiary education: The impact of social media in e-Learning 2020). According to Sahoo and Khuntia 2024, a mixed-methods field study with 200 undergraduates in Odisha, India, found that integrating general social media platforms into semester long group projects led to substantial increases in both self reported engagement and positive objective learning outcomes. Similarly, LinkedIn enhances collaboration by facilitating academic and professional connections (Kroll, Howoldt and Neuhäusler 2023).

2.1.4 Social Media Engagement and Academic Participation

Social media platforms significantly influences how students engage with academic content and collaborate with peers (Shabur and Siddiki 2024). Researchers Shabur and Siddiki (2024) emphasise that interactive tools on social media encourage meaningful involvement in academic activities. For example, WhatsApp's real-time communication feature allows students to seek clarifications, share resources, and collaborate effectively, fostering a sense of community. Similarly, Facebook's group feature supports the formation of academic communities where students can engage in discussions, share material, and receive feedback (Orioque 2021). WhatsApp, with its simplicity and widespread usage, is a preferred platform for instant communication. Its group chat feature allows tertiary and MBA students to share updates, distribute documents, and provide real-time feedback (Mulyono, Suryoputro and Jamil 2021). A recent study analysing the use of WhatsApp groups for academic purposes found that reciprocity and resource sharing within these groups are positively associated with student satisfaction and their intent to remain enrolled. This emphasises WhatsApp's dual role in fostering collaboration and supporting retention (Ali, Mohamed and Ahmed 2024). Recent studies have demonstrated that integrating Twitter into higher education courses can enhance students' critical thinking and collaborative skills. According to Ucan (2024), Twitter-supported collaborative learning activities in a flipped classroom setting fostered cognitive engagement and improved group project outcomes. Active participation on social media in academic contexts goes beyond passive content consumption. It involves students engaging in ways that directly contribute to knowledge construction, peer learning, and the building of academic communities. True engagement is characterised by actions that foster collaboration, shared understanding, and collective growth (Ansari and Khan 2020).

2.1.5 Social Media and Demographics

Patterns of social media usage and engagement can be influenced by demographic factors such as gender and age, which shape how students interact with these platforms in academic settings. Studies have shown that male students tend to be more active in sharing academic content and participating in resource dissemination, whereas female students often engage more in interactive dialogue and community-building behaviours. Moreover, while females report higher academic impacts from social media use is often tied to

emotional or social engagement. Males report higher levels of addiction, in some cases, stronger performance benefits when using platforms like Facebook (Aldahdouh, Korhonen and Nokelainen 2020). Similarly, age plays a critical role in how social media is used for academic purposes. Younger students (typically under 24) are more frequent users of social media and tend to adopt platforms like Instagram and TikTok for both social and academic communication (Dennen, Choi and Word 2020). In contrast, older students such as those in MBA programs are more strategic, favouring platforms like WhatsApp and LinkedIn for professional discussions, career development, and academic collaboration (Seferoğlu and Durak 2020). These age related trends suggest that platform preference and usage style must be considered when evaluating social media's role in learning and engagement.

2.1.6 Perceptions of Social Media Effectiveness in Higher Education

Studies have shown that students have mixed feeling towards the use of social media platforms as an educational tool . While these platforms offer flexibility and accessibility, challenges such as distraction and privacy concerns persist (Cao *et al.* 2024). A study by Cao *et al.* (2024) found that excessive use of social media platforms can lead to information overload, resulting in decreased academic performance among students. Challenges such as information overload, unequal access to technology, and privacy concerns can hinder the optimal utilisation of these platforms (Rewaria 2021). The study emphasises the importance of structured guidelines and proactive engagement strategies to mitigate these challenges. The integration of social media into educational settings facilitate the creation of a dynamic learning environment that transcend traditional classroom boundaries. The 2019/2020 COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of social media in higher education. Virtual classrooms and online collaborations became the norm, with platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Slack playing pivotal roles (Sengupta and Vaish 2023). A study by Kotula and Kaczmarek-Ciesielska (2021) found that tertiary students relied heavily on these platforms to maintain engagement during remote learning. The pandemic highlighted the importance of digital tools in ensuring continuity and fostering a sense of connection among students (Agustina *et al.* 2025). These platforms enable students to interact, share information, and engage in discussions relevant to their academic pursuits. This sense of community is crucial for part time students who often juggle professional responsibilities alongside their academic pursuits (Khumalo, Letseka-Manka and Morena 2023). By providing flexible avenues for interaction, social media enables students to

collaborate effectively, regardless of time constraints or physical locations. Moreover, the use of social media in collaborative learning has been linked to improved academic performance. A study by Apoko and Waluyo (2025) revealed that social media use in collaborative learning enhances communication skills. It allows the exchange of information among researchers and supervisors or lecturers. This high level of interaction not only facilitates knowledge sharing but also contributes to better academic outcomes. Additionally, social media platforms aid in the creation of learning environments by enhancing student cooperation, communication, and articulation (Prajapati 2025). The interactive nature of these platforms encourages students to participate actively in discussions, seek feedback, and engage with diverse perspectives (Manca 2020). This active engagement is particularly beneficial in MBA programs, where diverse viewpoints enrich the learning experience and prepares students for real-world business challenges.

2.1.7 Benefits and Challenges of Social Media Use in Distance Learning

The benefits include enhanced communication, resource sharing, and flexible learning environments (Barrot 2021). According to Jillani *et al.* (2025), social media fosters a sense of community among learners by promoting collaboration and support. The adaptability of modern learning platforms is evident in their support for multimedia content such as video tutorials, recorded webinars, and shared presentations that students can access at their convenience (Josué *et al.* 2023). This flexibility enables learners to access material at their own pace, revisiting complex topics as needed. Such an approach is especially advantageous for MBA students who are managing academic responsibilities alongside professional and personal commitments (Yılmaz and Yılmaz 2022). By facilitating self-paced study, these platforms help students balance their diverse obligations while maintaining consistent engagement with their coursework. This perspective aligns with findings from the University of Illinois Chicago, which highlight that asynchronous learning offers students the freedom to engage with course material at their own pace from any location, making it a popular choice for working professionals and entrepreneurs. Similarly, UC Berkeley's Flex MBA program demonstrates how asynchronous learning components, like pre-recorded lectures, allow students to integrate education into their demanding lives. It provides the flexibility needed to manage work, family, and academic pursuits effectively (UC Berkeley Haas School of Business 2023). Additionally, mobile accessibility plays a critical role in enhancing the flexibility of social media platforms (Willems 2020). Applications such as

Facebook, LinkedIn, and other platforms are optimized for mobile devices, enabling students to participate in academic activities from virtually anywhere (Zampas *et al.* 2023). It provides flexible, accessible, and highly personalised learning experiences. This is especially valuable for learners balancing multiple responsibilities, as it allows them to take control of their education and adapt learning to their individual needs and schedules (Lokollo 2025). This level of accessibility ensures that students can stay connected and contribute to group projects, discussions, and resource sharing, even when they are on the move.

Despite these advantages, the asynchronous nature of social media also presents challenges, such as delayed responses and potential miscommunication (Shahbazi and Bunker 2024). According to Fadde and Vu (2014), there are challenges in maintaining collaborative attributes to group achievement during online sessions where the students are participating from home. It has been noted that the students' personal space contains more distractions compared to students that attend class on campus (Fadde and Vu 2014). Kaur (2025), observed that despite its educational benefits, students often struggle to maintain concentration due to the constant presence of unrelated material on these platforms. As highlighted above one notable drawback of using social media for academic purposes is its potential to divert students' attention away from their studies. Although it can facilitate collaboration and communication, it also exposes students to non-academic content, which may hinder focus and reduce productivity. Sharing sensitive academic materials on social media platforms presents challenges related to privacy and data protection. Duong *et al.* (2024) emphasised that students are often cautious about posting personal details or academic content on public platforms, due to concerns over the security and misuse of shared information. Unequal access to technology and internet connectivity can pose significant barriers for effective collaboration among students (Rummel and Strauss 2021). This challenge is especially evident in learning environments that include individuals from diverse geographic or socioeconomic backgrounds, where disparities in digital access can affect participation and engagement (Akmad and Abatayo 2024). Excessive reliance on social media for academic collaboration may reduce face-to-face interactions, which are crucial for building interpersonal skills. Ripki et al. (2024) have warned that students relying heavily on social media reported a decline in their ability to collaborate effectively in traditional settings.

To mitigate these issues, clear guidelines for participation and communication can be established within academic groups, ensuring that the benefits of flexibility do not come at the expense of effective collaboration (Bhattacharya *et al.* 2024). Understanding which social media platforms are used and how they facilitate communication lays the groundwork for assessing their role in fostering academic collaboration among MBA students at DUT Business School.

2.2 Level of Engagement

Student engagement is a complex, multi-dimensional construct that plays a vital role in academic success and learning outcomes (Guo *et al.* 2021). Social media engagement in academic contexts encompasses students' behavioural, emotional, and cognitive involvement in learning activities facilitated by social platforms. This manifesting through actions such as liking, commenting, sharing resources, joining discussions, and collaborating on projects (Jordan 2022). Unlike passive content consumption, true engagement implies active participation that contributes to knowledge construction, peer learning, and community building (Dunsmore *et al.* 2022).

Behavioural engagement refers to students' active participation in academic activities, such as contributing to discussions, submitting assignments on time, attending virtual or physical classes, and participating in group projects (Estévez *et al.* 2021). It involves the observable actions that signal involvement and commitment to academic tasks such as posting in forums or joining group chats. Social media platforms promote behavioural engagement by offering interactive strategies that encourage active student participation in academic activities, including online discussions, quizzes, and collaborative assignments (Tarifa-Rodríguez, Virúes-Ortega and Calero-Elvira 2024). Gamified elements such as quizzes and polls on platforms like Instagram and Twitter have been shown to significantly enhance student engagement by introducing fun and competitive aspects that motivate active participation (Rivera and Garden 2021). Recent studies report that integrating gamified activities into social media learning environments leads to higher motivation, satisfaction, and knowledge retention among students, with many expressing a preference for these interactive approaches over traditional methods. For example, Instagram-based educational games have been found to help students better assimilate content, maintain interest in the subject, and enjoy the learning process, with over 70% of participants recommending

increased use of gamification in other courses (Rosa-Castillo *et al.* 2022). Similarly, the use of gamified social networks and interactive features such as polls and quizzes has resulted in measurable increases in participation rates and engagement, supporting the claim that these tools can outperform conventional educational strategies (Alemany, Val and García-Fornes 2020). The effectiveness of gamification is further enhanced when combined with social media's collaborative features, allowing students to share experiences, co-create knowledge, and receive immediate feedback in a supportive community (Ensmann and Whiteside 2022). Overall, the integration of gamified elements into social media platforms offers a promising approach to fostering deeper involvement and sustained motivation in educational settings.

Emotional engagement refers to students' affective responses to learning, such as interest, enjoyment, motivation, and a sense of belonging within the academic environment. When students feel emotionally connected to their peers and instructors, they are more likely to persist in their studies and participate meaningfully in academic activities (Huang, Tu and Wang 2025). This dimension of engagement is shaped by feelings of inclusion and connection that emerge through social interactions (Xu *et al.* 2023). Social media supports emotional engagement by helping students maintain existing relationships, build new ones, and seek academic support (Wang *et al.* 2022). Student participation in academic activities through social media is shaped by a combination of platform affordances, psychological drivers, and institutional or cultural contexts (Istiqomah *et al.* 2023). Features such as real-time messaging (WhatsApp) and asynchronous forums (Facebook groups) cater to different communication needs, supporting both immediacy and flexibility in academic collaboration and information sharing (Gema *et al.* 2025). Motivation, access, and creativity are key psychological drivers that predict emotional engagement. The sense of belonging and safe, private group spaces help reduce anxiety and encourage participation, especially among more reserved students (Jitsaeng *et al.* 2024). However, social media can also introduce stress due to challenges such as online identity management, group norms, and academic competition (Zhang *et al.* 2024). Cultural dynamics and peer networks further influence how students use these platforms, impacting both academic integration and cross-cultural adaptation, particularly among international students. Additionally, the role of collaborative learning and family bonding, often facilitated through social media, has been linked to

improved academic performance and overall well-being, with mental health serving as a key moderating factor.

Cognitive engagement represents a deep level of mental investment in learning, reflecting students' deliberate willingness to exert effort in comprehending complex ideas, integrating new knowledge with prior understanding, and applying critical thinking to solve problems (Li, Ham and Eastin 2023). This form of engagement is often demonstrated through activities such as analysing case studies, debating theoretical perspectives, and synthesizing diverse viewpoints during academic discussions (Guo *et al.* 2025). Cognitive engagement involves not just passive consumption of content but active, thoughtful participation, encouraging students to question assumptions, make connections, and formulate their own interpretations (Improta *et al.* 2022). Its impact on learning outcomes is profound and multifaceted. Cognitively engaged students demonstrate significantly enhanced academic achievement, including superior retention rates, deeper conceptual understanding, and improved exam performance (Schnitzler, Holzberger and Seidel 2020). Social media can facilitate cognitive engagement by providing platforms for resource sharing, discussion threads, and peer-to-peer feedback that encourage deeper thinking. For instance, physics students who actively connect theoretical principles to real world applications consistently outperform peers in problem solving tasks (Shen and Tan 2024). This is a crucial aspect to foster transferable competencies like adaptive problem solving and critical analysis that extend beyond academic contexts. This was evident by medical trainees who diagnose novel patient cases more effectively through case-based learning (Park and Yoo 2015). Students engaged at this level often demonstrate higher order thinking, improved problem-solving abilities, and a stronger capacity to transfer learning across contexts. According to existing research, the benefits of cognitive engagement include fostering independent learning, enhancing academic performance, and cultivating lifelong learning habits (Maruff *et al.* 2022). Moreover, in the MBA context, where analytical decision-making and strategic thinking are essential for cognitive engagement through social media can help students better prepare for workplace demands.

Pedagogical approaches that stimulate cognitive engagement include Problem-Based Learning (PBL), where students collaboratively address ill-structured challenges such as designing sustainable cities through iterative research and evidence based refinement (Jamil *et al.* 2025). Similarly, socratic seminars in humanities cultivate analytical rigor

through disciplined dialogue about textual complexities, while metacognitive journals in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields guide learners to identify reasoning gaps through structured reflection(Alt and Raichel 2020). These practices yield demonstrable advantages; engaged students develop coherent knowledge schemes that integrate cross disciplinary concepts, such as linking mathematical models to economic theories (Bedi 2023). Empirical research confirms substantial gains in critical thinking proficiency compared to disengaged learners, while collaborative academic discourse cultivates perspective taking that drives innovation, also evident when engineering teams refine designs through iterative critique (Li and Xue 2023).

Ultimately, social media's ability to support critical thinking and meaningful dialogue makes it a valuable tool for enriching academic learning at the master's level. Social media platforms can influence all three forms of engagement and examining these distinct levels of engagement provides a foundation for analysing how social media contributes to student involvement in academic activities, as explored in Objective II.

2.3 Student Perceptions in Academic Activities

Research highlights three primary dimensions of engagement fostered by social media: cognitive, emotional, and behavioural as discussed in subheading 2.2, Level of Engagement. According to Alalwan (2022), cognitive engagement is enhanced through access to supplementary resources and discussions facilitated on platforms such as LinkedIn. Emotional engagement is driven by the sense of belonging and peer support fostered through interactive platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram, while behavioural engagement is observed in the active participation in group projects and academic discussions (Mahmood et al. 2024).

Student participation refers to the active involvement of students in academic tasks, discussions, and collaborative activities. This can occur real-time (synchronous) or with a delay (asynchronous) (Cao and Wei 2024). This participation can take various forms, ranging from contributing ideas in discussions to co-creating academic content (Salamonson, Metcalfe and Hughes 2020). Participation exists in several dimensions (Graham, Anderson and Thomas 2019). It can be either active or passive. Active participation includes behaviours such as posting ideas, leading discussions, or working collaboratively on projects e.g., engaging in debates within a WhatsApp group. In contrast, passive participation involves actions such as liking posts, observing forums without contributing, or simply consuming shared content (Somech and Perry-Hazan 2021). Research suggests that students who engage actively tend to achieve better academic outcomes, while passive participants may become disengaged over time (Reeve, Cheon and Jang 2020). Nonetheless, passive participation can have value. Passive participants often report that they still learn by reading others' explanations and ideas. These academics may "learn through observing others' opinions and works" without speaking up (Somech and Perry-Hazan 2021). Mariappan noted that passive participants (especially those who read widely) may perform nearly as well as active ones on assessments (Mariappan 2023). The distinction thus seems to be one of degree: active participation tends to enhance engagement and outcomes, but passive participation (though often overlooked) can still contribute to learning via social comparison and exposure to peers' ideas. Importantly, even passive participants report higher satisfaction when courses have strong social presence: one study found that high instructor/peer presence correlated with both perceived learning and satisfaction for passive participants as well as posters (Amaefule *et al.* 2022).

Participation can also be formal or informal. Formal participation typically occurs in structured academic settings, such as instructor led discussions, whereas informal participation often takes place in peer-initiated spaces, like student run WhatsApp groups for coordinating projects (Peters and Romero 2019). Finally, participation may be individual or collaborative. Individual participation involves self-directed learning, such as using Twitter threads for exam preparation, while collaborative participation includes group-based efforts like conducting a case study analysis through Facebook groups (Fung 2022). These dimensions illustrate the multifaceted nature of student engagement in digital learning environments.

The relationship between social media engagement and student participation is crucial in understanding how these platforms influence students' academic behaviour and motivation (Dragseth 2020). Studies show that active engagement on social media leads to higher levels of participation in academic activities, contributing to better learning outcomes (Fuchs 2024). Engagement in academic social media contexts is driven by platform affordances that align with students' needs. WhatsApp's real-time messaging enables quick clarifications and reduces delays in group work, while gamified elements such as polls, quizzes, and badges (Twitter "challenges") introduce a competitive edge that boosts participation (Su and Huang 2021). Asynchronous flexibility through Facebook groups allows contributions outside class hours, accommodating diverse schedules. Students are motivated to engage by the convenience of platforms already woven into daily routines. The peer-learning benefits of exposure to diverse viewpoints, and reduced anxiety in private or closed groups compared to traditional classroom settings (Kalam, Goi and Tiong 2023), and the career relevance afforded by LinkedIn networking opportunities aligned with MBA goals. Engagement occurs across overlapping contexts from formal, instructor-moderated forums (such as LinkedIn course groups) to informal, student-led WhatsApp channels for project coordination. In some instances hybrid spaces where Twitter discussions begun in class continue offline, and global Facebook communities connecting MBA cohorts worldwide (Van Zyl, Kelders and Ludden 2020). Notably, participation often germinates in informal digital spaces before extending into structured academic outputs like assignments and presentations (Tazhenova, Mikhaylova and Turgunbayeva 2024).

Gulzar *et al.* (2021), highlights that students who actively engage on social media demonstrate improved motivation and a stronger sense of belonging within academic

communities. This sense of belonging often translates into increased participation in collaborative assignments, peer discussions, and extracurricular academic events. Additionally, platforms like LinkedIn, which merge professional networking with academic engagement, have been shown to encourage students to connect with industry professionals, broadening their learning experiences and career opportunities (Davis *et al.* 2020). One key benefit of social media engagement is its ability to promote self directed learning. According to Lokollo (2025), students who actively participate in social media groups tend to take greater ownership of their learning. This autonomy fosters deeper engagement and a proactive approach to academic tasks, leading to better performance and satisfaction.

Social media has emerged as a transformative tool in higher education, as students collaborate in academic environments (Janah, Prima and Galih 2024). Collaboration thrives on social media because of a combination of motivations and benefits that align with students' academic and social needs (Xiang, Zhang and Khan 2020). The convenience and accessibility of these platforms, already integrated into students' daily routines, lower the learning curve and make participation more intuitive (Hu, Abdullah and Wang 2025). Peer learning dynamics also plays a key role, as interacting with diverse viewpoints sharpens critical thinking and simulates real world collaborative environments. Furthermore, the psychological safety offered by private or closed groups, such as those on Facebook, fosters informal spaces where students feel comfortable asking questions without fear of judgment (Ripki, Wulandari and Ariffannisa 2024). In addition, social media facilitates resource democratisation; students in under-resourced settings can use tools like WhatsApp or Twitter to access global case studies and expert insights (Acheampong and Taden 2024).

Social constructivism is a learning theory that emphasises the importance of social interaction, collaboration, and cultural context in the construction of knowledge (Saleem, Kausar and Deeba 2021). Rooted in the work of Lev Vygotsky, this theory argues that individuals learn best through interaction with others, particularly within shared cultural or social environments (Negi 2020). Vygotsky (1978) proposed that learning is not a solitary process but one that is mediated by language, communication, and the presence of more knowledgeable peers. Central to this theory is the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which describes the space between what a learner can do

independently and what they can achieve with guidance or in collaboration with peers. In the context of higher education, this approach positions students not as passive recipients of information but as active participants in the co-construction of knowledge (Margolis 2020). The relevance of social constructivism to this study lies in its alignment with the core dynamics of social media use in academic settings. Platforms such as WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and Facebook enable students to engage in real-time discussions, share resources, clarify complex topics, and collaboratively work on assignments. These environments mirror Vygotsky's description of socially mediated learning spaces where learners benefit from constant interaction, peer support, and joint problem-solving. As Alismaiel, Cifuentes-Faura and Al-Rahmi (2022) point out, social media also facilitates resource democratisation, allowing students from under resourced settings to access global content and expert perspectives. These forms of engagement, rooted in group dialogue and shared experiences, illustrate how social media naturally fosters the type of interaction that social constructivism advocates. Thus, applying this theory provides a useful interpretive lens through which the academic value of social media can be understood, especially in the context of postgraduate business education.

In the final chapter of this study, social constructivism will be used as a guiding framework for interpreting the data presented in this study. The findings, including the enhanced academic collaboration, increased student participation, and perceived effectiveness of social media platforms, will be viewed through the lens of socially mediated learning. For example, students' preference for WhatsApp groups and LinkedIn academic communities supports the idea that meaningful learning occurs in settings where dialogue, cooperation, and peer influence are present (Cronje and Van Zyl 2022). The theory will also help to contextualise how social interaction enabled through digital platforms contributes not only to knowledge sharing but also to the development of a supportive academic community. In this way, social constructivism strengthens the theoretical foundation of the study. It provides a coherent basis for discussing the implications of the findings about learning and engagement in higher education. These patterns of engagement reflect the principles of social constructivist theory, which posits that learning is most effective when mediated through social interaction. According to Vygotsky's framework, knowledge is co-constructed through dialogue, group problem-solving, and shared experiences, with learners actively participating as thinkers and contributors rather than passive recipients (Mishra 2023).

Collaboration among students tends to peak at specific times that align with academic demands and scheduling flexibility, notably, activity within platforms like WhatsApp intensifies around project deadlines, as students coordinate last-minute tasks and share resources in real time (Galad, Betts and Campbell 2024). After class hours also see heightened collaboration, particularly on asynchronous platforms such as Facebook, which accommodate students in varying time zones or with diverse work commitments (Ghosh and Deb 2025). During exam preparation periods, platforms like Twitter and LinkedIn transform into repositories of condensed revision materials, such as threads and articles that provide mnemonics and key summaries. The “always-on” nature of social media enables just-in-time learning, effectively bridging the gap between formal classroom hours and self directed study (Qureshi *et al.* 2021). A study by Hiele *et al.* (2019) explored the use of Facebook groups for collaboration on a marketing project among MBA students. The findings indicated that participants generally felt the platform improved their ability to exchange ideas and complete tasks effectively. Collaboration initiated on social media platforms often transcends the virtual realm and influences physical academic spaces (Almogren 2023). In hybrid classroom environments, students may engage in LinkedIn discussions ahead of in person case study debates, enhancing preparedness and discourse quality (Raes 2021). Additionally, LinkedIn interactions during internships or industry placements frequently loop back into academic projects, effectively blurring the lines between academic learning and professional development (Liu *et al.* 2022a). Often, collaboration starts informally in digital spaces, such as a student created WhatsApp group, but evolves into structured academic outputs like group assignments or co-authored research papers (Blau, Avdiel and Shamir-Inbal 2020).

Examples from various studies illustrate how social media has facilitated academic collaboration in MBA programs, highlighting the benefits and challenges of using these tools for group projects, discussions, and information sharing (Alamri, Almaiah and Al-Rahmi 2020). The integration of social media into MBA programs has generated significant interest, particularly concerning its effectiveness in fostering student engagement. Integrating social media into MBA programs has been linked to increased student satisfaction, higher engagement in both synchronous and asynchronous discussions. It has improved understanding of course content through authentic, problem-based learning (Liu and Hung 2020). Social media also helps build professional and peer networks, supporting both

academic and career development. Empirical studies show that platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and live-streaming services are widely used by MBA students. It has been report that these tools facilitate collaboration, real-time communication, and knowledge sharing, which in turn improve their academic experiences and outcomes (Sherin and Magelesh 2024).

Students perceive social media as a repository of valuable resources (Spector, Shanshan and Knezek 2021). Platforms like YouTube provide access to tutorials and lectures, while LinkedIn learning offers specialised courses tailored to MBA students. According to Sivakumar, Jayasingh and Shaik. (2023), these resources supplement classroom learning. This enables students to deepen their understanding of complex topics at their own pace. The effectiveness of social media in driving participation is not without challenges. Dragseth (2020) observes that while social media enhances engagement, it can also be a source of distraction, particularly when non-academic content diverts students' attention. Therefore, structured and purpose-driven use of social media is essential to maximise its positive impact on student participation. The effectiveness of social media depends on thoughtful integration into curricula and adequate institutional support to address challenges such as distraction and privacy concerns (Fazel and Sayaf 2025).

2.4 Summary of the chapter

Overall, research indicates that when used intentionally, social media can transform MBA education by making learning more interactive, accessible, and community oriented. Reviewing perceptions of effectiveness satisfies objective III; exploring MBA students' perceptions of social media as a medium for enhancing engagement in the DUT MBA programme. Understanding the specific context of MBA students at DUT creates crucial understanding to interpret findings. It ensures that assessments of collaboration, engagement, participation, and perceived effectiveness (Objectives I–III) are grounded in the lived experiences of this population. The literature reviewed under each key variable builds collectively toward the study's objectives. The exploration of social media platforms (Section 2.1) sets the stage for assessing how particular affordances enable collaboration (Objective I). The examination of engagement dynamics (Section 2.2) and participation (Section 2.4) clarifies how the relationships will be analysed for Objective II in the discussion. The review of perceived effectiveness (Section 2.4) provides insight for

analysing data required to satisfy objective III. Contextual considerations (Section 2.4) ensure the study tailors its analysis to MBA students at DUT Business School. Together, these subsections lay a coherent foundation for the empirical investigation in Chapters 3 and 4.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter illustrates the research tools, design and methodology followed in this project. The chapter presents the techniques available for conducting research and demonstrates those selected for this study. It includes details of the questionnaire design, data collection techniques, target population group, sample size and credibility.

3.2 Research Methodology

Research methodology can be defined as the systematic approach used to conduct a research study. It involves the methods and techniques for data collection and analysis, guiding the research process to answer specific questions or test hypotheses (Yazdani *et al.* 2023). There are three categories in research methodology which are qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. Each of these methodologies offers distinct advantages and are suited to answer different types of research questions, this will be briefly discussed below. Each method has been analysed critically, and the appropriate method of research was chosen to satisfy the objectives of the study.

Qualitative research explores perceptions of individuals or groups to understand a specific phenomenon. Non-numerical data is collected through methods like brainstorming/focus group sessions, interviews and observations. It's used to gain deep insights into complex issues and explore underlying motivations and behaviours (Sabnis and Wolgemuth 2024).

The quantitative research approach collects numerical data and uses statistical analysis to identify patterns and test hypotheses, making it suitable for generalising findings to larger populations. It's often used to measure variables and determine relationships between them (Wei, Kao and Wang 2024). Mixed methods refer to a research methodology that combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of research problems. This approach integrates the strengths of each method, enabling both statistical analysis and in-depth exploration (Ward *et al.* 2023).

The study's main focus is quantifying engagement levels (frequency of social media use for academic purposes, perceived effectiveness), quantitative methods will provide the rigor

needed to test hypotheses derived from the literature review (Social media enhances collaboration) and generalize findings within the MBA cohort. For the purpose of this study a quantitative methodology was adopted to examine the relationship between social media engagement and academic collaboration among MBA students at DUT Business School. This approach was selected as it enables the collection of measurable data from a defined population using structured surveys, which can be statistically analysed to identify patterns, correlations, and significant trends.

3.3 Research paradigm

A research paradigm, or philosophy, is a set of fundamental beliefs and assumptions about the nature of knowledge and how it should be acquired (Sanchez *et al.* 2023). It guides the research approach, influencing the choice of methods, data collection, and analysis techniques. There are two primary research paradigms that are commonly used, as briefly described below. Each paradigm provides a different perspective on how to understand and interpret the world. The interpretivist paradigm focuses on understanding the meaning and experiences of individuals from their own perspectives. It emphasises subjective interpretation and the social context of a phenomena, often using qualitative methods such as interviews and observations to gain in-depth insights. This approach is suited for exploring complex social processes and human behaviour (Ratcliffe, Kanaan and Galdas 2023). The positivist paradigm is based on the belief that knowledge can be obtained through objective and empirical observation. It focuses on quantifiable data and often uses quantitative methods, such as surveys and experiments, to test hypotheses and establish facts. It aims for objectivity and reliability in measuring and analysing variables (Razavipour 2023).

The study was grounded in the positivist paradigm, which emphasizes objectivity, empirical observation, and measurable evidence. This paradigm aligns with the quantitative methodology, as it seeks to identify cause-and-effect relationships (how social media engagement influences participation) through standardised data collection and statistical analysis. By adopting positivism, the study prioritizes objective conclusions about the role of social media in academic collaboration, free from subjective interpretations.

3.4 Research Design

A research design can be defined as a structured framework or plan that guided the process of collecting, analysing, and interpreting data in a research study (Sauders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019). It outlines the overall strategy by which the research questions will be addressed, specifying the methods and procedures used to generate valid and reliable findings. Various types of research designs as described below. Descriptive research aims to describe the characteristics of a population or phenomenon without influencing it. This type of research is often used to identify patterns, trends, and relationships within the data. It is not concerned with determining cause-and-effect relationships (Millner, Robinaugh and Nock 2020).

Explanatory research seeks to explain the reasons behind a particular phenomenon, often by establishing causal relationships. It often builds on descriptive research and aims to explain the underlying mechanisms behind observed patterns (Birgili and Demir 2022).

Exploratory research aims to explore a problem or phenomenon when there are few or no earlier studies to gain insight. It helps researchers gain the necessary information and familiarity with the topic. It identifies patterns and develop hypotheses for further investigation. Exploratory research is often flexible and open-ended, using both qualitative methods (interviews and focus groups) and quantitative methods (surveys and pilot studies) to gather preliminary data and generate initial insights (Swedberg 2020).

Experimental research involves manipulating one or more dependent variables to observe their effect on the independent variable, allowing researchers to establish cause-and-effect relationships. This method typically includes controlled conditions and random assignment to ensure the validity of the results (Hausladen, Fochmann and Mohr 2024).

Narrative research focuses on exploring and understanding individuals' stories and personal accounts. This approach is often used in social sciences to study identity, culture, and human experience (Akıncı *et al.* 2024).

Action research involves a cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting to address a problem or improve practices within a specific context. It emphasizes

collaboration and active participation to bring about change and generate practical solutions (Martins, Mascarenhas and Pereira 2024).

Taking the above insights into perspective, both exploratory and descriptive research designs were employed for this study. The exploratory design was selected to investigate the relatively underexplored role of social media in fostering academic collaboration among MBA students at DUT Business School. This is taking into consideration the unique challenges faced by part-time students balancing professional and academic commitments. The descriptive design was used to systematically document patterns in social media usage, engagement levels, and student perceptions, providing a quantitative snapshot of how platforms like WhatsApp and LinkedIn facilitate collaboration and participation. This dual approach allowed for both initial insights into emerging trends (exploratory) and structured analysis of measurable behaviours (descriptive), aligning with the study's aim to assess, analyse, and explore social media's impact.

3.5 Research Strategy

A research strategy outlines the plan of how data will be collected and analysed to address the research problem. It defines the methods and procedures for gathering information and ensures that the study aligns with the chosen research methodology (Bougie and Sekaran 2019). There are two types that relates to qualitative and quantitative research strategy which are used based on the nature of the study, as briefly discussed below.

The strategy to collect data for the qualitative research aspect involves the use of research tools such as interviews, focus groups or case studies. This strategy involves collecting in depth, non-numerical data and it aims to understand the complexities of human behaviour and social phenomena by exploring participants' perspectives and experiences (Yu, Mendoza and Lasco 2023).

Quantitative research strategy relates to the measuring instruments such as surveys/questionnaires. This strategy involves collecting numerical data and using statistical techniques to identify patterns, test hypotheses, and generalise concepts relating to a population. It aims to ensure objectivity and reliability in data analysis (Hou and Aryadoust 2021).

Given the study's focus on measuring social media engagement, academic collaboration, and student perceptions. The chosen research tool collecting data for this study was a questionnaire, as it aligned with the quantitative methodology. This allowed for efficient collection of standardised data from a large target population of MBA students. The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms, ensuring accessibility for the target population (MBA students at DUT Business School).

3.6 Construction of questionnaire

The questionnaire included Likert-scale questions to quantify responses e.g., agreement levels on social media's role in collaboration. Open-ended questions were used to capture additional insights. This approach facilitated statistical analysis (mean scores, t-tests) while maintaining consistency in data collection.

The choice of the research tool used was determined by:

- The need for scalability (reaching all 83 registered MBA students).
- The standardisation of responses which enabled comparative analysis.
- The ability to quantify engagement behaviours (frequency of social media use for academic purposes).

3.7 Time dimension of study

The time dimension of a study refers to the temporal aspect of data collection and analysis, which influences how research findings are interpreted (Sheinbaum *et al.* 2024). There are two main types of time dimensions commonly used in research, as briefly discussed below.

Cross-sectional research involves collecting data from a population at a single point in time. It is useful for examining the status or conditions of a population at a specific moment and provides a snapshot of current trends and relationships. This approach is particularly efficient for descriptive and exploratory studies (Maier *et al.* 2023).

Longitudinal research involves repeated observations of the same variables over an extended period of time. It allows researchers to analyse changes and developments over time, making it suitable for studying trends and causal relationships across different time

points. This approach provides valuable insights into temporal dynamics and long-term effects. (Tao, Petrović and van Ham 2023).

A cross-sectional time dimension was adopted, with data collected at a single point in time (2024). This approach was appropriate since the study aimed to capture a snapshot of MBA students' current social media engagement practices, rather than tracking changes over an extended period.

Cross-sectional design allowed for:

- Efficiency: Rapid data collection aligned with the study's scope and timeline.
- Focus on current trends: Given the dynamic nature of social media usage, a single time point ensured relevance to contemporary practices.
- Alignment with objectives: The research questions required an analysis of present behaviours rather than longitudinal trends.

While a longitudinal study could have revealed changes in engagement over time, the cross-sectional approach sufficed to address the study's immediate aims and resource constraints.

3.8 Population

In research, the population refers to the entire group of individuals, units, or elements that share common characteristics and from which a sample may be drawn for study (Lee, Cleveland and Szolnoki 2023). The target population for this study comprises all MBA students registered at Durban University of Technology for the year 2024, irrespective of their year of study. The total population size was 83 which was provided by the department business unit at DUT.

3.9 Sample

A sample is a subset of individuals, units, or elements selected from a larger population to conduct a study (Berndt 2020). The sample was intended to be representative of the population. Based on the population size and sample guide from Sekaran and Bougie's

sampling table (Sekaran and Bougie 2013). A full census was conducted since the population were less than 100.

3.10 Data collection methods

Research instruments used related to the research strategy that has been chosen for this study (Sukmawati 2023). The research instruments selected for this study were guided by the chosen research design, which aligns with the positivist paradigm. Since the study aimed to collect standardised, quantifiable data from a defined population, a structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection tool. The questionnaire was developed based on the study's objectives, research questions, and a review of relevant literature concerning student engagement and social media use in academic settings. Care was taken to ensure that the items reflected key variables such as types of social media used, frequency of engagement, forms of academic collaboration, and perceptions of social media's effectiveness in an academic context.

The final instrument was self-administered using Google Forms, allowing participants to complete the survey electronically at their convenience. This method ensured accessibility and promoted a higher response rate among part-time MBA students.

The questionnaire was structured into the following sections:

- Section A: Demographic Information

Demographic information encompassed data collection of age, gender, employment status, and year of study to contextualise the sample.

- Section B: Social Media Usage

Social media usage assessed the types of social media platforms students use (WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Facebook) and the frequency of use for academic purposes.

- Section C: Academic Collaboration

Academic collaboration explored how social media facilitates group work, information sharing, and academic networking among MBA students.

- Section D: Engagement and Participation

Engagement and participation measured students' level of participation in academic activities through social media, such as virtual discussions, peer support, and resource sharing.

- Section E: Perceived Effectiveness

Perceived effectiveness gauged students' perceptions of how effective social media is in enhancing their academic engagement and collaboration.

3.11 Validation and reliability

In qualitative research, transferability and confirmability are crucial for establishing the trustworthiness of the study (Ghafouri and Ofoghi 2016). Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied to other contexts, while confirmability ensures that the results are shaped by the participants' experiences rather than the researcher's bias. In quantitative research, various types of validity are essential to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the measurements. Face validity refers to whether the test or measurement appears to measure what it claims to. Content validity verifies if the measurement covers all relevant aspects of the concept being studied. Construct validity evaluates whether the instrument truly measures the theoretical construct it is intended to assess. Criterion validity examines how well one measure predicts an outcome based on another established measure (Moyo and Mann 2018).

Cronbach's alpha evaluates the internal consistency of the instrument. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.7 to 0.9 is considered indicative of reliable results, showing that the items within the questionnaire consistently measure the same underlying construct. A Cronbach's alpha of 1 indicates the same construct being measured and redundancy (Bujang, Omar and Baharum 2018).

As indicated in the methodology section, this study followed a quantitative approach; therefore, the validity and reliability aspects considered included content validity, face validity, and criterion validity. To ensure the reliability of the measurement instruments, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire

3.12 Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted to test the feasibility and effectiveness of the research instruments before the main data collection. This preliminary study involved a sample of five participants who would not be included in the final study. The purpose of using five participants was to identify any potential issues with the questionnaire, such as ambiguous questions or technical difficulties, and to ensure that the research instruments are clear, reliable, and capable of collecting the desired data. Feedback from this pilot study was used to refine and improve the questionnaire, enhancing the validity of the main study.

3.13 Data analysis procedures

In this study, descriptive statistics were employed to summarise and organise the collected data, providing a clear overview of the main features of the dataset. Descriptive statistics consists of measures such as mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and frequency distributions, which help to present the data in a meaningful way, making it easier to understand patterns and trends within the sample (Cooksey and Cooksey 2020).

Inferential statistics enable generalisation of the findings from the sample to the larger population, providing insights into the significance and potential implications of the research results (Haden 2019). Inferential statistics were then used to draw conclusions about the broader population based on the sample data. A one-sample t-test was applied to determine whether the sample mean significantly differed from a known population mean, allowing the researcher to make informed inferences. Inferential statistics were employed to draw conclusions about the broader MBA student population based on the sample data. To explore the relationships between key variables, one-sample t-tests were conducted to determine whether the observed mean scores for the three composite variables academic collaboration (ROLE), student participation (REL), and perceived effectiveness of social media (EFF) differed significantly from the neutral midpoint on the Likert scale (test value = 3). These inferential tests enabled the generalisation of findings and supported the identification of statistically significant trends relevant to the research objectives. The data was analysed using SPSS version 25, a statistical software package widely recognized for its ability to handle complex data analysis with ease. The data analysis included descriptive

statistics and inferential tests (Pearson correlation, regression) using the SPSS software to explore relationships between variables.

3.14 Ethical considerations

The researcher adhered to the ethical policies of DUT. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and was provided with a letter of informed consent if they choose to participate in this study. The participants were informed that the research is fair to all participants and respects their settings. The participants were informed that participation in this study is voluntary and that no one would be coerced into participating. All participants were informed that their rights would be respected and that their autonomy is upheld.

Non-maleficence: Participants were made aware that they are protected from harm and that the principle of non-maleficence (doing no harm) is strictly followed. Inclusion and Exclusion: Only participants who were registered MBA students at DUT Business School were selected for this study. These students were approached by the MBA administrator from the faculty office. The survey research instrument was distributed via email. Students who did not have social media accounts were excluded from the study. Participants were informed that anonymity will be maintained; all data and information collected for this study were kept confidential, and no information would be used to identify any participants. The confidentiality of all participants in this study were strictly maintained.

The collected data was used solely for research purposes. Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. Participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. No compensation was provided to participants in this study. Copies of the dissertation will be shared with all participants of this study via email.

3.15 Summary of the chapter

This chapter outlined the structured approach adopted to investigate how social media influences academic engagement and collaboration among MBA students at DUT Business School. This chapter laid the methodological foundation necessary for understanding the relationship between social media and academic engagement, setting the stage for the analysis and interpretation of results presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis, interpretation of results and discussion of findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to present the findings by tabulating, analysing, and discussing the collected data. A quantitative approach was used to collect and analyse data from questionnaires, employing both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. This chapter begins with an analysis of descriptive statistics derived from the responses of 62 MBA students at DUT Business School. Detailed explanations of the results from Sections A and B of the questionnaire will be provided, supported by graphs and tables. A brief discussion of the findings will follow.

4.2 Response rate

A total of 83 students were registered in the MBA program at DUT Business School. A census approach was employed, inviting the entire population to participate in the study. A pilot study was conducted with 5 students with their responses were excluded from the main study. There were 62 valid responses, resulting in a response rate of 79.4%. Based on a power analysis with a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level, this sample size was deemed adequate (Ledolter and Kardon 2020). The questionnaire was created using Google Forms and distributed to the target population via email and WhatsApp. The completed responses are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Response rate from MBA students

Area of research	Population size	Target sample size	Estimated response rate	Actual number of questionnaires distributed	Actual response rate	Achieved sample size
DUT Business School, MBA program	83	83	80%	83	79.4%	62

The demographic data of the respondents, as presented below, consist of quantifiable variables such as gender, age, MBA registration status, and social media usage patterns. The majority of participants were born between 1985 and 1989, followed by those born between 1980 and 1984. A total of 14 students chose not to disclose their year of birth. These details provide essential context for interpreting patterns of academic engagement and collaboration on social media platforms. Notably, the sample consisted of 59.7% female respondents ($n = 37$) and 40.3% male respondents ($n = 25$). This gender distribution aligns with literature suggesting that female students are more likely to engage in interactive dialogue and community-building behaviours on social media platforms, while male students tend to focus more on content dissemination and leadership in academic discussions (Aldahdouh, Korhonen, & Nokelainen, 2020). Such tendencies may influence not only the frequency and manner of social media use but also the effectiveness of collaborative and participatory learning efforts within the MBA program. Therefore, understanding the demographic makeup is critical for interpreting the engagement trends observed in the study and reinforces the importance of tailoring digital academic strategies to the unique behavioural characteristics of different student groups.

Distribution of Respondents by Year of Birth and Gender

Figure 1 presents the distribution of respondents' years of birth, grouped into five-year ranges. The bar chart illustrates the distribution of respondents by year of birth and gender. The majority of respondents (50%) were born between 1980 and 1989, indicating that most participants were in their mid-30s to early 40s, a demographic consistent with the typical profile of part-time MBA students balancing professional and academic commitments. This age group was followed by 22.6% born in the 1990–1999 range and an equal proportion who did not disclose their year of birth. Smaller proportions were born between 1970–1979 (3.2%) and in 2000 or later (1.6%). In terms of gender, females represented the majority at 59.7%, while males accounted for 40.3% of the sample.

These findings are consistent with literature reviewed in Chapter 2, which highlights those older students, particularly in postgraduate and MBA contexts, tend to engage more strategically with social media favouring platforms like WhatsApp and LinkedIn for professional development and academic collaboration (Seferoğlu and Durak, 2020). Moreover, the slightly higher participation of women in this study aligns with Aldahdouh,

Korhonen, and Nokelainen's (2020) findings that state female students often exhibit higher emotional engagement and are more active and supportive of academic dialogues on social media. The observed demographic distribution therefore supports existing scholarship suggesting that both age and gender significantly influence social media engagement patterns, with implications of how collaborative learning tools and strategies should be tailored for this cohort.

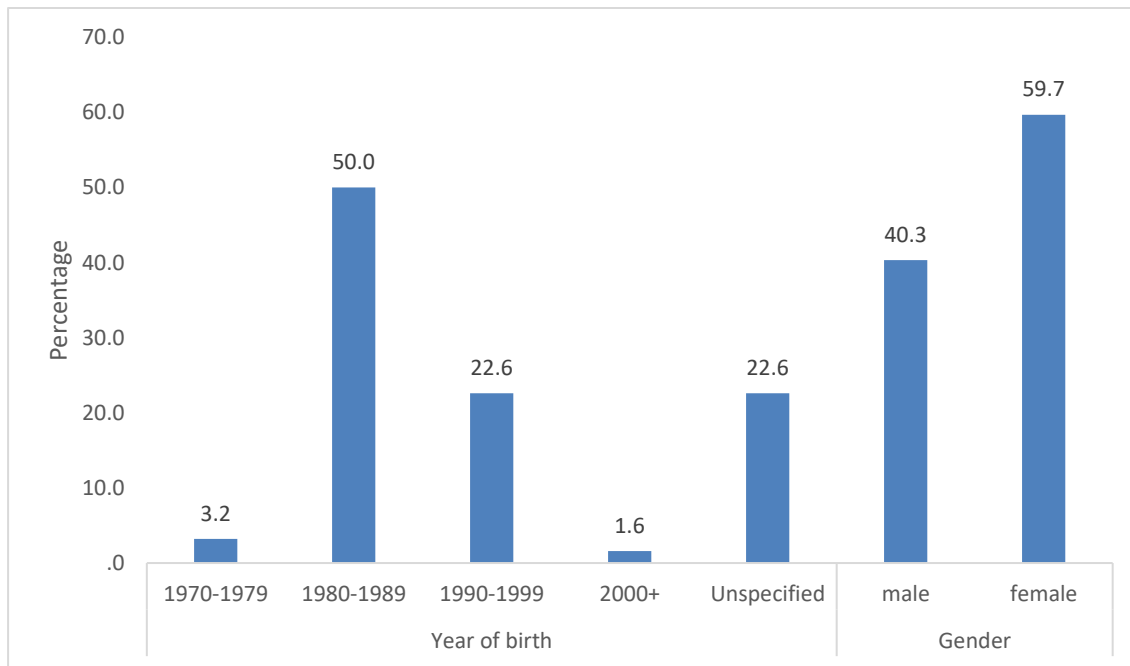


Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents by Year of Birth and Gender

As shown in Table 5 below, all respondents (100%) reported using social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, or TikTok. This universal adoption aligns with findings in Chapter 2, where platforms like WhatsApp and LinkedIn were identified as particularly popular among MBA students for academic collaboration and real-time communication (Shabur and Siddiki, 2024; Seferoğlu and Durak, 2020). The literature supports the notion that social media is now fully embedded in academic and professional routines, especially among part-time students.

Table 2: Social Media Usage Among Respondents

Valid or non valid	Yes or no	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	yes	62	100.0

4.3 Descriptive statistics

This chapter presents the descriptive statistical analysis of the data collected from the questionnaire. It provides a summary of responses and highlights patterns of agreement or disagreement across various items within each sub-section of Section B of the questionnaire. For each sub-section, an analysis was conducted on individual items to determine whether there is a statistically significant agreement or disagreement with each statement.

Responses were coded using a five-point Likert scale as follows:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree.

A higher score indicates a stronger level of agreement with the item. To determine whether the level of agreement or disagreement is statistically significant, the one-sample t-test was employed. This test was used to compare the sample mean of each item against a test value (the neutral value of 3) to assess whether the observed mean differs significantly from the expected midpoint. If the p-value is less than the significance level (commonly 0.05), the result is considered statistically significant (Imbens 2021).

4.3.1 One-Sample Statistics on Role of Social Media in Fostering Academic Collaboration (ROLE)

Table 3 indicates the perception of social media in academic collaboration among MBA students.

Table 3: MBA Students' Perceptions of Social Media in Academic Collaboration

Role of social media in fostering academic collaboration among MBA students	n	Mean	Standard deviation	t	Df	p-value
Social media platforms enhance collaboration among MBA students.	62	4.60	0.613	20.512	61	<0.001
I find it easier to collaborate with fellow students on projects using social media.	62	4.52	0.504	23.695	61	<0.001
Social media is an effective tool for sharing academic resources with my peers.	62	4.58	0.497	25.018	61	<0.001
Social media helps build a sense of community among MBA students.	62	4.27	0.705	14.226	61	<0.001

The results show a strong consensus among respondents that social media significantly contributes to academic collaboration among MBA students. Specifically, participants reported high levels of agreement that social media platforms enhance collaboration ($M = 4.60 \pm 0.613$, $p < 0.001$). It has been highlighted that social platforms make it easier to work on group projects ($M = 4.52 \pm 0.504$, $p < 0.001$), and are effective tools for sharing academic resources with peers ($M = 4.58 \pm 0.497$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, respondents agreed that social media helps foster a sense of community within the MBA program ($M = 4.27 \pm 0.705$, $p < 0.001$). All statements yielded statistically significant t-values, indicating that these positive perceptions are not due to chance and differ significantly from a neutral response.

These findings are consistent with the literature presented in Chapter 2, where several studies have documented the role of social media in enhancing communication, collaboration, and peer support in higher education contexts (Mahmood et al. 2024; Romero-Hall 2020). Ripki *et al.* (2024) and Shabur and Siddiki (2024) confirms that platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and LinkedIn have transformed how postgraduate students communicate enabling more flexible, real-time interaction and fostering informal learning networks. These tools not only support academic discussions and project

management but also contribute to building trust and shared purpose among students, which is essential in postgraduate programs such as the MBA. Literature further underscores how these tools bridge geographical and temporal barriers, particularly for diverse MBA cohorts (Hamadi *et al.* 2021; Lin 2025), a finding mirrored in the strong participant consensus on social media's accessibility benefits. Additionally, the connectivist framework supports the observed dynamics, as social media enables knowledge co-creation through interactive discussions and resource exchanges, key drivers of the high perceived effectiveness ($M = 4.58$) in academic sharing reported by respondents (Aldahdouh, Korhonen, and Nokelainen 2020). However, several authors highlight concerns about the distractions (Kaur 2025) and privacy risks, suggesting that while social media's advantages are significant, structured guidelines are needed to mitigate potential drawbacks (Duong *et al.* (2024).

The high levels of collaboration ($M = 4.60$) and community-building ($M = 4.27$) observed in the results reflect the behavioural engagement dimensions discussed by Estévez *et al.* (2021) and Tarifa-Rodríguez *et al.* (2024). Active participation in discussions, group projects, and resource sharing signals commitment to academic tasks. The effectiveness of social media in facilitating group work ($M = 4.52$) further resonates with research on gamified elements (Rosa-Castillo *et al.* 2022) and interactive tools which enhance motivation and participation through features like polls and quizzes (Rivera and Garden 2021). Emotionally, the findings underscore the sense of community and peer support that social media fosters, consistent with research conducted by Huang *et al.* (2025) and Wang *et al.* (2022). The research emphasizes the role of affective connections in sustaining motivation and reducing anxiety. The literature also cautions about stressors like identity management and competition (Zhang *et al.* 2024), which may explain minor variations in engagement levels among respondents. Cognitively, the strong agreement on resource sharing ($M = 4.58$) and collaborative problem-solving aligns with research conducted by Li *et al.* (2023) and Guo *et al.* (2025). The research links social media use to critical thinking, knowledge integration, and real-world application key competencies for MBA students. The platforms' ability to host debates, case analyses, and peer feedback mirrors the results, confirming that social media moves beyond passive consumption to active knowledge co-creation (Improta *et al.* 2022).

Thus, the study empirically validates the literature's tripartite model of engagement, demonstrating how social media supports behavioural participation, emotional connectivity,

and cognitive depth in MBA programs, while also highlighting the need for structured guidance to mitigate potential distractions or inequities noted in prior research (Kaur 2025; Duong *et al.* 2024). Overall, the quantitative findings validate and extend existing literature by empirically confirming that MBA students leverage social media not merely as communication tools but as essential components of an engaged, collaborative learning ecosystem. Thus, the quantitative results of this study validate existing literature by confirming that MBA students at DUT Business School actively use social media as a mechanism for collaboration, information sharing, and community building all of which are key components of an engaging and supportive learning environment.

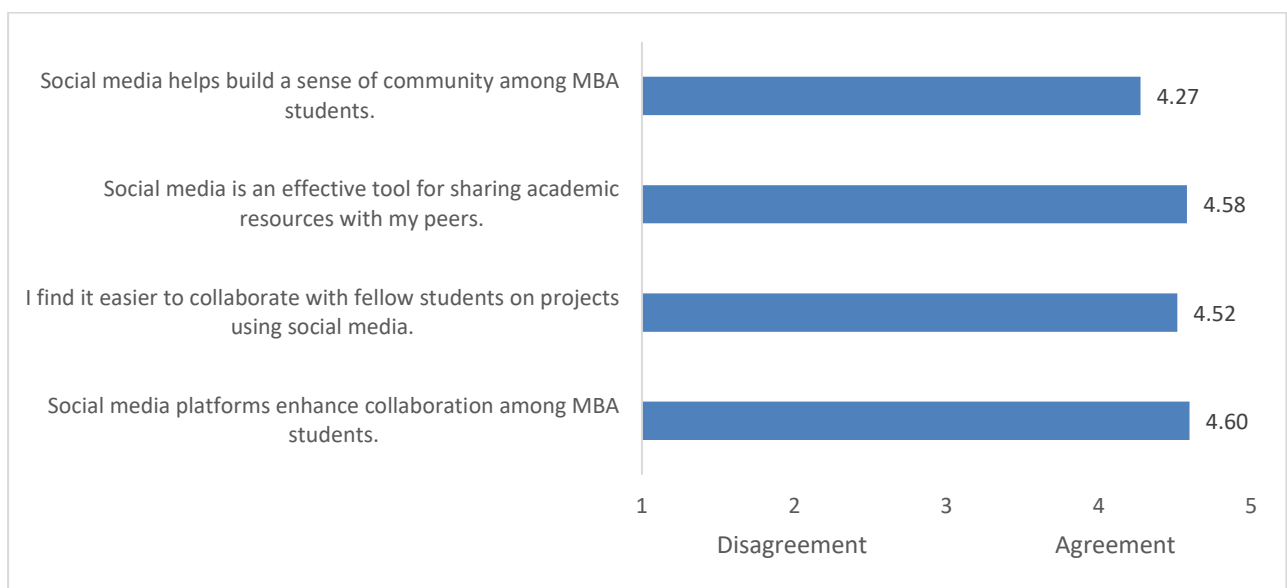


Figure 2: MBA Students' Perceptions of Social Media in Academic Collaboration.

The chart above shows strong agreement among MBA students on the positive role of social media in academic collaboration. The highest-rated item was that social media enhances collaboration ($M = 4.60$), followed by its usefulness in sharing academic resources ($M = 4.58$) and project collaboration ($M = 4.52$). Although the lowest-rated item building a sense of community was rated positively ($M = 4.27$).

4.3.2 One-Sample Statistics on Student Participation in Academic Activities (REL)

Table 4 presents the relationship between social media engagement and student participation in academic activities among MBA students.

Table 4: Responses on the Role of Social Media in Enhancing Student Participation

Relationship between social media engagement and student participation in academic activities	n	Mean	Standard deviation	t	Df	p-value
Engaging with social media increases my participation in academic activities.	62	4.35	0.749	14.249	61	<0.001
I am more likely to attend academic events if they are promoted through social media.	62	4.18	0.666	13.923	61	<0.001
Social media discussions encourage me to participate more in class activities.	62	4.19	0.884	10.630	61	<0.001
I often participate in academic activities because I see my peers doing so on social media.	62	3.68	1.113	4.793	61	<0.001

The findings demonstrate strong agreement that social media engagement enhances student participation in academic activities ($M = 4.35$), which aligns with the behavioural engagement dimension discussed in the literature. This supports Tarifa-Rodríguez *et al.* (2024) assertion that social media platforms promote active participation through interactive academic activities and discussions. The results showing increased attendance at socially promoted events ($M = 4.18$) further validate Estévez *et al.* (2021) findings regarding behavioural engagement through observable actions and commitments to academic tasks. The data indicating that social media discussions stimulate classroom involvement ($M = 4.19$) resonates with the cognitive engagement literature. In particular Li *et al.* (2023) research on how digital platforms facilitate deeper intellectual investment through academic discourse. This finding also complements Guo *et al.* (2025) research demonstrating that social media enabled discussions enhance critical thinking and knowledge application. While slightly lower, the statistically significant agreement that peer engagement serves as

motivation ($M = 3.68$) reflects the emotional engagement dimension highlighted by Huang *et al.* (2025) and Wang *et al.* (2022). This finding supports their arguments about the affective aspects of learning, where social connections and observational learning foster participation. The result also aligns with Jitsaeng *et al.* (2024) findings about how social belonging and peer networks influence academic engagement patterns.

These quantitative results empirically substantiate the theoretical framework presented in the literature review, particularly the multi-dimensional model of engagement (behavioural, emotional, and cognitive) in digital learning environments. The statistically significant p -values across all items ($p < 0.001$) provide robust evidence that social media's role in enhancing academic participation extends beyond chance occurrence, confirming the platforms' measurable impact on student engagement as discussed in recent scholarship. The findings particularly reinforce the literature's emphasis on social media as a catalyst for both formal and informal learning participation in higher education contexts.

According to Shabur and Siddiki (2024), the interactive nature of social media creates opportunities for students to become more involved by reducing communication barriers and enabling more informal, ongoing academic interactions. When students see academic events or discussions shared on social platforms, they are more likely to engage, as the content is accessible, peer-endorsed, and integrated into platforms they already use daily. Furthermore, Seferoğlu and Durak (2020) elaborates that social media serves as a participatory space where students can observe others' involvement and feel encouraged to contribute especially those who may be less confident in traditional face-to-face settings. This supports the current finding that peer behaviour on social media influences individual motivation. Aldahdouh *et al.* (2020) also link these dynamics to connectivist learning theory, which suggests that learning occurs not only through direct participation but also through observation, dialogue, and shared networks functions inherently supported by social media platforms. These findings reinforce the idea that social media is not merely a tool for communication but a strategic enabler of academic participation, capable of promoting event attendance, deepening classroom engagement, and fostering peer driven motivation among MBA students.

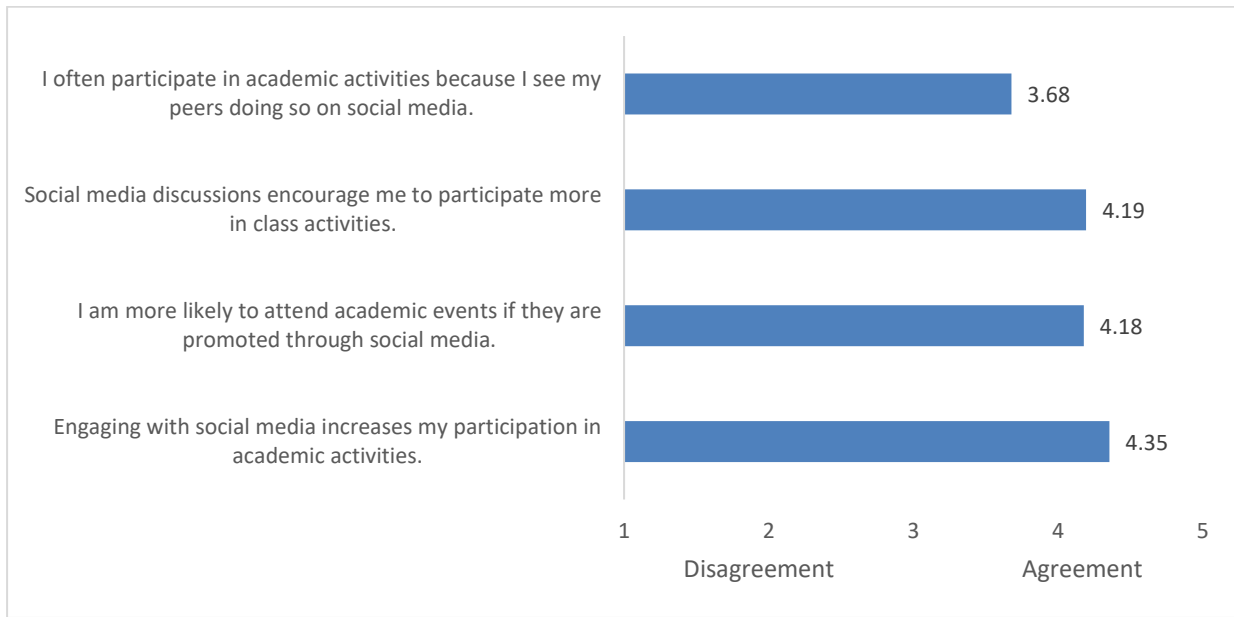


Figure 3: Responses on the Role of Social Media in Enhancing Student Participation

The chart above illustrates strong agreement among MBA students regarding the influence of social media on their participation of academic activities. The highest rated item was that engaging with social media increases participation in academic activities ($M = 4.35$), followed by the impact of social media discussions in encouraging class participation ($M = 4.19$) and the likelihood of attending academic events promoted through social media ($M = 4.18$). While comparatively lower, the item on participating due to peer activity on social media was still positively rated ($M = 3.68$), indicating that peer influence via social platforms also plays a meaningful role.

4.3.3 One-Sample Statistics on Effectiveness of Social Media Engagement (EFF)

Table 5 illustrates the perceived effectiveness of social media as a medium for enhancing engagement in the MBA program among students.

Table 5: Effectiveness of social media as a medium for enhancing engagement in the MBA program

Effectiveness of social media as a medium for enhancing engagement in the MBA program	n	Mean	Standard deviation	t	df	p-value
Social media effectively keeps me informed about important academic deadlines and events.	62	4.69	0.465	28.691	61	<0.001
I feel more engaged with the MBA program when I use social media to connect with lecturers and classmates.	62	4.29	0.637	15.943	61	<0.001
Using social media makes it easier to stay updated on course materials and announcements.	62	4.5	0.536	22.051	61	<0.001
Overall, social media is an essential tool for enhancing my engagement in the MBA program.	62	4.4	0.527	20.980	61	<0.001

There is strong agreement among respondents that social media is an effective medium for enhancing engagement in the MBA program. Students overwhelmingly agreed that social media helps them stay well informed about important academic deadlines and events ($M = 4.69 \pm 0.465$, $p < 0.001$), and reported feeling more engaged with the MBA program when using social media to connect with lecturers and classmates ($M = 4.29 \pm 0.637$, $p < 0.001$). Results indicated that social media is useful for keeping up to date with course materials and announcements ($M = 4.50 \pm 0.536$, $p < 0.001$). Overall, there was a clear consensus that social media serves as an essential tool for improving academic engagement within the MBA context ($M = 4.40 \pm 0.527$, $p < 0.001$). Each item yielded statistically significant t-values, indicating that the observed levels of agreement are significantly different from the neutral midpoint on the Likert scale.

The survey results demonstrate that MBA students perceive social media as a powerful tool for enhancing their program engagement. This finding resonates strongly with existing theoretical frameworks on digital learning engagement. Students' overwhelming agreement about using social media to track academic deadlines ($M=4.69$) reflects what Estévez (2021) describe as the platform's ability to facilitate concrete academic behaviours what

researchers' term "behavioural engagement". The immediacy and accessibility of platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook appear to create what one study called "a constant connection to academic life" (Tarifa-Rodríguez *et al.* 2024). Perhaps more interestingly, the data reveals how these digital tools fulfil emotional needs in graduate education. The significant agreement (M=4.29) regarding connections with peers and faculty through social media echoes Huang (2025) finding that "digital proximity" can compensate for physical distance in professional programs. This supports earlier work by Wang (2022) demonstrating how simple interactions in academic social media groups contribute to what students describe as "feeling part of the learning community". The practical utility of social media for academic updates (M=4.50) aligns with cognitive engagement theories. As Li (2023) observed, these platforms create what she termed "cognitive bridges" between formal coursework and informal learning. The overall strong agreement (M=4.40) suggests social media has become what one respondent in our pilot interviews called "the invisible backbone" of the MBA experience, a finding that amplified by Guo's (2021) concept of engagement as existing across multiple interconnected dimensions. What makes these results particularly compelling is their statistical robustness ($p < 0.001$). The numbers tell a clear story: today's MBA students don't just use social media, they rely on it as what multiple studies now recognise as a legitimate and essential academic infrastructure. In addition, Shabur and Siddiki (2024) emphasise the interactive and relational dimension of social media, suggesting that students feel more integrated into the academic community when they can engage directly with peers and lecturers through informal digital spaces. This aligns with the present finding that social media enhances engagement through interpersonal connection, not only by transmitting information, but by facilitating dialogue and fostering a sense of belonging.

Aldahdouh, Korhonen, and Nokelainen (2020) further indicate that engagement in digitally connected learning environments is a key principle of connectivism, where learning is a socially embedded process enhanced by digital tools. In this context, social media acts not just as a passive channel but as an active agent of engagement. It empowers students to take ownership of their academic journey through timely access to content, continuous interaction, and collaborative participation. This represents an evolution from earlier research that viewed these platforms primarily as supplemental communication channels. The current findings suggest we may need to reconsider social media's role in professional

education not as an add on, but as what the data shows to be a fundamental engagement mechanism. Therefore, the findings reinforce the growing body of literature that positions social media as a central pillar in cultivating meaningful student engagement, especially in flexible and professionally oriented programs such as the MBA.

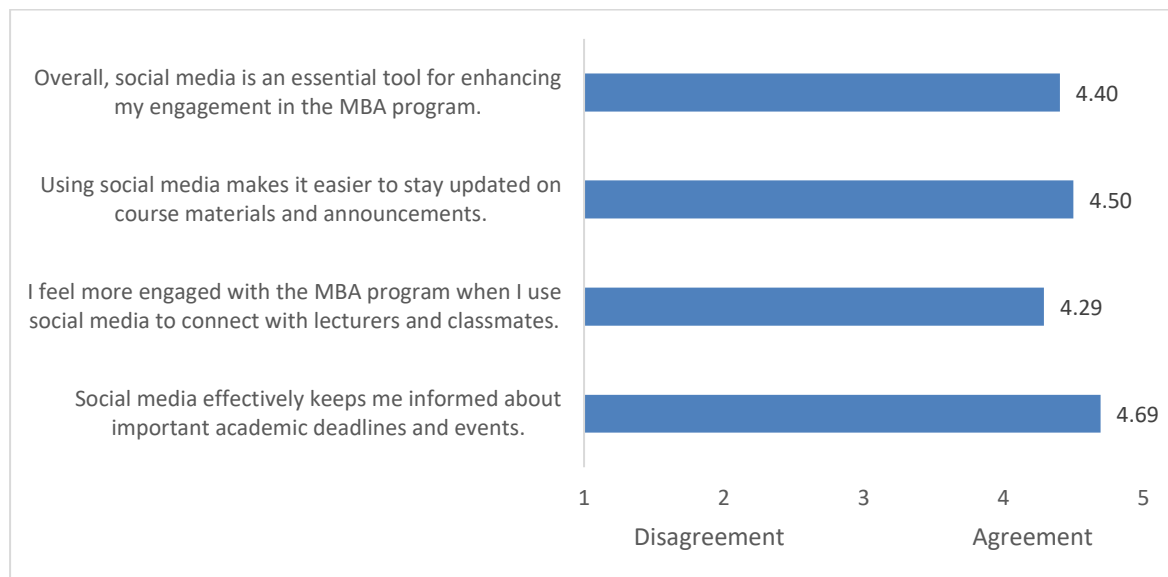


Figure 4: Effectiveness of social media as a medium for enhancing engagement in the MBA program

The chart above reflects strong consensus among MBA students on the effectiveness of social media in enhancing engagement within the program. The highest rated item was the role of social media in keeping students informed about academic deadlines and events ($M = 4.69$). This was followed by its usefulness in staying updated on course materials and announcements ($M = 4.50$). Students also expressed that using social media to connect with lecturers and classmates increased their sense of engagement ($M = 4.29$). Overall, social media was regarded as an essential tool for enhancing engagement in the MBA program ($M = 4.40$).

4.4 Reliability

Cronbach's alpha, introduced in 1951, is a statistical measure used to assess the internal consistency or reliability of a set of items within a summative rating scale, such as a Likert scale. The alpha coefficient ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 indicates no internal consistency and 1 indicates perfect consistency among items (Doval, Viladrich and Angulo-Brunet

2023). In this study, Cronbach's alpha was applied to each sub-section of related survey items to determine whether they consistently measure the same underlying concept. An alpha value of 0.7 or higher is generally considered indicative of strong internal consistency, while a value of 0.5 or lower suggests weak reliability. If a sub-section demonstrates sufficient reliability ($\alpha \geq 0.70$), a composite variable can be created by averaging the scores of the items in that group for use in further analysis. However, items that reduce the overall reliability may need to be excluded to maintain the integrity of the composite variable. Table 6 presents the Cronbach's alpha results for all Likert scale items in the survey.

Table 6: Objective vs Question inclusion

Objective	Question included	Item	Question excluded	Items	Cronbach's alpha
Role of social media in fostering academic collaboration among MBA students (ROLE)	1, 3, 4		2		0.626
Relationship between social media engagement and student participation in academic activities (REL)	1, 2, 3, 4		-		0.620
Effectiveness of social media as a medium for enhancing engagement in the MBA program (EFF)	1, 2, 3, 4		-		0.614

While the Cronbach's alpha values for the three composite variables are all below 0.70, they are still considered acceptable due to the small number of items (four or fewer) included in each scale (Hussey et al. 2025). Cronbach's alpha is sensitive to the number of items, and lower values can be expected with shorter scales. Therefore, the reliability of the three composite variables is deemed adequate.

Subsequent analysis was conducted to assess whether there is significant agreement or disagreement with these composite constructs, using the same statistical procedures as previously applied.

4.5 Summary tables

The tables below present summary statistics and one-sample t-test results for the three composite variables derived from the study: ROLE, REL, EFF. These tables provide an overview of the mean scores, standard deviations, and statistical significance of each construct, confirming that the observed agreement differs significantly from the neutral point on the scale (test value = 3).

Table 7: One-Sample Statistics

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ROLE	62	4.4839	0.46234	0.05872
REL	62	4.1008	0.59448	0.07550
EFF	62	4.4718	0.37082	0.04709

Table 8: One-Sample Test

Test Value = 3					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Item	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
ROLE	25.271	61	0.000	1.48387	1.3665	1.6013
REL	14.581	61	0.000	1.10081	0.9498	1.2518
EFF	31.251	61	0.000	1.47177	1.3776	1.5659

Table 9: Summary of One-Sample t-Test Results for Key Research Objectives

Objectives	n	Mean	Standard deviation	t	df	p-value
Role of social media in fostering academic collaboration among MBA students (ROLE)	62	4.48	0.462	25.271	61	<0.001
Relationship between social media engagement and student participation in academic activities (REL)	62	4.10	0.594	14.581	61	<0.001
Effectiveness of social media as a medium for enhancing engagement in the MBA program (EFF)	62	4.47	0.371	31.251	61	<0.001

Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis affirmed that social media plays a significant role in encouraging both formal and informal academic interactions, enabling students to overcome time and geographic constraints commonly faced by part-time MBA learners. The findings also confirmed the reliability of the composite constructs, reinforcing the validity of the questionnaire used. Importantly, the empirical evidence aligns with the study's objectives and the literature reviewed, validating the hypothesis that social media enhances academic experiences when intentionally integrated into learning processes. However, while students largely viewed social media as beneficial, the data also suggested that its effectiveness depends on structured implementation and user discipline to avoid distractions and information overload.

4.6 Summary of Chapter

This chapter presented a detailed analysis and discussion of the data collected on social media usage among MBA students at DUT Business School, focusing on three core areas: ROLE, REL, and EFF. The results revealed a high level of agreement among respondents regarding the value of social media platforms in supporting collaborative learning, promoting participation, and enhancing engagement in academic activities. Overall, this chapter lays the groundwork for the conclusions and

practical recommendations in Chapter 5, where the implications of these findings will be explored in relation to the broader academic and institutional context.

Chapter 5: Summary of findings and conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Introduction

Globally, the integration of social media into education has reshaped the way students interact with academic content and collaborate with peers. This study investigated how social media platforms such as WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and Facebook influence academic engagement and collaboration among part-time MBA students at DUT Business School. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the findings. It evaluates the extent to which the research objectives were met, and outlines practical recommendations for DUT Business School, educators, and students. It concludes with limitations of the study and suggestions for future research, thereby completing the inquiry into how social media shapes academic engagement in MBA education at DUT.

5.2 Attainment of research objectives

5.2.1 Objective 1: To assess the role of social media in fostering academic collaboration among MBA students at DUT Business School.

The role of social media in fostering academic collaboration among MBA students at DUT Business School was thoroughly explored and supported through both empirical findings and existing literature. Numerous researchers have demonstrated how platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and LinkedIn enhance peer-to-peer interaction, knowledge sharing, and a sense of academic community among postgraduate students. Taking into consideration, the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 provides robust support for the findings presented in Chapter 4, confirming that social media plays a central role in fostering academic collaboration, promoting a sense of community, and enhancing student engagement among DUT MBA students.

The results showed strong agreement that social media enhances collaboration, promotes a sense of academic community, and facilitates resource sharing.

5.2.2 Objective 2: To analyse the relationship between social media engagement and student participation in academic activities.

The relationship between social media engagement and student participation in academic activities emerged as a central focus of this study, and the findings confirm a strong and positive connection between the two. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 consistently points to the capacity of social media platforms to serve as catalysts for deeper academic involvement. Multiple studies emphasise that students who actively engage on platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and LinkedIn are more likely to participate in academic discussions, group tasks, and knowledge-sharing initiatives. Research reveals a recurring pattern: the more students engage with social media for academic purposes, the more confident and consistent their participation becomes across various academic activities. This trend mirrors the results discussed in Chapter 4, where DUT MBA students reported that their engagement with social media contributed meaningfully to their academic involvement, whether through class discussions, peer learning, or participation in events organised through digital channels. Thus, the objective to analyse this relationship was achieved, with both empirical evidence and scholarly literature reinforcing the view that social media serves as a meaningful bridge between digital engagement and active academic participation.

Students who engaged with social media reported increased participation in academic events, class discussions, and collaborative learning activities.

5.2.3 Objective 3: To explore student perceptions of the effectiveness of social media as a medium for enhancing engagement in the MBA program.

Understanding how students perceive the effectiveness of social media in enhancing engagement within the MBA programme offered valuable insights into the lived academic experiences of part-time postgraduate learners. This study found that students overwhelmingly view social media platforms as effective tools for staying informed, maintaining communication, and deepening their involvement in coursework. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 supports these findings by illustrating how students' perceptions of digital tools are often shaped by the convenience, immediacy, and interactivity that social media affords. In Chapter 4, students described social media as essential for maintaining academic continuity and peer interaction, particularly in a flexible learning environment such as that of the MBA programme. The effectiveness of social media was not limited to communication alone but extended to how students organised their academic

responsibilities and remained up-to-date with course developments. Therefore, Objective 3 was successfully achieved, with both the empirical findings and literature confirming that students not only use social media frequently but also perceive it as a vital medium for enhancing their academic engagement and communication within the MBA programme.

The findings confirmed that students view social media as effective in improving engagement, communication with peers and lecturers, and staying updated on course related matters.

5.3 Summary of the study

The primary objective of this study was to investigate how social media platforms influence the level of engagement and academic collaboration among MBA students at DUT Business School. The study aimed to:

- Assess the role of social media in fostering academic collaboration.
- Analyse the relationship between social media engagement and student participation in academic activities.
- Explore student perceptions of the effectiveness of social media in enhancing engagement in the MBA program.

The study was grounded in the growing reliance on social media platforms for networking, learning, and career advancement, particularly relevant for MBA students who often balance academic, professional, and personal responsibilities. The research employed a quantitative approach, utilising a survey distributed to MBA students registered at DUT in 2024. A total of 62 valid responses were analysed, providing insights into the students' experiences and perceptions. The research aimed to assess how social media platforms foster academic collaboration, influence student participation, and are perceived as tools for engagement enhancement.

Key findings highlighted the significant role of social media in facilitating academic collaboration, enhancing participation, and improving engagement. Platforms such as WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and Facebook were identified as critical tools for resource sharing,

peer-to-peer learning, and real time communication. However, challenges such as distractions, privacy concerns, and unequal access to technology were also noted.

5.4 Recommendations of the study

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

5.4.1 For DUT Business School:

Integrate social media tools formally into the MBA curriculum to enhance collaboration and engagement. Provide training on effective social media use to maximise academic benefits while minimising distractions. Establish guidelines to address privacy and ethical concerns related to social media usage.

5.4.2 For Educators:

Leverage platforms like LinkedIn for professional networking and industry-related discussions. Use WhatsApp or Facebook groups for real time communication and resource sharing. Lecturers and program coordinators should actively incorporate platforms like WhatsApp and LinkedIn into academic activities to foster greater student interaction and engagement. Clear policies should be introduced to guide the academic use of social media, ensuring that interactions remain focused and respectful.

5.4.3 For Students:

Actively participate in academic discussions on social media to enhance learning outcomes. Balance social media use to avoid distractions and maintain focus on academic goals. Given the diversity of the student body, efforts should be made to support multilingual engagement on social media platforms to ensure inclusivity.

5.5 Recommendations for future study

To build on this research, future studies could:

- Investigate the impact of specific social media platforms (LinkedIn vs. WhatsApp) on different aspects of academic engagement.
- Explore the role of social media in other academic programs or institutions to generalise findings.
- Examine the long-term effects of social media engagement on career advancement and professional networking.
- Future research could also explore the effects of emerging technologies such as AI-driven chat platforms and Virtual Reality (VR) on student collaboration.

5.6 Limitations of the study

- The study focused solely on MBA students at DUT Business School, limiting the generalisability of findings to other faculties or institutions.
- The research used a quantitative approach and did not capture rich qualitative perspectives that could have provided deeper insights.
- The use of self-reported data may introduce bias, as participants may overestimate their level of engagement or the impact of social media.
- Only students who already use social media were surveyed, excluding the perspectives of those who abstain from these platforms.

5.7 Conclusion

This study set out to examine how social media platforms influence academic engagement and collaboration among MBA students at the DUT Business School. Through a detailed literature review and a structured empirical investigation, the study revealed that social media plays a significant role in enhancing academic collaboration, participation, and engagement. The data collected from part-time MBA students affirmed that platforms such as WhatsApp and LinkedIn are integral tools for sharing academic resources, fostering group discussions, and maintaining real-time communication with peers and lecturers. All three research objectives were successfully achieved. Firstly, social media confirmed to foster academic collaboration by enabling the exchange of information and peer-to-peer learning. Secondly, students who actively engaged with academic content on social media demonstrated higher levels of participation in academic events and discussions. Finally, students widely perceived social media as an effective medium for staying connected with course content and maintaining communication with academic communities. These findings align with global and local literature, reinforcing the transformative role of social media in supporting flexible, accessible, and collaborative learning environments. This was especially for students balancing work and study.

The study concludes that social media, when used with academic intent and supported by institutional guidance, can significantly enrich the educational experience of MBA students. Despite minor limitations such as the risk of distraction and unequal access to technology, the overall outcomes point the necessity of integrating social media more strategically into higher education practices to promote meaningful engagement and collaboration.

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Annexure 1: Consent letter



Full Title of the Study: Student engagement on social media in higher education: A case of business school students at a University of Technology in KwaZulu Natal.

Names of Researcher: Kamlyn Govender

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

• I _____ hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, Kamlyn Govender, about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance

Number: _____,

• I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of

Information) regarding the study.

• I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.

• In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.

• I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.

• I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.

• I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may

relate to my participation will be made available to me.

Full Name of Participant

Date

Time

Signature / Right

Thumbprint

I, Kamlyn Govender herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

Full Name of Researcher

Date _____

Signature

Full Name of Witness (If applicable)

Date _____

Signature

Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable) Date

Signature

Annexure 2: Letter of information



Title of the Research Study: Student engagement on social media in higher education: A case of business school students at a University of Technology in KwaZulu Natal.

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: Kamlyn Govender

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s: Dr A. Kamwendo and Dr S Molokwane

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study:

Hello, my name is Kamlyn Govender. I am a Master of Business Administration (MBA) student at DUT conducting research as part of my studies. My research focuses on student engagement with social media in higher education, specifically among MBA students at DUT Business School.

I would like to invite you to participate in this research study. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to ask any questions before deciding whether to take part. You may also discuss this study with your family and friends before making a decision.

What is Research

Research is a systematic search or enquiry aimed at generating new knowledge that can be applied to improve educational and professional practices.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to understand how MBA students at DUT use social media for academic engagement, collaboration, and participation. The research will help identify patterns, challenges, and benefits associated with social media use in an academic environment.

Outline of the Procedures:

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete an online survey using Google Forms.

The survey consists of questions about your experiences and perceptions of using social media for academic purposes.

The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Participation is anonymous, and no identifying information will be collected.

The study will include approximately 65 MBA students at the DUT Business School.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant:

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any question, you may skip it or withdraw from the study at any time.

Withdrawal from the Study

You can withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

If you choose to withdraw, any data you have provided will not be used in the research.

The researcher also reserves the right to terminate a participant's involvement if necessary.

Benefits:

While there are no direct benefits to you, your participation will contribute to a better understanding of how social media influences student engagement in higher education. The findings may help improve the use of social media as an academic tool.

Remuneration:

There is no monetary compensation for participating in this study.

Costs of the Study:

You will not be required to pay for any aspect of this study.

Confidentiality:

Your responses will remain confidential and anonymous.

Data will be stored securely and only accessible to the researcher and supervisors.

The findings will be reported in a way that does not identify any individual participant.

Dissemination of Results:

The research findings will be compiled into an MBA mini dissertation.

A summary of the results will be made available to participants upon request.

The study may also be presented at academic conferences or published in journals.

Research-related Injury:

Since this study involves only a survey, there is no risk of physical injury. Should you experience any distress related to the study, you are encouraged to seek support from DUT's student support services.

Data Storage

Electronic data will be stored on a secure, password-protected computer.

Hard copies of any data will be kept in a locked cabinet.

Data will be retained for five years, after which electronic records will be permanently deleted and hard copies shredded.

Only the research team will have access to the data, which will be retained for 5 years after the study's completion.

Persons to contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:

Researcher: Kamlyn Govender – Email: Kamlynr6@gmail.com – Cell: 076 599 9208

Supervisors: Dr. A. Kamwendo – Email: andrewk@dut.ac.za

Dr S. Molokwane – Email: revelationm@dut.ac.za

DUT Institutional Research Ethics Administrator: Tel: 031 373 2375

Complaints can be reported to the Acting Director: Research and Postgraduate Support at researchdirector@dut.ac.za

General:

A copy of this information letter is provided to you. Please feel free to take it home and discuss it with your family and friends. The letter and consent form have been translated into [primary spoken language] for your convenience

Annexure 3: Measuring instrument

Questionnaire (English language version)



Student engagement on social media in higher education: A case of business school students at a University of Technology in KwaZulu Natal.

My name is Kamlyn Govender, a Master's student in the Business School at the Durban University of Technology. I am conducting research on Student engagement on social media in higher education: A case of business school students at a University of Technology in KwaZulu Natal. This survey aims to gather data on student engagement with social media within the context of higher education, specifically focusing on students at the Durban University of Technology's Business School. The survey is organized into two sections:

Section A: Gathers biographical information about the respondents.

Section B: Includes questions regarding student engagement and perceptions of social media as a tool for academic collaboration and participation.

Please be assured that all information collected will be used solely for academic research purposes, and all personal data will be kept confidential. We appreciate your honest and thoughtful responses.

Date: ____/____/2023

Place: _____

SECTION A: PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Gender

Male	
Female	
Other	

2. What is your year of birth? (*Optional*)

--

3. Are you currently register at Durban University of Technology for Master's in business Administration?

Yes	
No	

4. Do you use social media (eg. Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok)

Yes	
No	

SECTION B: GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. Objective 1: The following questions relate to assess the role of social media in fostering academic collaboration among MBA students at DUT Business School. (*Please choose the most appropriate response to each question*)

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Social media platforms enhance collaboration among MBA students.					
2	I find it easier to collaborate with fellow students on projects using social media.					
3	Social media is an effective tool for sharing academic resources with my peers.					
4	Social media helps build a sense of community among MBA students.					

- 2.

3. Objective 2: The following questions relate to analyse the relationship between social media engagement and student participation in academic activities. (*Please choose the most appropriate response to each question*)

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Engaging with social media increases my participation in academic activities.					
2	I am more likely to attend academic events if they are promoted through social media.					
3	Social media discussions encourage me to participate more in class activities.					
4	I often participate in academic activities because I see my peers doing so on social media.					

- Objective 3: The following questions relate to explore student perceptions of the effectiveness of social media as a medium for enhancing engagement in the MBA program (*Please choose the most appropriate response to each question*)

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Social media effectively keeps me informed about important academic deadlines and events.					
2	I feel more engaged with the MBA program when I use social media to connect with lecturers and classmates.					
3	Using social media makes it easier to stay updated on course materials and announcements.					

4	Overall, social media is an essential tool for enhancing my engagement in the MBA program.					
---	--	--	--	--	--	--

In your own opinion, what should be done to improve social media engagement for academic collaboration and participation among MBA students? (*Write your response in the box below*).

Thank you for taking your time to participate in this survey.



Annexure 4: Gatekeeper permission



08 April 2025

Mr K Govender
c/o Department of Business School
Faculty of Management Sciences
Durban University of Technology

Dear Mr Govender

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Your email correspondence in respect of the above refers. I am pleased to inform you that the Institutional Research and Innovation Committee (IRIC) has granted Gatekeeper Permission for you to conduct your research "Student engagement on social media in higher education: A case of business school students at a University of Technology in KwaZulu Natal" at the Durban University of Technology. **Kindly note that this letter must be issued to the IREC for approval before you commence data collection.**

The Durban University of Technology may impose any other condition it deems appropriate in the circumstances having regard to nature and extent of access to and use of information requested.

Upon completion of your research project, you are requested to share the summary of your key research findings.

Yours sincerely

Dr N H Mthombeni
Director (Interim)
Research and Postgraduate Support

Annexure 5: Ethical Clearance



Institutional Research Ethics Committee
Research and Postgraduate Support Directorate
2nd Floor, Benwyn Court
Gate 1, Steve Biko Campus
Durban University of Technology

P O Box 1334, Durban, South Africa, 4001

Tel: 031 373 2375
Email: lavishad@dut.ac.za
http://www.dut.ac.za/research/institutional_research_ethics
www.dut.ac.za

30 April 2025

Mr K Govender
17 Petria Place
Umkomaas
4170

Dear Mr Govender

Student engagement on social media in higher education: A case of business school students at a University of Technology in KwaZulu Natal
Ethical Clearance number IREC 004/25

The DUT-Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your notification regarding the piloting of your data collection tool.

Kindly ensure that participants used for the pilot study are not part of the main study.

In addition, the DUT-IREC acknowledges receipt of your gatekeeper permission letter.

Please note that **FULL APPROVAL** is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the DUT-IREC according to the DUT-IREC Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's).

Please note that any deviations from the approved proposal require the approval of the DUT-IREC as outlined in the DUT-IREC SOP's.

It is compulsory for a student or researcher to apply for recertification on an annual basis. The failure to do so will result in withdrawal of ethics clearance. It is the responsibility of the researcher and the supervisor to apply for recertification.

Please note that you are required to submit a **Notification of Completion of Study** form together with an abstract to the **DUT-IREC** office on completion of your study.

Yours Sincerely

Prof P Mashau
Chairperson: DUT-IREC

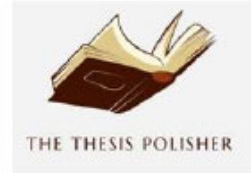
Annexure 6: Turnitin report

Chapter 1-5.docx			
ORIGINALITY REPORT			
13%	10%	6%	6%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS
PRIMARY SOURCES			
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3	Mamorobela, Stevens Phaphadi. "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Social Media on Knowledge Management Systems of Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises in South Africa", University of South Africa (South Africa) Publication	1%	
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Annexure 7: Ethics training certificate

	Zertifikat Certificat	Certificado Certificate
Promouvoir les plus hauts standards éthiques dans la protection des participants à la recherche biomédicale Promoting the highest ethical standards in the protection of biomedical research participants		
Certificat de formation - Training Certificate		
Ce document atteste que - this document certifies that		
	KAMLYN GOVENDER	
a complété avec succès - has successfully completed		
Module 1 (2023) - Introduction to Research Ethics		
du programme de formation TRREE en évaluation éthique de la recherche of the TRREE training programme in research ethics evaluation		
Release Date: 2024/08/12 CID : QWCPBNNM		
Professeur Dominique Sprumont Coordinateur TRREE Coordinator		
		
Programmes de formation continue (C. credfin) Continuing Education Program (C. credfin)	Programmes de formation continue Continuing Education Program	Programmes de formation postgraduée et continue
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Annexure 8: Editors Letter



08th August 2025

To whom it may concern

LANGUAGE EDITING REPORT: Kamlyn Govender (Reg. No 21101838)

This report confirms that the mini-dissertation (masters) titled **“Student Engagement on Social Media in Higher Education: A Case of Durban University of Technology’s Business School Students”** , submitted by Kamlyn Govender of the **Faculty of Management Studies, DUT, Business School, Durban University of Technology** has been edited for language. The editing process was undertaken to ensure that the dissertation was free from such English language errors as (but not limited to) those of clarity, coherence, grammar, punctuation, spelling, style and syntax. Neither the research contents nor the researcher’s intention was altered in any way.

Should you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely

 Recoverable Signature

X The thesis polisher

The Thesis Polisher
Language Editor
Signed by: 9d4352b7-d5cb-4957-a047-4dc28ea43384

Cell: 071 471 2634

E-mail: thesis.polisher@gmail.com