



The Quality of Information Distributed by Clubs and Societies to Prospective Students at a South African University of Technology

By

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DECLARATION

I, Lungile Pretty Ngcobo, solemnly declare that the research presented in this dissertation, **'The Quality of Information Distributed by Clubs and Societies to Prospective Students at a South African University of Technology,'** is entirely my own original work. This investigation was conducted under my supervision and is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Business and Information Management at the Durban University of Technology. I affirm that no portion of this work has been submitted previously to any other university or institution for any academic award.

Signature:-

Date: 2025/12/09

APPROVED FOR FINAL SUBMISSION

...

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Date: 2025-12-10

PhD: Management Sciences, Business Administration (DUT)

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved mother, **Shongani Beauty Ngcobo**, whose unwavering inspiration and steadfast support were instrumental in my pursuit and completion of this Doctoral Degree.

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ABSTRACT

The effective distribution of high-quality information within higher education (HE) is foundational, critically shaping student decision-making, fostering engagement, and directly influencing overall satisfaction. While student organizations (clubs and societies) play a pivotal role in enriching campus experiences and guiding students, empirical research on their information distribution quality within South African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) remains conspicuously scarce. This dissertation directly addresses this scholarly gap by rigorously examining the intrinsic quality of information generated and distributed by these student-led entities. This investigation delineates the core attributes of information quality, including accuracy, integrity, consistency, completeness, validity, timeliness, and accessibility. Concurrently, it explores contextual factors that reinforce or diminish these attributes. Grounded in the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle and Organisational Information Theory (OIT), the research adopts a qualitative, interpretivist paradigm. This approach facilitated a profound understanding of the lived experiences and nuanced realities inherent in information management within student organizations. Primary data were systematically collected through in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions with 46 participants from 23 clubs and societies at a University of Technology (UoT) in KwaZulu-Natal. This rich qualitative dataset was triangulated with pertinent secondary data from social media platforms and a comprehensive review of academic literature, ensuring a multi-faceted and robust analysis.

Findings reveal significant, nuanced variations in student leaders' conceptual understanding of information quality and their practical quality assurance measures. Critically, systemic challenges identified include: the pervasive absence of clear, internally defined information standards; limited awareness among student leadership regarding institutional information governance; and discernible deficiencies in communication and leadership competencies. These factors collectively compromise the reliability and overall quality of information shared by student organizations. Based on these compelling empirical insights, the dissertation advances strategic

recommendations. It advocates for HEIs to proactively establish clear information policies and robust, tailored quality assurance frameworks specifically for student groups. Furthermore, it proposes strengthening collaborative partnerships between institutional management and student leadership, alongside targeted training to cultivate superior communication and leadership capabilities. Crucially, aligning institutional practices concerning student information with comprehensive guidelines from the Council on Higher Education (CHE) is underscored as essential. This study concludes by emphasizing the profound need for ongoing scholarly inquiry into quality assurance mechanisms and their measurable impact on student recruitment, retention, and institutional reputation.

Key words: *Information quality, Distribution, Higher Education, Clubs and Societies, Prospective students.*

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ACRONYMS

4IR	Fourth industrial revolution
BEC	Branch executive committee
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education
DoE	Department of Education
DUT	Durban University of Technology
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HES	Higher Education Sector
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
OIT	Organisational information theory
PDCA	Plan, Do, Check and Act
PSET	Post-school education and training
QA	Quality assurance
SGD	Student Governance and Development
SRC	Student Representative Council
UoT	University of technology
VFM	Value for money

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND THE BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The landscape of higher education (HE) today is defined by an imperative for clarity and precision. Within this complex environment, the effective distribution of quality information is not merely an administrative function; it is foundational to shaping student decision-making, fostering active engagement, and ultimately influencing overall satisfaction and academic success. At the heart of vibrant campus life, student organizations, encompassing a diverse array of clubs and societies, play a pivotal, often underestimated, role. These entities serve not only to enrich the student experience but also as vital conduits of information, particularly critical in the strategic recruitment of prospective students. However, persistent concerns regarding the veracity, relevance, and overall quality of information distributed to these future enrollees cast a shadow of doubt, raising fundamental questions about its adequacy in empowering truly informed decision-making during a crucial life transition.

This chapter lays the groundwork for this inquiry, thoroughly outlining the research background that underpins its necessity, articulating the compelling problem statement it seeks to resolve, and clearly defining the study's overarching aims, specific objectives, and guiding research questions. It underscores the escalating global importance of transparent and quality information distribution within HE, a demand amplified by the digital age. Internationally, HEIs face immense pressure to communicate with unwavering transparency and accuracy. This global imperative resonates acutely within the South African context, where national HE policies, particularly those emanating from the Council on Higher Education (CHE), vigorously emphasize accountability and robust quality assurance mechanisms across all facets of institutional operation.

Moreover, this study is uniquely positioned within the specific context of a University of Technology (UoT) setting, where students often exhibit a heightened dependence on accessible and reliable organisational communication for practical guidance and integration. In such environments, the imperative to critically evaluate the quality of

information flowing from student organizations becomes especially significant, directly impacting student enrolment, integration, and retention. By addressing these concerns, this research contributes meaningfully to both academic discourse and practical institutional strategy. This introductory chapter concludes by providing a succinct summary of the thesis structure, offering a clear roadmap that delineates how this crucial investigation is systematically unfolded across the subsequent chapters.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THIS STUDY

The distribution of quality information within higher education institutions (HEIs) plays a vital role in informing individuals about potential opportunities and challenges in an appropriate context (Mai 2013: 677). Quality of information is characterised by accuracy, integrity, consistency, completeness, validity, timeliness, and accessibility (Prakash 2018: 733). In HEIs, providing high-quality information is essential for attracting prospective students and maintaining a strong reputation. High-quality information helps reduce ambiguity by clarifying the fundamental nature and attributes of concepts, thereby helping individuals to understand instructions, explanations, examples, and theories (Chaushi and Dika 2013: 3). This study examined the distribution of information within HEIs, focusing specifically on examining the quality of information provided by clubs and societies to prospective students. In HEIs there is a growing emphasis on students transitioning from information receivers to active knowledge constructors (Santelices *et al.* 2020: 103). The provision of high-quality information in the context of HEIs is a crucial factor as it directly influences the level of accessibility for prospective students and the stability of the HEIs. Therefore, it is important to evaluate the stakeholders responsible for distributing information, particularly the clubs and societies within the scope of this research. Hence it is imperative to assess the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies.

The focus of this study is on the ability, mechanisms and motivations for distributing information, which significantly influences the quality of the information distributed by clubs and societies. There are various categories of clubs and societies within the context of higher education (HE), such as political, religious and social structures representing the interests and the needs of the student population. Each of them uses distinct methodologies and justifications for distributing information, and this study

evaluates the quality of the information they distribute. The examination in this study of the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies involved the various dimensions of quality. This study also examined the many types of information that contribute to the assessment of quality within clubs and societies, as well as the factors that influence the distribution of quality information. This encompassed a comprehensive examination of policies that govern the distribution of information to prospective students, with a focus on ensuring quality. The emphasis placed on the distribution of quality information by clubs and societies is motivated by the growing imperative to provide quality information to enable access to HE for prospective students. The study further proposed a framework for the quality of the information distributed by clubs and societies as statutory bodies that are advocating for student interests within universities.

Post 1994, a series of initiatives were implemented to enhance the opportunities for HE among individuals who had previously faced disadvantages. The execution of this activity involved utilising several Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) frameworks, and the students recognised the necessity of establishing clubs and societies to provide support to their peers (Almaiah *et al.* 2019: 74). The primary objective was to ensure that HEIs implemented policies that would support inclusion, therefore enabling those who were previously disadvantaged to obtain entry to HE. It has been emphasised by scholars that students have a significant impact on the advancement of the higher education sector (HES) and the eradicating of inequalities (Sokhela and Murhula 2022: 261; Almeida *et al.* 2022: 1139).

Over the years, clubs and societies have implemented several approaches to distribute information to prospective students. This encompasses all prospective students who need information to pursue HE and are unable to access and utilise the platforms offered by HEIs. Clubs and societies use both online and physical methods to distribute information. The way they distribute information is at their discretion, which might significantly weaken the quality. It is argued that the quality of the information distributed is crucial in HE and must be considered, since it plays a pivotal part in its success (Almaiah *et al.* 2019: 74). In this context, the focus of the study was on quality of information distributed by clubs and societies prospective students as they seek spaces to enrol at HEIs. Previous studies focused on information quality in

learning, quality learning systems and basic formal education quality (Hartwell 2020: 8; Li and Zhu 2022: 2; Asongu and Odhiambo 2019: 419). There is a lack of research focusing on the quality of information that is distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students. As a result, there is a gap in the body of knowledge pertaining to the quality distribution of information by clubs and societies especially in the South African context.

This study focused on a university of technology (UoT) that is based in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), where a deficiency in the quality of information has been observed, and there exists a historical precedent of student protests. The campuses are in two areas namely urban and semi-urban, each characterised by unique geographical dynamics. This geographical diversity enhances the relevancy of examining this phenomenon, particularly because students are coming from an area where there is a paucity of information regarding the HEIs. KwaZulu Natal is a province with high levels of poverty, and the communities are not exposed to much information concerning HE and academic opportunities. One of the campuses is situated in a township where there are evident disparities in opportunities for further education for young people, with the quality of information available being a significant contributing component. Therefore, the primary aim of this study was to investigate information quality in terms of accuracy, integrity, consistency, validity, and accessibility of the information distributed by clubs and societies to prospective HE students.

The objective of HEIs is to educate and cultivate students to effectively navigate the intricacies of the economic and societal transformation, and to generate novel insights (Ngoasheng 2021: 136). Simultaneously, they strive to build a dedication to society and democratic principles (Moodley 2022: 114). South Africa has six UoTs, which, for historical reasons, face distinctive problems and possibilities in their transformation initiative. The UoTs were established shortly after the beginning of the millennium, and they continue to be seen as key contributors to the third purpose of HEIs, which is the pursuit of economic growth and social advancement. There has been great emphasis on quality, particularly quality information, at these HEIs. Research asserts that technology is the determining criterion for a UoT and further argues that its objective is to render information practical and beneficial (Smith 2020: 40). However, these UoTs, especially the one being researched, are lacking in resources and burdened

with excessive numbers of students (Mhlongo 2021: 25) who are seeking spaces to be admitted. Despite the excessive numbers, they have a responsibility to educate mostly economically disadvantaged students who are the direct offspring of those who endured apartheid's discriminatory laws. The lack of resources available to the UoTs has created a void, allowing clubs and societies to distribute information on their behalf. However, there is a deficiency in the approaches used for examining the quality of the information they distribute, the impact of the information on prospective students, and the impact on the reputation of the HEI. These underlying problems have a detrimental implication and require attention.

1.2.1 Institutional perspectives on the quality of information distributed

The HEIs have adopted various methodologies to guide quality in information distribution. One of them is introducing community engagement programmes that reach out to a much bigger audience of prospective students. They also utilise technology through websites and social media platforms. In addition to the student leaders from clubs and societies also distribute information related to the institutions. The recognition and affiliation of clubs and societies is guided by the SRC constitution, for them to operate within the HEI. The SRC, together with Student Governance and Development (SGD) unit takes steps to ensure that every club and society that operates is recognised and has service to students as their aim. In the process of recognising clubs and societies they request them to submit their constitution, a list of 150 students that support the club or society as well as a list of the branch executive committee (BEC) members. These BEC members become the liaison with SGD in terms of accounting for any programmes done within the HEI and they usually consist of 10 members. Although participants had some operational challenges at the start of the year (2025), it is their consistent practice to distribute information. The question arises as to whether the information they distribute is of high quality or not.

1.3 RATIONALE OF THIS STUDY

The information distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students frequently lacks quality. The chairpersons and secretaries of clubs and societies in the UoT have expressed similar concerns regarding the ongoing problems with the quality of

information distributed to prospective students. Higher Education Institutions have made significant progress in ensuring the quality of information distributed to prospective students. They utilise websites and social media channels to distribute information as well having a career resource office, visiting high schools and hosting open days. Notwithstanding these attempts, there exists a substantial population of prospective students who lack resources, and the sole remedy is to approach clubs and societies to get information at the HEI gates and on social media.

Many clubs and societies in HEIs are linked to external organisations such as churches, political parties, and advocacy groups for minority communities. The presence of external organisations contributes to the quality distribution of information to prospective students. Information distributed relates to the requirements of the external organisational for recruitment of new members as well as the requirements of recruitment to the clubs and societies. To fulfil the mandates of external organisations, the clubs and societies adopt different approaches to attract students. These approaches are designed to gain popularity and recruit new members, since those who are more expressive are seen as more appealing. Information campaigns also serve the purpose of persuading votes for the Student Representative Council (SRC) elections. This frequently results in numerous strikes, during which clubs and societies intentionally distribute poor quality information. The dynamics have had a detrimental impact on prospective students at the beginning of the year. This has resulted in the lack of quality information that might assist them gain access to HE.

This study aimed to assess the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students, based on the dimensions of information quality such as accuracy, integrity, consistency, completeness, validity, and accessibility. The findings of this study will help assist clubs and societies to analyse the impact of the information they distribute to prospective students and will assist the UoT in recognising the influence of clubs and societies in terms of the quality of the information they distribute. In simple terms, the study aimed to enhance knowledge the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies. The study suggests that HEIs can effectively monitor and enhance the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies through various methods.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The quality of information distributed to prospective students by clubs and societies in HEIs is highly inconsistent. While some clubs and societies manage to distribute quality information, many others provide incomplete, outdated, or poorly verified due to the absence of standardised guidelines. As such, the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies has an enormous effect on efficiency and effectiveness of HEIs in recruiting and informing prospective students (Carlo 2018: 2). The viability and success of HEIs is substantially influenced by the quality of information distributed (Strydom and Loots 2020: 21), as the quality of information distributed has the potential to attract students and funding. Existing research highlights the challenges related to the distribution of high-quality information that is accurate and reliable, indicating a need for more investigation in this domain (Ndibuuza and Langa 2020: 120). There is a research gap in the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies within HEIs as statutory, student-run bodies that represent the academic and lifelong learning interests of students. The gap is related to what information is distributed by students and how is the quality of the information measured. A study conducted by Wickens *et al.* (2017: 46) in Canada at HEIs reveals a noteworthy finding, that 68% of HE students reported encountering difficulties with the quality of information distributed by their peers, citing poor quality as the primary issue. Despite the considerable impact of information quality in the HES, and its status as a complex multidimensional phenomenon, a complete understanding of it remains elusive. The distribution of poor-quality information significantly contributes to the prevalence of instability in the HES (Omoregie 2022: 2). Furthermore, in the context of Africa, the consequences of the distribution of information that lacks quality by students in HEIs has contributed to student protests (Boboyi and Kang'ethe 2024). South Africa has even experienced fatalities because of student protests perpetuated by a lack of quality information as well as misinformation circulated by students (Olagunju 2022: 5). Distribution of information that lacks quality can lead to misinformation which referred to unintentional spreading of wrong information and disinformation referred to as intentional spreading of inaccurate information with the aim to deceive.

Lack of quality in the information distributed in HEIs has a wide range of negative consequences which can interrupt academic processes, impede decision-making, and jeopardise interpersonal communication and comprehension (Marcellina 2020: 3). Poor quality information distributed to prospective students can lead to misinformation leading to confusion regarding courses available, entrance requirements, institutional processes and policies. Because of these challenges, protests have a negative effect on the admissions process of the HEIs (Masinde and Roux 2020: 10). In 2022, a certain UoT in KwaZulu Natal stated that “it strongly condemned the spreading of numerous false statements online, specifically related to student registration, available spaces, and confirmation of banking details” (Thwala 2022: 1). Poor-quality information can lead to prospective students having a sense of stress, anxiety, anger, powerlessness, and loss of motivation, which often contributes to negative feelings about the HEI (Badaru and Adu 2020: 18). Li and Shang (2020: 30) state that one of the most significant problems facing information seekers, including decision-makers in organisations as well as casual online users, is encountering low-quality information.

Mare *et al.* (2019: 4) highlight the mushrooming of fake social media pages which claim to distribute information on behalf of HEIs. There are challenges surrounding the quality of information, including the legitimacy of the information distributed on social media pages and through word of mouth (Badaru and Adu 2020: 18). It is therefore important to outline the policies formulated by the DHET to ensure the quality of information that is distributed. For instance, the DHET (2014: 6) white paper states that related regulations and policies on equity highlight that every South African learner should have access to learning and teaching and equal educational opportunities. However, the Evaluation of the Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act from 2008 to 2016 (DHET 2018), identifies many difficulties encountered in the execution of policies inside institutions. Based on the literature so far, there is a gap in the quality information distribution by clubs and societies in HEIs, and this has had a negative impact on HEIs' reputation and the recruitment of prospective students. Therefore, it was necessary to examine the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students.

1.5 RESEARCH AIMS

The overarching aim of this doctoral research was to undertake a comprehensive examination of the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students at a South African University of Technology. This rigorous assessment focused on several critical dimensions of information quality, specifically examining its accuracy, integrity, consistency, completeness, validity, timeliness, and accessibility.

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students.
2. To investigate the types of information distributed by clubs and societies.
3. To explore factors influencing the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies.
4. To propose a framework that can guide the quality of information distributed by students in HEIs.

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How is the quality of the information distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students ascertained?
2. What are the types of information distributed by clubs and societies?
3. What are the factors that influence the quality of the information distributed by clubs and societies?
4. What framework can be proposed to guide the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies in HE?

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

The distribution of information by clubs and societies is important considering the ongoing student strikes and lack of access that persist within HEIs. Quality information is defined as complete, concise, relevant, and timely information (Prakash 2018: 733). The study used various methods of examining quality, namely dimensions of

information quality. These findings can assist HEIs in devising strategies to address the distribution of information that lacks quality. The study will also make a substantial contribution to the knowledge that HEIs have regarding the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students. Addressing the issue of quality information is important since it plays a role in recruiting prospective students. This study contributes valuable insights to the fields of information sciences, quality, and HE.

1.9 CONTEXT OF THIS STUDY

Clubs and societies in HEIs run campaigns at the beginning of the year with the aim of assisting prospective students (Sokhela and Murhula 2022: 261). They assist prospective students with information on how to apply for funding, study spaces and many other aspects (Naidoo 2021: 1). Many of the clubs and societies are concerned with structural and educational inequalities and related power struggles. In many situations, they are mobilised because of inequalities that exist in HEIs. Sokhela and Murhula (2022: 261); Almeida *et al.* (2022: 1139) highlight that students in HEIs have a significant impact on the advancement of the HES and the eradicating of inequalities. They make their impact through running campaigns to assist prospective students with information.

Prospective students' perceptions of the quality of services provided by HEIs can be influenced by provision of adequate and trustworthy information (Mijač *et al.* 2022: 178). Good quality information distributed in the appropriate context at the right time informs potential possibilities and challenges (Mai 2013: 677). HEIs have various functions, including implementing, examining, and reporting on the management of information related to quality, and administration (Lee and Min 2021: 973). In the context of this study "quality information" in HE refers to the extent to which information is valuable to its end users which are, in this context, prospective students. The perception of "quality" is typically subjective and may differ across information seekers and information distributors in HE (Rerung *et al.* 2020: 90). Taking into consideration information quality dimensions of accuracy, integrity, consistency, completeness, validity, timeless and accessibility, may assist HEIs to ensure that quality information is distributed to prospective students (Ariyanto *et al.* 2022: 10). Challenges emerge

when stakeholders must distribute information; HEIs struggle to guarantee the distribution of high-quality information, particularly in the case of clubs and societies. These clubs and societies distribute this knowledge through various technological means online and through face-to-face contacts physical.

In the context of digital transformation in society, an important and pertinent issue for HEIs is the establishment of a high-quality information environment (Zabolotniaia *et al.* 2020: 175). This environment aligns with the current advancements in science and technology, global educational standards, and the needs of the information society. Technologies facilitate the retention of important information through organisational learning and corporate memory, as well as a broad distribution of useful information to all stakeholders (Zamir and Kim 2022: 4). Fitrios *et al.* (2022: 2) highlight that an inadequate production of high-quality information leads to organisational failure in meeting the requirements of information users, resulting in erroneous decision-making by users. In this study the users are prospective students. Thus, obtaining precise and useful insights, as well as enhancing performance, relies on the presence of information of high quality (Hmoud *et al.* 2023: 6). There are different perspectives on this topic, they consist of global, regional and local. In the next section, the study discusses these perspectives.

1.10 OVERVIEW OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Two theoretical frameworks were used to evaluate the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies: the PDCA (plan, do, check and act) cycle (Desai 2016: 1), and organisational information theory (OIT). The successful implementation and execution of the PDCA is a standardisation process that hinges upon effective process management, and a full understanding of the individual circumstances of each participant (Pan *et al.* 2007). Organisational Information Theory offers a comprehensive perspective on the diverse mechanisms via which information is distributed (Mathiassen and Sorensen 2008: 8). This study places great focus on the comprehension of information and its relevance to generate high-quality outcomes, therefore employed OIT. Both theories facilitated a fuller comprehension of the phenomena under investigation. Since both theories are related to quality improvement, they were relevant in the context of this study. Neither theory ascertains

the role of students in distribution of quality information. Due to this gap, the study proposes a model that clearly outlines the role of students in enhancing the quality of the information about HEI admissions distributed by them to prospective students.

1.11 OVERVIEW OF THE PARADIGM AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.11.1 Research philosophy

A research philosophy is a set of beliefs about how data on a topic should be collected, analysed, and utilised, which arise from various assumptions (Kivunja and Kuyini 2017: 28). Philosophical assumptions are a "pragmatically justified perspective or way of seeing" that have methodological implications (Boucher 2014: 2320). The aim of this study was to acquire data with respect to the quality of information distributed by politically, religiously and socially affiliated students in clubs and societies to prospective students in the South African context. Consequently, the study embraced an interpretive paradigm, which focuses on comprehending the world as it exists through subjective experiences.

According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999: 344), the research process comprises various dimensions which include ontology, epistemology, and methodology. The ontological dimension is the character of reality which is knowledge that exists outside of the researcher, or it may alternatively be stated as the very nature of the social phenomena under inquiry (Khanyile 2020: 42). Epistemology is defined as the nature of knowledge and how any social actor knows that they know something (Victor *et al.* 2021: 480). Methodology discusses and explains the data production and analysis methods used in a research study (Mkhize 2021: 44). This study adopted an interpretivism paradigm which was accompanied by constructivism. Interpretivism as a research paradigm is often accompanied by constructivism as an ontological and epistemological grounding (Junjie and Yingxin 2022: 11). This study adopted ontological and epistemological constructivism. According to Creswell (2014), constructivism pertains to the formation of subjective interpretations and comprehensions of individuals' personal experiences related to specific subjects, influenced by their social and historical context. The clubs and societies in this context had experience with distributing information thus could answer the questions posed by the study related to the quality of information distributed. Hence, they were relevant

in the context of this study which was aimed at ascertaining what information is distributed by students through their interpretations and how through their personal experiences the quality of the information they distribute has been influenced by various factors.

1.11.2 Research approach

For the purpose of this study, a qualitative research methodology was purposefully adopted. Qualitative research, recognised for its inherent flexibility and depth, fundamentally seeks to achieve a profound understanding of a research problem or phenomenon from the perspective of a specific population within their natural settings (Mohajan 2018: 25). While often initiating with exploratory inquiry (Asehabi 2019: 79), its core strength lies in its capacity to unearth rich, context-specific insights into complex social realities. This methodology proved exceptionally suitable for the current study, as its primary objective was to look into the lived experiences and nuanced perspectives of the clubs and societies concerning the quality of information they distribute. Although characterised by its naturalistic and interpretive stance, this approach was executed with rigorous systematicity, involving a meticulous process of the problem identification, data collection, comprehensive analysis, critical examination, and insightful interpretation (Nassaji 2020: 428). This rigorous process involved the generation and analysis of non-numerical data, specifically encompassing textual and verbal accounts obtained through interviews and discussions, thereby allowing for a deep exploration of concepts, that includes text, video, or audio to understand concepts, opinions, opinions, and experiences related to information quality (Bhandari 2020: 1).

1.11.3 Research setting

The research setting refers to the specific geographical location or context from which empirical data is gathered (Goundar 2022: 10). This study was situated within KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), South Africa, specifically at a designated University of Technology (UoT). The chosen UoT operates multiple campuses, strategically located across two major cities within the province. The selection of this UoT and its constituent campuses was a deliberate methodological decision, driven by several key factors. Importantly, these campuses exhibit distinct organizational dynamics and

possess a documented history of concerns regarding the quality of information distributed by their respective clubs and societies to prospective students. This background rendered the chosen setting an ideal empirical site for investigating the study's central research questions concerning information quality within student organizations.

1.11.4 Research population

The research population for a study comprises the entire group of individuals, objects, or data points relevant to the research question (David, 2017: 56). For this study, the target population consisted of all Executive Committee (BEC) members of the officially affiliated and recognized clubs and societies at the selected University of Technology (UoT) at the time of the investigation. Contrary to the provided definition, a total population refers to the entire group that the researcher wishes to study, while a sample is a manageable subgroup drawn from that population (Etikan and Bala, 2017: 2). In this research, a census approach was adopted, where all accessible members of the defined target population were included, rather than drawing a sample. The complete list provided by the UoT indicated a total of 23 clubs and societies, with an estimated 10 executive members per club, leading to a potential total population of 230 members.

From this identified population, the study specifically focused on chairpersons and secretaries of these clubs and societies. This deliberate selection was predicated on their pivotal roles in planning, organizing, and overseeing information distribution campaigns aimed at prospective students. These individuals were chosen because their positions grant them direct involvement in, and comprehensive knowledge of, the information distribution processes. The selected participants represented a diverse range of clubs and societies, encompassing religious, social, and political affiliations. Their inclusion was contingent upon meeting specific criteria aligned with the study's identified problem and objectives. Principally, the chairpersons and secretaries selected possessed demonstrated experience in distributing information to prospective students, both during formal registration periods and via online platforms, particularly Facebook. This ensured that the participants possessed firsthand insights into the practical aspects of information quality, directly contributing to a robust

understanding of its attributes and challenges.

1.11.5 Sampling

Sampling is the process of selecting a smaller but representative population Chaturvedi (2018). This study used a purposive sampling method, also known as the judgemental, selective, or subjective sampling method (Sharma 2017: 756). According to Obilor (2023: 4), purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method which is based on the characteristics of a certain population and the objectives of the study. This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially informed about or experienced in relation to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas *et al.* 2015: 536). In this study, participants were chosen because they had experience with the distribution of information regarding the admission process in the institution. All participants were required to be at least 18 years of age, because these participants possess the requisite age to grant legal permission (Hennink and Kaiser 2022: 292). The study had 46 participants. These participants were selected because of their leadership roles within the BECs of planning and organising the campaigns to distribute information within the BECs and were all chairpersons or secretaries. There were 23 registered clubs and societies hence, the sample was 46 participants. Participants were identified through SDG and were invited through their UoT student emails.

A snowballing sampling method was adopted in addition to the purposive sampling method since the researcher did not meet the desired number of participants in the first round of recruiting. This method was used to find participants with the desired characteristics (Naderifar *et al.* 2017: 2). A snowballing strategy was adopted if a chairperson or secretary was unavailable, in which case they recommended other executive committee members to approach who had been actively responsible for distributing information to prospective students.

1.11.6 Sample size

The sample size utilised in a qualitative research study is frequently smaller in comparison to the sample size employed in quantitative research methods. Smaller numbers are sufficient to acquire an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon or to

concentrate on the interpretation of meaning (Dworkin 2012: 1319). Secondary data was also collected from social media (Facebook).

1.11.7 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The research considered different demographic characteristics: age, gender identity, ethnicity when selecting participants to ensure that the inclusion criteria were met. The inclusion criteria is defined as a study of a population in a consistent, reliable, uniform and objective manner (Quintero *et al.* 2019: 1). As a result, the study selected participants with different demographic characteristics and ensured that there was equal representation of different demographic groups. The clubs and societies that were included were only members of clubs and societies that were affiliated and recognised by the UoT. The exclusion criteria include factors or characteristics that make the recruited population ineligible for the study (Amir-Behghadami and Janati 2020: 2). The research excluded clubs and societies that were not affiliated and participants that were not BEC members were also excluded. The study ensured that only the stipulated criteria of students were sampled. In this study only registered students from the UoT were recruited to participate in the study.

1.11.8 Recruitment procedure

The researcher utilised emails to extend invitations to potential participants. These invitations were delivered directly to the individuals concerned. The researcher evaluated participant availability and scheduled interviews based on the participant's availability.

1.11.9 Data type and production process

The study had two data production processes, namely, primary and secondary data production methods. The primary data collection method involved conducting in-depth individual interviews and focus group interviews. Data collection was firstly in a form of in-depth-individual interviews of 12 chairpersons and secretaries from each club and society. Secondly, data was collected using four focus groups consisting of six to eight participants each (Hennink and Kaiser 2019: 83). The groups consisted of participants from political, religious, and social clubs, with the selection based on the

defining characteristics of these clubs and societies. This approach ensured that all club types were adequately represented in each of the focus groups. The generation of secondary data encompassed data obtained from social media platforms of clubs and societies specifically posts on Facebook. These consisted of groups and pages of these clubs and societies that did not have any restrictions on privacy. The generation of secondary data was facilitated by the utilisation of internet sources, namely, that social media (Facebook) pages of clubs and societies.

1.11.10 Pilot study

A pilot study, often referred to as a preliminary study, is a research method commonly employed to assist in the preparation of a larger-scale study through testing the data collection tools (In 2017: 601). In this study, the interview schedule was piloted by using five students belonging to clubs and societies from the UoT campuses situated the other city which were not involved in the study. The selection of these campuses in the UoT was based on their unique dynamics, however there were comparable issues regarding the recognition and quality distribution of information about admissions and applications by clubs and societies for prospective students.

1.11.11 Data analysis

Thematic analysis was adopted to analyse the data obtained from individual and focus group interviews. It enabled a crucial principle of qualitative analysis: identifying common and conspicuous themes within the acquired data through simplifying the data gathered through interviews, then breaking it down to reassemble into assimilated themes (Badat 2020: 34). To achieve this, Nvivo 15 software was utilised. NVivo is a software program that is used for storing, managing, and analysing qualitative data (Jackson and Bazeley 2019: 13). The program can analyse unstructured text, audio, and image data from individual interviews and focus groups (In 2017: 601). The study also analysed data from social media using content analysis. Qualitative researchers are able to obtain extensive and varied access to individuals, as well as the content they produce, through the utilisation of social media platforms (Andreotta *et al.* 2019: 1767). Content analysis is a great method for obtaining information pertaining to the experiences and perceptions that are being investigated by examining images and text from social media (Deghani *et al.* 2019: 87). The social media platform was

Facebook posts published by clubs and societies on their pages and groups between 2023 and 2024.

1.11.12 Ethical clearance

The researcher adhered to the guidelines set forth by the ethical committee of the DUT. Ethical clearance and gatekeeper letters were obtained before collecting data. A letter of information was designed and provided to participants to inform them about the guidelines of participating in the study. To maintain the confidentiality of participants, their identities were protected using pseudonyms. The participants were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation. The researcher explained the guidelines and confirmed that the participants possessed the agency to withdraw from the interview at any time. The name of the institution was concealed, and a pseudonym was utilised to ensure that its reputation was protected in case of negative statements made by clubs and societies.

1.11.13 Limitations and delimitations

The limitations inherent in qualitative investigations pertain to the challenges associated with accessing study participants, such as their geographic locations, time zone variations, and the presence of gatekeepers (Queirós *et al.* 2017: 372). These restrictions were addressed by ensuring that the researcher secured gatekeepers in a timely manner and ensured timely communication for scheduling interviews with the participants. The scope of this study was limited to one of the two cities where the OuT has campuses which was a delimitation since there was a lot of time saved, and all participants were available in one space.

1.11.14 Trustworthiness

The study adopted a qualitative research approach. Trustworthiness is significant in qualitative research, since it establishes trust between the researcher and reader on how the researcher is conducting the study. It also minimises bias, and the researcher transparently describes the research process (Adler 2022: 601). Lincoln and Guba (1986) state that the four fundamental aspects for assessing trustworthiness and which contribute to the rigorousness of a study are: credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability. Credibility assesses whether the research findings accurately interpret the participants' initial perspectives and represent trustworthy information derived from their original data (Korstjens and Moser 2018: 121). This study used triangulation which is defined as the application of several techniques or data sources, to create trustworthiness (Lemon and Hayes 2020: 606). The approaches that were used were in-depth individual interviews, focus group interviews and analysis of social media (Facebook) sites to ensure triangulation. The researcher ensured that participants did not influence each other during the focus group interview session. To increase trustworthiness the researcher emphasised the transferability factor. Transferability is possible when there are detailed description of the participants and the study procedure so that the reader can determine whether the findings are applicable to their own context (Stahl and King 2020: 29).

The research findings were supported by participant quotations as evidence for the assertions made. The study described the participants and explained the applicability of findings. To achieve dependability, researchers guarantee that their research method is rational, traceable, and well-documented (Nowell *et al.* 2017: 3). The interpretation was not based on personal preferences and points of view, but rather on the evidence presented by participants and on Facebook. The study utilised recorded transcripts from participants to analyse data and took screenshots as evidence of posts on Facebook. Confirmability is described as the researcher's interpretations and findings being clearly derived from the data, requiring the researcher to demonstrate how conclusions and interpretations have been reached (Cloutier and Ravasi 2021: 116). The study also ensured reflexivity which is described as the consideration and acknowledgement of how one's beliefs and experiences can influence the research process, including participant responses and how data are collected, interpreted, analysed, and presented (Nyirenda *et al.* 2020: 2).

1.12 RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

My professional work at the time of this study was within residence life at an HEI. I worked very closely with clubs and societies. This implied that I was a researcher who possessed familiar knowledge or experience in the subject matter being studied. The characterisation of an individual as an "insider" in research occurs when they possess

specific characteristics that align with those of the study participants (Bukamal 2022: 327). Thus, this research was conducted in a setting that I am familiar with as well as the problems mentioned in the problem statement. The advantage of being in the same environment was having access to information. As an insider researcher I was continually conscious of any preconceived beliefs that may have had an impact on my findings. I also considered questions of critical subjectivity, in which my experiences were not suppressed but rather utilised as part of the research process. As a result, I continued to self-reflect and perform audit trails and expert checking throughout the study.

1.13 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the study. It provides the necessary background information, context, problem statement, as well as clearly defined aims, objectives, and research questions. The research also presents international perspectives, as well as the regional perspective, on the distribution of high-quality information in HE. It provides an institutional perspective through a comprehensive examination of the political, religious, and social clubs and societies.

Chapter 2: Literature review related to the quality information distribution in higher education institutions

The literature reviews the conceptual framework regarding information quality and the fundamental principles underlying the notion of high-quality information.

Chapter 3: Policy frameworks related to the quality of information distributed

This chapter provides an overview of the literature pertaining to the current rules governing the distribution of high-quality information in HE. It further delineates the significance of QA and quality improvement as the factors that determine quality policies.

Chapter 4: Theoretical frameworks

This chapter presents the two theoretical frameworks used as a point of reference, namely, the PDCA cycle and OIT.

Chapter 5: Methodology

This section provides an overview of the process, beginning with a discussion of the philosophical underpinnings. The chapter explores the research onion framework which provided a comprehensive and coherent rationale for the selected approach.

Chapter 6: Presentation of findings

The findings are presented in this chapter through the themes that were generated from the data collected.

Chapter 7: Recommendations and conclusion

This chapter presents the findings pertaining to the policy frameworks used by clubs and societies for the quality of information distributed. The produced themes are presented, and a comprehensive analysis is conducted considering the existing literature.

1.14 Summary

Chapter 1, "Introduction to the Study," lays the critical groundwork for this dissertation by establishing its overarching context, delineating the problem it addresses, and presenting its precise scope and methodology. The chapter commences by highlighting the foundational role of high-quality information within the contemporary higher education (HE) landscape, emphasizing its profound influence on student decision-making, engagement, and overall satisfaction. It then strategically positions student organizations (clubs and societies) as pivotal, albeit often unregulated, conduits of vital information for prospective students, particularly within South African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). A central argument advanced is the conspicuous scarcity of empirical research specifically addressing the quality and effectiveness of information distributed by these student-led entities. This academic lacuna forms the core of the problem statement, underscoring persistent concerns regarding the

veracity, relevance, and overall reliability of such information, which can impede truly informed decision-making during the critical university application phase. The chapter substantiates this problem with compelling real-world examples of information failures and fraudulent schemes within HEIs, highlighting the severe risks to prospective students and institutional credibility.

The chapter proceeds to articulate the study's research aims, which involve rigorously examining the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies, specifically assessing attributes such as accuracy, integrity, consistency, completeness, validity, timeliness, and accessibility. These aims are then broken down into precise objectives and guiding research questions, providing a clear roadmap for the investigation. Furthermore, Chapter 1 meticulously outlines the research design and methodology, detailing the adoption of a qualitative, interpretivist paradigm, anchored in the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle and Organisational Information Theory (OIT). It specifies the research setting (a particular University of Technology in KwaZulu-Natal and its campuses, chosen for their distinct dynamics and historical information quality concerns) and the research population (Executive Committee members of affiliated clubs and societies). The chapter clarifies the sampling strategy (a census approach focusing on chairpersons and secretaries) and the data collection methods (in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and secondary data analysis).

Finally, the chapter positions the study within broader international, national, and institutional discussions on quality information and accountability, particularly within the South African HE policy framework. It concludes by providing a succinct summary of the dissertation's overall structure, offering the reader a clear roadmap for the subsequent chapters. Through this comprehensive introduction, Chapter 1 firmly establishes the significance, rigor, and anticipated contribution of this doctoral research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW RELATED TO THE QUALITY INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the pertinent literature underpinning the investigation into information quality within HE. The central aim of this study is to critically examine the quality of information distributed by student organizations, specifically clubs and societies. To establish a robust theoretical foundation for this analysis, this chapter systematically explores fundamental concepts of quality, drawing from established philosophical and theoretical perspectives that define quality as perfection, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformative potential. To adequately contextualize the significance of information quality in HE, the chapter differentiates various types of information, categorizing them as conceptual, empirical, procedural, stimulatory, policy-driven, and directive. This typology helps to illustrate the diverse informational needs of prospective students and the varied nature of content distributed by student organizations. Furthermore, the chapter delves into the broader philosophical underpinnings of information and quality, exploring the philosophy of information and the philosophy of quality to frame the critical importance of ensuring high-standard data.

A significant portion of this chapter is dedicated to evaluating established information quality dimensions that profoundly influence information distribution and reception. These dimensions are meticulously categorized into four main aspects: intrinsic (encompassing accuracy, believability, reputation, and objectivity), contextual (addressing relevance, completeness, timeliness, and appropriate amount), representational (focusing on understandability, interpretability, concise representation, and consistent representation), and accessibility (covering ease of access, operational simplicity, and security). Each dimension will be discussed in relation to its impact on student decision-making and institutional credibility.

Finally, the chapter critically reviews the literature pertaining to the diverse channels utilized by clubs and societies for information distribution. This includes traditional

physical methods, such as face-to-face interactions during high school visits, the distribution of printed manuals, and direct engagement at HEI gates. Concurrently, it examines the growing prominence of online platforms, particularly social media, as crucial avenues for reaching prospective students. This comprehensive literature review serves to position the present study within existing scholarship and identifies the theoretical and empirical gaps that this research aims to address.

2.2 CONCEPTUALISING QUALITY IN TERMS OF THE INFORMATION DISTRIBUTED IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Quality is an intricate concept that varies depending on the stakeholders involved, and HEIs are organisations with several purposes. In HE, there is no precise definition of what constitutes quality (Basar *et al.* 2016: 108). Scholars examine information quality as the successful receipt of what the sender intended to transmit to the recipient (Azemi *et al.* 2018: 413). Despite its relevance and worth, the quality of information from numerous settings is frequently variable or vaguely defined or simply ignored (Bovee *et al.* 2003: 56). 'Quality information' in this study refers to accurate, timely and relevant information distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students. Su *et al.* (2007: 193) indicates that it is crucial to "define, measure, analyse, and improve the quality of information, treating information as a product" because "creating quality information and organisational knowledge is the prerequisite for any organisation to gain a competitive advantage". Therefore, the quality of information that is distributed by clubs and societies is defined and measured in the current study which will assist in improving the quality of information they distribute to prospective students. This is important because students' perceptions of the quality of services provided by HEIs can be influenced by the quality of the information distributed (Mijač *et al.* 2022: 178), which in turn influences prospective students' enrolment decisions. Thus, the quality of a decision is influenced by the quality of the information on which it is based, and timely information utilisation is crucial (Howard 2011: 296). Prospective students require the information to be able to apply on time and make decisions. Hence, it is imperative to conceptualise the distribution of high-quality information in HE.

2.2.1 Concepts of quality of information in higher education

The notion of 'quality' within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is a complex and dynamic construct, inherently shaped by its specific contextual setting. Its operationalization is typically achieved through numerous dimensions, across various institutional levels, and via adaptive methodologies. Within the scope of this present study, the concept of quality is specifically examined through the lens of information distribution, making it directly contingent upon the choices made by clubs and societies regarding the content and method of information distribution, and crucially, the inherent quality of this conveyed information. Student perceptions of the overall quality provided by HEIs are demonstrably influenced by the provision of adequate, reliable, and trustworthy information (Mijač et al., 2022: 178; Greenfields, 2019: 2). This highlights a critical link: the broader institutional reputation for quality is intricately tied to the perceived quality of its communication. In academic discourse, quality is often broadly categorized into two primary forms: educational quality, which pertains to the efficacy, relevance, and outcomes of academic programmes and learning experiences; and administrative quality, which encompasses the efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness of institutional processes. It is within this realm of administrative quality that the integrity and impact of information distributed to prospective students are crucially situated. Building upon these foundational understandings, quality can be further elucidated through several philosophical and conceptual perspectives. Prakash (2018: 733) identifies five key dimensions: quality as perfection, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as excellence, quality as value for money, and quality as transformation. In this context the quality of information distribution is outlined through the following concepts.

2.2.1.1 Quality as perfection when distributing information

Quality as perfection refers to quality as consistent and flawless. When information is perfect and flawless, the optimum circumstance for attracting prospective students arises (MacLeod and Urquiola 2019: 10). A common assumption for an efficient market is "perfect" information. Rational choice necessitates economic players being fully informed about the quality (Dill 2015: 7). Research highlights that perfect information is a key component of perfect competition (Brown 2019: 185). There have been indicators of information that is imperfect in HE which has led to

dysfunctionalities in HEIs. Imperfect information not only causes individual students to make ill-informed decisions but also generates suboptimal or even dysfunctional incentives for how scarce public resources are utilised in the sector (Beerkens 2022). High school students believe that when they have perfect information about their HE, there is a reduction in informational barriers (Thibault 2022). Hence, it is crucial to examine the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students to ensure it is perfect.

2.2.1.2 Quality as fitness for purpose when distributing information

A “fit for purpose” approach aims to ensure that a system, policy, or programme is designed and operationalised in a manner best suited to local needs and contexts (Taber *et al.* 2020: 2). This concept is aligned with emerging models for education and development that are espoused in HE. The most prevalent definition of “fitness-for-purpose” entails an assessment of the utilisation of information based on the original goal for which they were acquired (Riley *et al.* 2022: 2). Fitness for purpose is also the ability of information to be interpreted and used in a context that allows for a certain utilisation, that is, the purpose (Mocnik *et al.* 2018). Hence, HE processes and procedures should be evaluated, analysed, and critiqued on a regular basis to guarantee fitness of purpose (Isaac *et al.* 2019: 115) and this includes those of clubs and societies. It is debatable whether quality assessments measure fitness for purpose against institutional definitions of purpose (as intended by the concept of fitness for purpose) in HE (Taber *et al.* 2020: 2).

2.2.1.3 Quality as excellence when distributing of information

This dimension encompasses circumstances that are restricted and demanding, perpetuating an elite attitude of education (Yang and Li 2023: 315). It emphasises the need to achieve high quality. This also pertains to achieving high quality of information that is distributed by clubs and societies. The concept of ‘information excellence’ involves the strategic use of information to enhance customer value and experience (Ademe 2023: 19). This is achieved via the implementation of efficient procedures and resource allocation, enabling a cohesive strategy for enterprise-level management. The implementation of excellence plays a crucial role in ensuring the quality of distributed information. Thus, the distribution of high-quality information through clubs

and societies depends on the exceptional quality of the information provided. This model has similarities to the concept of quality as distinctiveness (Immerstein *et al.* 2020). It differs from uniqueness in that it offers a specific set of standards by which quality may be evaluated, even while these standards are almost impossible to achieve or only achievable in certain situations. The emphasis is on inputs, where the outcome is predicted based on the input. In the context of this study the quality of information that is distributed by clubs and societies impacts the outcomes, related to the information prospective students possess as well as stability in the institution.

2.2.1.4 Quality as value for money when distributing information

In the context of HEIs, “Value for money” (VFM) Refers to achieving the most cost-effective outcomes through provision of quality services (Mohammed 2022: 9). When applied to the quality distribution of information by clubs and societies, VFM implies that the information distributed should not only be accurate and relevant but also impactful with the resources that are financially invested by prospective students. In this context, the primary measure of VFM is based on the perception of the information distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students. Barton *et al.* (2019: 212) assert that this concept has become more prominent on the HE development agenda for several interrelated reasons. Value for money is interstitially tied to the concept of quality and accountability in their marketised HE landscape (Wilkinson and Wilkinson 2023: 406). Prospective students need financial resources to get information, and clubs and societies are anticipated to provide high-quality information, as this is regarded as VFM. Basheka (2008: 2) states that education systems throughout the world are changing, with an increased emphasis on preserving the concept of VFM information and enhancing access. Despite its importance, this concept has not yet been completely integrated into the broader student experience (Wilkinson and Wilkinson 2023: 408). Therefore, it is important for HEIs to emphasise VFM to its stakeholders, especially clubs and societies, since it has an impact on prospective students' experiences.

2.2.1.5 Quality as transformation when distributing information

The transformational perspective on quality is based on the concept of 'qualitative change' which refers to a profound transformation in form (Cregg and Russell 1998:

28). The emphasis on handling quality moves from the assurance of information, such as reports and key performance indicators, for decision-making purposes, to the management of risks, quality of information, and information security (Robertson 2023). One of the indicators of transformation is a quality notion that may be operationalised by several factors (Okogbaa 2016: 141). It is characterised by various forms, with technology being the most significant one. The advent of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) has significant influence on these improvements, requiring HEIs to undertake a thorough digital transformation. This encompasses the conversion of systems and processes to align with the demands of the 4IR (Yende 2021: 60). The COVID-19 outbreak significantly accelerated the process of digital transformation, since all instructional activities in HE was performed online. This also spurred a change in the operations of clubs and societies; while HEIs were observing COVID-19 protocols of no contact sessions during registration, clubs and societies continued to distribute information. The same fashion continues online, using social media as a means of distributing information, therefore influencing the level of quality (Cele *et al.* 2023: 4).

2.3 Types of information as quintessence of quality

There are six types of information, namely, conceptual information, empirical information, procedural information, stimulatory information, policy information and directive information (Kodiralievich 2020: 21; Tseng *et al.* 2023: 4; Huang *et al.* 2014). Clubs and societies usually distribute directive information to prospective students, and they tend to ignore all different types of information that affirms its quality.

2.3.1 Conceptual information

The term "conceptual information" pertains to the cognitive frameworks and mental constructs being used by individuals to comprehend and make sense of their external environment (Malak 2023: 1). One plausible explanation posits that conceptual information is acquired, integrated, and subsequently processed by a filtering mechanism (Forsell and Mankki 2022: 77). Conceptual rules and roles have been established to facilitate the efficient and timely flow of exchanges of information (Koliousis *et al.* 2020: 345). Hence, effective management of information flow within

an educational setting has the potential to enhance mutual comprehension and cooperation among all relevant parties (Kougias *et al.* 2012: 166). According to Molloy *et al.* (2009: 2), it is crucial for information to possess a high level of quality and be suitable for both its primary purpose and any potential supplementary purposes. Hence, it is imperative for clubs and societies to possess a comprehensive grasp of conceptual information to be able to effectively apply it, thereby facilitating a seamless distribution of information.

2.3.2 Empirical information

Empirical information refers to information acquired via the use of human senses, observation, and experimentation, with the aim of establishing documented patterns or behaviours (Bhatti *et al.* 2021: 438). In HE, empirical information provides an understanding of how HEIs achieves their objectives and maintain ongoing monitoring of its level of quality (Lazić *et al.* 2021: 6). Empirical information is contingent upon information obtained from individuals affiliated with the organisation (Pettersen and Solstad 2007: 1). Hence, the understanding of context-specific variables by clubs and societies that significantly impact prospective students' selection of study programmes in HEIs is becoming increasingly important as empirical information. This understanding serves as valuable feedback for the development of effective management strategies aimed at attracting and retaining both local and international prospective students (Mbawuni and Nimako 2015: 120). Empirical information plays a crucial role in informing decision-making processes pertaining to the contemporary educational system (Nabayra and Tambong 2023: 1238). Therefore, it is imperative for clubs and societies to comprehend the significance of empirical information.

2.3.3 Procedural information

Procedural information refers to the acquisition of information through practical application or engagement in specific activities (Joyce 2023: 1). It further offers instructions, directions, or stages for completing a task or procedure (Liu *et al.* 2022: 1008). Clubs and societies assist prospective students with information on how to apply for funding, study spaces and many other aspects (Wade 2023: 54). The inclusion of procedural information has the potential to improve both the outcome and the quality (Lauber 2022: 5). Wade (2023: 54) assert that the absence of procedural

information and effective coordination of transition services in HE presents significant challenges that have a detrimental effect on the overall quality. Consequently, it is imperative for clubs and societies to understand this type of information. Procedural information exhibits clarity and simplicity when users adhere to a defined number of procedures inside a straightforward system, it gets increasingly complex when users are required to navigate through various potential pathways.

2.3.4 Stimulatory information

Information that elicits encouragement among individuals is referred to as stimulatory information (Rashid 2023: 1). However, there is limited knowledge available in HE on the comprehension of how stimulatory information can potentially impede the achievement of task objectives (Kozlowski *et al.* 2019: 2). It is conveyed by direct communication, which involves the contagious excitement of another individual. Whether the communication is direct or indirect, it is inherently spontaneous and resistant to being influenced or persuaded (Nagar and Munshi 2014: 4). Historically, with the intention of stimulating prospective students, clubs and societies distribute a variety of stimulating information. A misleading social media post in 2022 invited potential students to come to the particular UoT for walk-ins. This occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in violations of social distancing requirements, this led to the apprehension of 16 individuals including prospective students, and the closure of the campuses. Similarly, at a neighbouring HEI, there have been numerous instances of inviting prospective students under false pretences, resulting in significant unrest. These instances demonstrate the outcomes of distributing stimulating information that has a detrimental impact on quality.

2.3.5 Policy Information

Policy information relates to the production of guidelines, regulations, and laws that govern how information is kept, distributed, and utilised. Policies in HE are designed by DHET and HEIs are obliged to implement them (Alenezi 2023: 88). This includes the policies and guidelines for clubs and societies. Hence HEIs have the obligation of formulating and implementing policies for clubs and societies operations as well as ensuring that they abide by the policies in place. It is significant that these policies are relevant for all stakeholders (Wang and Gong 2023), including clubs and societies

(Setthasuravich and Kato 2022) to ensure accountability. Clubs and societies need to stay informed about policy information and actively responding to it is crucial for continuously understanding and adapting to policies (Aguilar and Richerme 2020). It is acknowledged by (Hasan *et al.* 2022: 163) that HEIs need to implement policies on quality and ensure comprehension amongst stakeholders. Since this contributes to the quality distribution of information.

2.3.6 Directive information

Directive information is a phenomenon that helps to steer, lead, and typically urge toward an activity or objective (Enyia and Emiri 2023: 6). It frequently influences the behaviours of both information distributors and information seekers. This contributes to facilitating the availability of information to prospective students regarding HE. Directive information has influenced prospective students in HE negatively. During the COVID-19 epidemic in 2020, many prospective students gathered at various HEIs in search of studying opportunities, despite the lockdown measures in place. Although the institution's communication suggested otherwise, some felt obligated to remain outside the gates and seek assistance from clubs and societies (Durban University of Technology 2023). This indicates the crucial necessity for straightforward and tailored information for prospective students and the significant impact it plays. The many categories of information collectively constitute the foundation for emphasising the significance of comprehending the quality of information distributed by students. Hence it must be guided by outlining the significance of the quality of information distributed.

2.4 OUTLINING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF QUALITY OF INFORMATION DISTRIBUTED

The quality of information distributed by HE students has a significant impact (Verhoef *et al.* 2021: 890) on the recruitment of prospective students by HEIs (Luescher *et al.* 2016: 15). Inadequate quality in the information distributed by clubs and societies has a wide range of negative consequences which can interrupt operations, impede decision-making, and jeopardise interpersonal communication and comprehension (Marcellina 2020: 3). Scholars assert that lack of quality of information is a significant obstacle to development and call for appropriate consideration to fast-track delivery of

quality information (Shonhe 2017: 5). The philosophy of quality and philosophy of information are discussed below.

2.4.1 Philosophy of information

The idea of information quality must be founded on a philosophy of information and the philosophy of quality. The philosophy of information is a discipline of philosophy concerned with the systematic study of information in all its forms and the application of informational approaches to new and established philosophical concerns (Mai 2013: 676). Furthermore, it is concerned with a) the critical investigation of the conceptual nature and basic principles of information, including its dynamics, utilisation, and sciences, and b) the development and application of information-theoretic and computational methodologies to philosophical problems (Zubair 2023: 24). Prior to delving into the practical uses of information, it is essential for clubs and societies to first gain an understanding of the philosophy of information. This will give them with the required background information and context. Therefore, it is essential to comprehend the principles and concepts underlying the philosophy of information and the philosophy of quality.

2.4.2 Philosophy of quality

Information serves to decrease uncertainty and enhance knowledge inside organisations. It plays a crucial role in the decision-making process and must possess high quality in order to enhance its value (Maravilhas 2014). The idea of quality has traditionally placed a strong emphasis on the creation and adoption of an organisational culture that prioritises a customer-focused approach, ongoing growth, and data-driven decision-making (Kenyon and Sen 2015: 31) and in HE it focuses on educational quality and its systems. The philosophy of quality, principles, methods, and methodologies are important since quality management highlights that philosophy is the way individuals think to discover the essential truth about a given subject or issue (Juodaityte 2004: 13). The idea of quality in education is relied upon to ensure the growth of HEIs by fostering more innovative potential (Dieniezhnikov *et al.* 2021: 67). These philosophies are significant in contextualising the importance of analysing the quality of information in HE.

2.5 GLOBAL, CONTINENTAL, LOCAL AND INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON QUALITY INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION

2.5.1 Global Perspectives

Global perspectives emphasise quality information distribution in HE (Mijač *et al.* 2022: 178). The quality of the information distributed by HEIs is measured by it being precise, comprehensive and up to date. The focus is on ensuring that the quality is maintained in both online and physical contexts. Globally, access to HE has been debated and different scholars such as ((Basar *et al.* 2016: 108) and (Perera *et al.* 2022: 28)) assert that inequalities and lack of access to information both online and physical may hinder prospective students being able to access HE. Other factors highlight the inconsistencies in the information that is distributed in HE, especially the distribution of information that lacks quality. This information is generally distributed to mislead prospective students, and HE has faced multiple issues related to this. The uniqueness of fabricated information originates in the contemporary information landscape, where social media platforms play a crucial role in the distribution of information, and HEIs no longer rely entirely on traditional gatekeepers for receiving information. There is a gap in literature regarding the quality of information distributed both online or physical , particularly through clubs and societies.

To contextualise this, the United States as a developed nation has prioritised the expansion and advancement of the HES. Emphasis is placed on different aspects including the information related policies. Mostly the policies are focused on information quality in learning (Hartwell 2020: 8; Lucas 2023: 10). The United States Department of Education has also set up an information quality site with information on quality processes and procedures as well quality guidelines (United States Department of Education 2023: 1). All these guidelines are in place to enhance access to HE. However as depicted above, there is a fragmentation in South Africa in terms of the role of students, especially clubs and societies. Though their existence is recognised, and they play a role in development of students in the HEI, there is a lack of information related to their role when interacting with prospective students. This gap necessitates the undertaking of this study.

Quality components play a critical role in the advancement of HE in Russia. This includes information related to applying as well as the reputation of institutions. There have been various advancements in Russia, especially in the HES, but there is still a lack of literature on the role of students or clubs and societies. Most quality components are lacking in Russian HE, including on information quality (Bagrova *et al.* 2018: 559). Prospective students seeking information about Russian HEIs often depend on the official websites and social media channels (Dilmukhametova and Talipova 2023: 125), which sometimes involves misreporting which constitutes the distribution of false information (Molina *et al.* 2021: 186). There is little information provided on students or clubs and societies. Given that the focus is only on these platforms, it is important to comprehend the calibre of information distributed by clubs and societies.

HEIs in China experience tremendous pressure in the current competitive and commercialised landscape to enhance their appeal to prospective students. This has also increased the need to ensure that high-quality information is distributed. Hence, numerous frameworks organising the dimensions of information quality have been proposed and used in the field of HE (Guo and Klein 2020: 11). These frameworks are in place, and they are mostly implemented in the quality learning systems. Various scholars have conducted research on the quality of information in learning systems (Li and Zhu 2022: 2; Zheng *et al.* 2023: 2; Li 2023: 413), but there is a gap in the literature regarding the quality of information distributed by students in HE, particularly those associated with clubs and societies. Clubs and societies are a significant stakeholder in the HEI context, with greater levels of engagement with prospective students than the formal structures of HEIs.

2.5.2 Continental perspectives (Africa)

The African continent has a multitude of challenges, and there are significant obstacles in terms of growth and development especially in the quality of information distributed. One of the most crucial issues in HE is the quality of its methodologies and procedures including those related to information. As a result, several efforts have been launched, however the execution of these measures has been particularly problematic due to a shortage of resources in terms of technology.

Due to the introduction of innovative technological approaches and the emphasis on improving the quality of HE, African HEIs are compelled to adjust, despite the various challenges they face. Nevertheless, there are various measures that can assist in the distribution of information which includes interventions by clubs and societies. Prospective students in Africa get information from several sources, including through the official HEI websites and prospectuses, by attending open days, and by utilising internet forums for students (Mogaji *et al.* 2020: 280). This study evaluated perspectives from Malawi, Nigeria and Egypt to contextualise the African continent's approach to the quality of information distributed. There are HEI platforms that are aimed at distributing information to prospective students. The influx of increased numbers of prospective students is exerting pressure on HEIs, and several nations with limited resources are facing challenges in funding the increased demands of a greater student population without sacrificing quality (Ndofirepi *et al.* 2020: 3), including the quality of the information.

There is a shortage of measurements regarding the quality of the information that is distributed by clubs and societies, even though many countries place a great priority on overall quality in HE. There are indications of clubs and societies presence, with the majority stating obligations involving facilitation of the development and advancement of students inside the educational system (Nowell *et al.* 2017: 3). South African HEIs have a substantial number of clubs and societies that carry out activities that are comparable to those of other countries, but other countries offer a lesser amount of information in this respect. The fact that this is occurring, highlights a gap in the existing body of research regarding the operational dynamics of clubs and societies in countries outside South Africa.

2.5.3 Local perspectives (South Africa)

In line with international trends, South African HES's conceptualisation of quality has developed over time to emphasise how students are prepared to be effective contributors to the economy and society (Madioppe *et al.* 2021: 3). Nations develop their quality standards in accordance with the education standards that they practice, and they manage quality in the HES in accordance with the quality standards that they develop (Sari and Karaduman 2017: 328; Fomunyam, 2018). As a result, the DHET

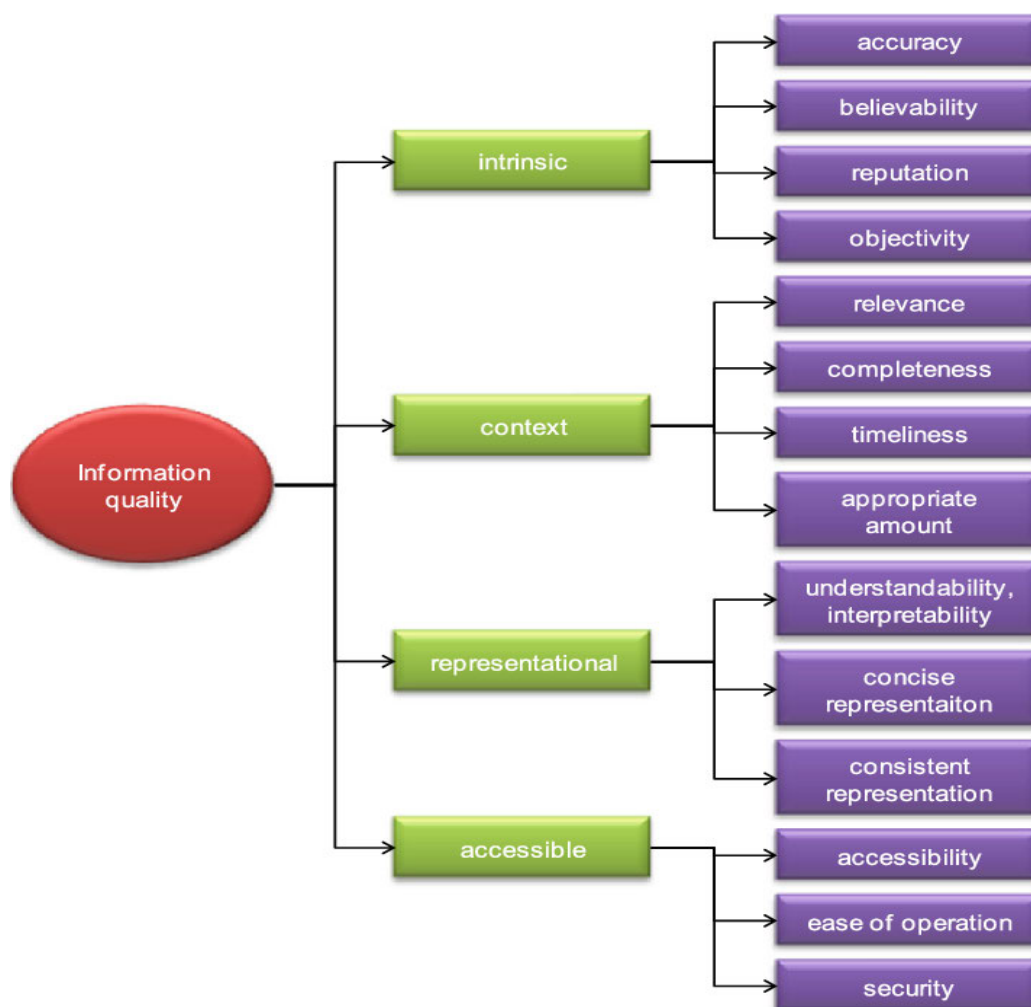
has adopted quality assurance (QA) methods to ensure the implementation of quality standards. These documents are implemented to establish and maintain quality standards. For example, the white paper of 1997 promotes the distribution of information, while the Higher Education Act of 1997 (Republic of South Africa 1997) recommends that institutions prioritise the quality of HEIs. One of the factors contributing to student demonstrations in South African HEIs is the need for enhanced quality, as students want better value for their money (Gxothiwe 2022: 46). High-quality information resources are valuable when they aid users in fulfilling all their needs. There are issues pertaining to the dimensions of quality of information as well as the strategies clubs and societies adopt to distribute this information to prospective students within a South African context. Therefore, it was crucial to get South African perspectives on the problem at hand.

2.6 EVALUATION OF INFORMATION QUALITY DIMENSIONS

Information quality dimensions are information qualities that can be independently assessed, interpreted, and improved (Kang and Namkung 2019: 38). The dimensions of quality information are necessary for providing information to students for distribution and are intended to address the problems consumers face in finding and accessing information about HEIs (Suarez *et al.* 2012: 2). Wickens *et al.* (2017: 46) found in their study that 68% of university students highlighted challenges with the quality of information that was distributed by fellow students. The concept of information quality dimensions seeks to comprehend the basic principles of the quality of information, with each dimension representing a distinct attribute (Cabaluna and Dequito 2022: 145).

Scholars claim that these elements have been overlooked by researchers when analysing the quality of information or when considering the variables influencing information quality (Ofosu-Ampong *et al.* 2020: 2; Ssegawa 2023: 2). For instance, one of the most significant problems facing information consumers, including decision-makers in organisations as well as casual online users, is encountering low-quality information (Li and Shang 2020: 3). Thus, this study outlines the dimensions of quality in relation to information distributed by clubs and societies in a particular HEI.

Figure 2.1 below illustrates the information quality dimensions.



Source: Edwin *et al.* (2019: 2)

Figure 2.1: Information quality dimensions

2.6.1 Intrinsic information quality

Intrinsic information quality refers to the inherent worth and foundational integrity of the data itself, independent of its context or presentation (Ssegawa, 2023: 2). This category emphasizes that the information's value lies within its fundamental characteristics, making it trustworthy and reliable. Research consistently indicates that intrinsic quality significantly shapes users' initial impressions, influencing their attitudes, perceptions of credibility, and ultimate satisfaction with the information source (Tseng *et al.*, 2023: 4). Consequently, a heightened awareness of concerns related to intrinsic information quality often permeates the user community, particularly when critical decisions hinge on the data's reliability (Guo and Klein, 2020: 12). Furthermore, intrinsic information quality implies that the data should ideally be

verifiable or substantiated through a reputable source or institution, underscoring its verifiable foundation (Wilson et al., 2021: 349). The dimensions of intrinsic information quality are diverse and collectively ensure the foundational soundness of the information: accuracy, believability, reputation and objectivity:

2.6.1.1 Accuracy

Accuracy is the extent to which information can represent reality, and its veracity, general greatness, and quality (Edwin *et al.* 2019: 2). It is one of the determinants of the quality of information (Li and Xiao 2022: 1). Blake (2021: 196) assert that precision refers to the characteristic of being highly exact and accurate. Hence, this subject is important to ensure that clubs and societies distribute quality information to prospective students. To foster the distribution of quality information, Shah *et al.* (2023: 7) state that there are various elements to be considered, namely:

- Know the audience
- Stay on message
- Encourage two-way conversation
- Be clear about roles and responsibilities
- Have an open-door policy.

However, accomplishing the HE is a formidable undertaking due to the substantial number of individuals involved in the exchange of information (Edwin *et al.* 2019: 2). Clubs and societies adhere to the constitutions of their mother body organisations, and their objectives may vary from those of the HEIs they are affiliated with. Hence, it is imperative to assess the accuracy of the information they provide to prospective students. Identifying discrepancies in the quality distribution of information within the HE can effectively mitigate constraints while enhancing the accessibility and accuracy of information provided to prospective students.

2.6.1.2 Believability

Information that is deemed believable is regarded as having superior overall quality. In the context of HE, believability is an important attribute that determines the future behaviour of prospective students (Deng and Chau 2021: 960). The first interactions of prospective students in the HEIs are mostly clubs and societies who seek to recruit students to join their clubs and societies and for recognition to win SRC elections

(Parreira *et al.* 2023: 4). Hence the believability of the information clubs and societies distribute is crucial since it influences the decisions of prospective students (Figl *et al.* 2019: 2). This element allows prospective students to weigh the believability of information distributed (Dlamini 2017: 45) by clubs and societies. This study argues that clubs and societies distribution of believable information to prospective students is not guaranteed since the HEI has no accountability measures for them. Hence it is valuable to understand the information they distribute to prospective students to ascertain believability.

2.6.1.3 Reputation

Reputation includes information or presumptions about inputs and outcomes. In this context, reputation is established based on the prospective student's interaction with the HEI and affects the decisions to choose the HEI (Mateus and Acosta 2022). It also impacts the perception and the opinions of both internal and external stakeholders, and the assessment and ranking of HEIs. Scholars assert that the reputation of HEIs is established via the positive experiences of students, the attainment of credible outcomes, and the recognition and esteem that these institutions get from both the national and worldwide communities (Koutselini 2020: 135). Investing in building a solid reputation yields substantial benefits for the organisation (Perera *et al.* 2022: 28), including HEIs. The reputation of HEIs is also influenced by their stakeholders, in this context, the clubs and societies; their involvement in distribution of low-quality information can damage the reputation of the HEI. Thus, the reputation of the HEIs in the context of this study relies on the clubs and societies interaction with prospective students.

2.6.1.4 Objectivity

Objective information is derived from impartial and factual evidence (Naim 2022). The information provided by HEs is distributed across several platforms, and as a result, its quality is taken into consideration. However, earlier instances of clubs and societies using this information have encountered numerous problems. The problems arise from the distribution of inaccurate information that is tailored to serve clubs and societies' own agenda. Logachev *et al.* (2021: 93) assert that HEIs require objective information regarding the resources, procedures, and outcomes of HEI operations. The quality

management system review allows HEIs to assess the level of development of the entire quality management system using objective information (Vykydal *et al.* 2020: 1). Objective information makes it easier to ensure that information is of high quality.

2.6.2 Contextual information

Contextual information quality in HE includes elements such as relevance, usefulness, and timeliness (Cabaluna and Dequito 2022: 145). Scholars claim that these contextual elements have been overlooked by researchers when analysing the quality of information or considering the variables influencing information quality (Ofosu-Ampong *et al.* 2020: 2).

2.6.2.1 Relevance of the information distributed

Relevant information encompasses information that is directly applicable and essential for a particular goal, decision-making scenario, or problem-solving endeavour (Doyle 2023: 3). Relevant information has the potential to impact the outcome of a choice, regardless of whether it is made in a business, personal, or any other setting (Fischer *et al.* 2023: 646). It is also necessary for prospective students to have full access to the information on HEIs, with a comprehensive structure to readily identify relevant information (Núñez-Canal *et al.* 2022: 12), including from clubs and societies. Research suggests the necessity of assessing information and encouraging students to recognise relevant information (Stričević and Rubinić 2023). Consequently, clubs and societies must understand and comply with the distribution of relevant information (Argelagós *et al.* 2022: 6).

2.6.2.2 Completeness of the information distributed

Students generally lack sufficient proficiency in evaluating the completeness of information sources (Frolova *et al.* 2022: 381), especially prospective students. For an HEI to be effective, it relies on the leaders' capacity to handle both official and informal interactions and establish a cohesive communication system that provides access to complete information (Beketova *et al.* 2020: 3). Prospective students who possess complete information are more inclined to acquire high-quality experiences, hence exerting a beneficial influence on the HEI (Anyim 2021: 53). Consequently, the

complete presentation of information by clubs and societies enables prospective students to have quality experiences in HE.

2.6.2.3 Timeliness information to evaluate quality

Time is regarded as a crucial element in achieving organisational success. To accelerate quality, the time taken to distribute information requires various factors to be considered (Izumi *et al.* 2021: 55). The application process in HEIs occurs in the preceding year and has designated timeframes for submission. Therefore, the timely distribution of information is essential to ensure quality (Ashraf *et al.* 2020: 25). It is crucial for prospective students to get the information they need in a timely manner to apply promptly. For this context they depend on clubs and societies as HEIs lack enough employees to meet their needs. However, most of the research has disregarded the fundamental importance of time and the sense of urgency at HEIs (Sahibzada *et al.* 2022: 719). The lack of availability of literature in HE for HEIs has had a detrimental impact on HEIs because it has created an opportunity for clubs and societies to thrive. Hence, it is crucial to ensure that information is distributed timeously.

2.6.2.4 Appropriate amount of information distributed

The greater the amount of information a prospective student has, the more efficiently they can arrange themselves to achieve the most favourable results. Prospective students require an appropriate amount of information to make decisions about the course they wish to enrol for (Ifenthaler and Yau 2020: 80). These decisions are therefore influenced by the appropriate information available to the prospective students. To support this assertion, (Mengash 2020: 5) states that the appropriate amount of information has the potential to influence decisions of prospective students. The prospective students have various reasons to ascertain information which varies from the application process to courses available, career counselling and many others (Demir *et al.* 2020: 38). This information is critical as it also impacts the availability of high calibre students that directly influence the intake of the HEI. Thus, it is critical to ensure that the appropriate amount of information is available.

2.6.3 Representational information

Representational information consists of various elements that include understandability and interpretation, concise representation, and consistent representation. Asyraff *et al.* (2023) emphasises that representational information quality attributes the information itself, which pertain to its demonstration, irrespective of its use for a specific purpose.

2.6.3.1 Understandability and interpretability of information

Interpretation involves elucidating, recontextualising, or otherwise demonstrating one's own comprehension of a given subject matter. Although students, especially clubs and societies, possess a reasonable level of self-awareness of their emotional responses to experiences, they often struggle to express the underlying reasons for their feelings and identify the most optimal course of action (Suarez *et al.* 2021: 1101). Although a significant number of prospective students may comprehend this information, most of them may fail to express their feelings appropriately under pressure. The understanding and interpretation of information is contingent upon the pertinence of the content about the recipient's expertise and communicative objectives (Rokhmawan *et al.* 2023: 105). Hence, the information distributed by the clubs and societies should be unambiguous.

2.6.3.2 Concise representation of information

Offering concise representational information regarding the comparative benefits of specific programmes and HEIs (Stevens and Shibanova *et al.* 2021: 220) allows prospective students to make informed choices about enrolment. Clubs and societies claim that they assist prospective students with information regarding access to funding, study spaces and other things (Daoud *et al.* 2023: 7). Providing concise information may have a positive impact on students' level of satisfaction (Ramli *et al.* 2020: 3). Concise information is necessary for their application for enrolment. Research emphasises that providing concise information is crucial for HEIs to keep students on schedule, hence facilitating a seamless registration procedure (Adoui 2023: 82). Therefore, the clubs and societies play a vital role in the distribution of

information since they serve as the primary platform for social interaction and information distribution.

2.6.3.3 Consistent representation of information quality

Ensuring the transmission of consistent information is crucial in the realm of HE (Nachman and Pryor 2023: 3). However, one of the primary difficulties in HEIs is ensuring the delivery of consistent information to users across different communication channels and digital platforms (Tungpantong *et al.* 2022: 12). This is because the stakeholders involved in this context are not employees of the HEI and the situation becomes more intense when clubs and societies are involved. Several HEIs have initiated a shift in the paradigm of knowledge distribution and availability of knowledge resources (Daoud *et al.* 2023: 3). For example, the utilisation of digital technology enables universal access to information.

2.6.4 Accessibility of the information

The accessibility of high-quality information is a paramount dimension within the higher education (HE) landscape, directly impacting student engagement, equity, and decision-making capabilities. This section rigorously delineates the concept of information accessibility within the context of this study. It will specifically explore three critical facets: the ease of locating and utilizing information, the operational simplicity of the platforms and tools through which it is delivered, and the security measures safeguarding its integrity and user privacy.

2.6.4.1 Accessibility

The accessibility of comprehensive information enables prospective students to make well-informed comparisons and decisions regarding HEIs (Perna *et al.* 2021: 1316). Research suggests that prospective students without access to resources such as technology, finances and infrastructure are deprived of high-quality, easily accessible information (Eguiguren Wray *et al.* 2022: 3). Thus, elements that impact the quality of information that is easily accessible, as well as the methods by which information can be made more accessible, remain significant. Thorough exploration is necessary to ensure proper distribution of high-quality information (Muehlbradt 2022: 3), in this

context by clubs and societies. Waight and Oldreive (2023: 5) emphasise that it is incumbent upon HEIs to guarantee the accessibility of quality information for prospective students.

2.6.4.2 Ease of operation

Quality encompasses factors such as ease of use and other advantageous features that contribute to functional performance (Nguyen and Le 2022: 10). Ease of operation pertains to information quality (Elahi and Ahmed 2023: 5) in HE. The quality of information has a beneficial impact on the perception of how easy it is to use (Machdar 2016: 3). Hence, the ease of use by clubs and societies is crucial, as well as their intentions and the accuracy of the information they distribute. The primary objectives of clubs and societies are controversial as they have utilised information to propagate acts of violence and strikes in HE. This has also endangered prospective students, as they rely on and capitalise on information of subpar quality.

2.6.4.3 Security

The security of information is paramount in preserving its overall quality within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), as it directly impacts both accessibility and reliability (Díaz et al., 2022: 94). Ensuring the robustness of information security measures is therefore crucial for maintaining the integrity and value of any distributed data (Kavak and Odabaş, 2023: 4). In the contemporary digital landscape, there is an escalating need for dedicated efforts towards developing and implementing highly efficient information systems that integrate both quality and security protocols, especially in the domain of public information distribution (Izonin, 2023: 2).

For clubs and societies within HEIs, when they utilize and distribute information to prospective students, the security and inherent quality of that information are of paramount importance. This is particularly critical given the vulnerability of online platforms. Despite this imperative, there have been numerous instances where information security has been severely compromised, especially on social media and other online channels. Ngcobo (2023: 60) compellingly argues that prospective students have unfortunately fallen victim to fraudulent schemes and the distribution of disinformation originating from malicious actors falsely purporting to represent

legitimate clubs and societies, particularly on platforms like Facebook. This pervasive issue is exacerbated by the fact that information distributed by many student organizations often operates outside the direct oversight or regulatory frameworks of the HEI itself (Astakhova, 2020: 57). Consequently, a thorough comprehension of the security risks intrinsically linked to such unregulated information distribution is not merely beneficial, but essential for safeguarding prospective students and maintaining institutional credibility.

2.7 INFORMATION SOURCES UTILISED BY CLUBS AND SOCIETIES TO DISTRIBUTE INFORMATION

In the contemporary higher education landscape, institutions are navigating increasingly complex challenges, particularly concerning student recruitment and engagement. This complexity necessitates a profound and nuanced understanding of the diverse information sources prospective students consult when considering applications to an HEI. Clubs and societies, acting as significant intermediaries, predominantly utilize two broad categories of information channels for distribution: physical and online platforms.

2.7.1 Physical through face-to-face to distribute of information

The discernment process involved in selecting a Higher Education Institution (HEI) and a suitable field of study constitutes a complex and inherently high stakes undertaking, often necessitating collaborative decision-making and involving considerable personal risk. Consequently, the reliance on readily available and user-friendly information sources becomes paramount for prospective students and their families (Ismail and Kuppusamy, 2022). Historically, HEIs significantly depended on direct, face-to-face interactions as a primary, if not exclusive, mechanism for information distribution (Ntuli, 2020: 26). In an era predating sophisticated online information systems, clear signage, and comprehensive digital guidance, clubs and societies frequently assumed the critical role of de facto navigators, offering vital insights and direction to parents and prospective students alike (Parreira et al., 2023: 1).

These student organizations traditionally position themselves strategically at HEI entrances during key periods, such as registration, and actively engage in outreach programs, including high school visits, often under the guidance of student governance structures (SGD). While these direct interactions foster personal connections and provide immediate opportunities for clarification, they are not immune to the complexities of the contemporary "Information Age." As Clarke (2017: 1) astutely observes, a paradox exists: despite unprecedented access to diverse information sources, discerning the origin and authenticity of information, distinguishing fact from opinion, and truth from falsehood has become increasingly challenging.

Alarmingly, a discernible gap persists in the academic literature concerning the intrinsic quality of information conveyed within HE through these various distribution channels, particularly through student-led initiatives. Studies, for instance, consistently highlight the profound influence of word-of-mouth communication in the pursuit of information (Ismail and Kuppusamy, 2022), a dynamic highly prevalent within clubs and societies. This underscores the critical imperative to thoroughly understand and reconceptualize the quality of information distributed via diverse sources by students themselves, with a view to assure and continuously enhance its integrity and efficacy. Against this backdrop of identified literary deficiencies and documented challenges, the current study undertakes a rigorous evaluation of the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies, meticulously examining both the content and the specific channels employed for prospective student engagement.

2.7.2 Physical through distributing manuals

HEIs generate and distribute manuals covering various types of information such as admission information, funding, and student housing (Savelios 2021). These manuals are department-specific and are distributed to the relevant departments for distribution. Access to these manuals is available both in physical form and online via the HEI websites (Mohd Jailani 2022). These instructions are accessible to any member of society who can then distribute them to prospective students, clubs and societies who can distribute them. Consequently, these manuals are also made available and distributed online by clubs and societies. While HEIs strive to provide prospective students with valuable information, they may encounter numerous hurdles when

seeking clarification on some concerns. The responsibility for answering these concerns lies with the manual providers, not the manual distributors, which may ultimately degrade the quality.

2.7.3 Online through social media platforms

In contemporary times the advent of technology has significantly transformed the process of distributing information. Hence, HE is transitioning from traditional face-to-face delivery techniques to other approaches. Effective methods of distributing information includes targeted engagement with clubs and societies, along with carefully planned promotional initiatives that encompass a wide-reaching social media presence and online content. Information distribution is more effective through technology since a high number of information seekers are migrating to the utilisation of online information (Shonhe 2017: 3). As a result, existing students consistently distribute information to prospective students on social media (Zhang 2021: 56). Due to challenges related to access to the internet, information literacy and finances for data, prospective students from underprivileged communities rely on the online sources of information. 73% of students indicated that they spend more time using technological means of social connection and less time interacting face-to-face with others due to the growing issue of social isolation (Al Rawashdeh *et al.* 2021: 108). It is important to assess the factors that affect the quality of information distributed, notwithstanding the obstacles involved.

2.8 FACTORS INFLUENCING THE QUALITY OF INFORMATION DISTRIBUTED

The landscape of higher education (HE) is increasingly defined by the imperative to address and eradicate educational inequalities, a responsibility that often prompts various stakeholders, including student organizations, to actively distribute information to prospective students (Luescher *et al.*, 2016: 15). Recognizing the critical vulnerability of this audience, clubs and societies frequently initiate information campaigns, particularly at the beginning of the academic year, to assist potential enrollees (Sokhela and Murhula, 2022: 261). Most prospective students arrive with limited prior experience of HE institutions, compelling them to undertake extensive research within the "educational market" to inform their pivotal decisions (Lubbe and Petzer, 2013: 922). Consequently, their search for information spans both

technological sources and invaluable face-to-face interactions, often seeking guidance directly from current students within the institutions (UNESCO-IESALC, 2020: 10). However, research unequivocally demonstrates that when this student-distributed information is of poor quality, prospective students encounter significant challenges, including impeded access to HE itself (Mpungose, 2020: 52).

The gravity of this issue is starkly illustrated by recent institutional experiences. In 2022, the specific University of Technology (UoT) central to this study publicly condemned the widespread distribution of false information online, specifically related to student registration, available spaces, and banking details (Thwala, 2022: 1). Similarly, a neighbouring HEI issued a critical warning that same year regarding an enrolment scam, where malicious actors fraudulently registered students for non-existent programs (Singh, 2022: 1). These incidents highlight the severe risks posed by compromised information quality, particularly when clubs and societies, often operating with limited institutional oversight (Astakhova, 2020: 57), become channels for such distribution. Several scholars (e.g., Rosenberg et al., 2020: 419; Togola et al., 2019: 1; Prinsloo et al., 2017: 4) have underscored various factors influencing the quality of distributed information, including the distribution channels' capabilities and extant institutional policies. Given the critical role of student organizations in guiding prospective students and the documented instances of information failures, it becomes imperative to critically establish the specific challenges affecting prospective students due to the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies in HEIs. This dissertation aims to address this urgent need for clarity and robust solutions.

2.8.1 The ability of clubs and societies to distribution information

The ability to distribute information has an influence on the decisions made by prospective students. Furthermore, it is related to resource availability and technological access (Lubbe and Petzer 2013: 922). The resources consist of human resources capable of distributing high-quality information (Miranda *et al.* 2021: 12). This also relates to the training required for distributing information. Technology also plays a crucial role in HEIs for distributing high-quality knowledge. This refers to websites and social media channels (Cuello-Garcia *et al.* 2020: 199) where information can be distributed directly by the HEI, ensuring high quality with no

compromises (Dutta 2020: 605). The capacity of clubs and societies to distribute information to prospective students during HEI applications highlights the crucial role these organisations have in defining the campus experience and therefore impacting application choices. Clubs and societies may greatly improve their exposure and appeal to prospective students by using efficient information distribution platforms and ensuring that they distribute quality. These clubs and societies frequently operate as entry points to campus life, providing crucial information on student participation, community engagement, and extracurricular options (Kenyon and Sen 2015: 31). The lack of presence might result in uneven and fragmented communication efforts, therefore reducing the potential influence of these organisations.

2.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has meticulously established the foundational importance of conceptualizing information quality within the unique context of higher education. It underscores that the strategic distribution of high-quality information, delivered within an appropriate context and in a timely manner, is pivotal for prospective students. Such information serves not only to apprise individuals of potential opportunities and mitigate prospective impediments related to the admissions process (Mai, 2013: 677) but also plays a crucial role in alleviating ambiguity. By effectively elucidating the fundamental nature and attributes of an institution or programme, quality information empowers individuals to comprehend complex instructions, explanations, examples, and theories (Chaushi and Dika, 2013: 3).

The overarching argument presented is that the superior the quality of information distributed, the greater the probability that HEIs, along with their various constituent members, will thrive. This direct correlation highlights a profound obligation: HEIs are inherently responsible for ensuring that all information distributed by student organizations, including clubs and societies, adheres to stringent quality standards. This is imperative, as the quality of this information demonstrably impacts the experiences and decision-making trajectories of prospective students, thereby directly influencing their academic futures and the institution's long-term reputation.

CHAPTER 3: POLICY FRAMEWORKS RELATED TO THE QUALITY OF INFORMATION DISTRIBUTED

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a critical examination of the policy frameworks that govern, influence, and relate to the distribution of quality information by student organizations, specifically clubs and societies, within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). A foundational understanding of quality assurance (QA), quality improvement, and quality maintenance is indispensable for appreciating the profound significance of establishing robust policies pertaining to information quality in HE. Therefore, this section commences by offering a comprehensive delineation of these key concepts, setting the conceptual stage for the subsequent policy analysis. The chapter then systematically navigates a hierarchy of policy perspectives, commencing with global, progressing through continental and national, and culminating in institutional considerations. Global insights will be drawn from the policy landscapes of China, the United States of America, and Russia. These nations are purposefully selected based on their profound contributions to the global academic community, their status as developed economies, and their varied approaches to educational governance, which offer diverse benchmarks for information quality regulation.

At the continental level, the review will encompass policies from Malawi, Nigeria, and Egypt. These countries are strategically chosen due to their classification as developing nations, sharing analogous socio-economic and educational development trajectories with South Africa, thus providing relevant comparative contexts. The national policy discussion will critically engage with seminal documents such as the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 1997) and the overarching Post-School Education and Training (PSET) Information Policy (DHET, 2013). Finally, the institutional policy landscape will be explored through an analysis of the admissions policy and the social media policy of the specific University of Technology (UoT) under investigation, revealing how broad directives translate into localized operational guidelines. The overarching aim of this chapter is to furnish the necessary contextual understanding required to comprehend the rationale, operational functions, and far-reaching consequences of policies regarding

information quality and its distribution within the dynamic HE environment. By synthesizing these diverse policy perspectives, this chapter will illuminate existing gaps, potential conflicts, and areas for strategic intervention, thereby underscoring the imperative for coherent and effective governance of student-led information distribution.

3.1.1 Quality assurance policies in higher education

Various countries have developed national policies to ensure the quality of HE, mostly by implementing external procedures for QA (Makola 2021: 15). Quality assurance is the implementation of policies, processes, systems, and practices (both within and outside the organisation) with the aim of attaining, sustaining, and enhancing quality (Jesry *et al.* 2022: 2). In accordance with the National Education Policy Act (DoE 1998) in South Africa, numerous policies, green and white papers, acts, and regulations have been put into effect by the government, all with the aim of reforming the HE system of the country and ensure QA. Higher Education Institutions have important responsibilities in terms of QA that contribute to the improvement of people's lives. This process is continuous and ongoing (Basar *et al.* 2016: 107). Furthermore, within the scope of this study, QA in HE is advocated for several purposes, such as ensuring accountability in providing information to prospective students regarding their decision-making process for applying and gaining admission to HEIs (Lucander and Christersson 2020: 135).

Hadzhikoleva *et al.* (2022: 2) suggest that QA and certification procedures need the collection, manipulation, and examination of substantial quantities of data. Ineffective QA processes can result from a lack of engagement and collaboration between students, HEIs, and QA organisations in the development of QA procedures (Rahnuma 2020: 26). To substantiate this, Kiden *et al.* (2021: 24) argues that African HEIs, including South Africa, often neglect internal QA standards in their student recruitment and admission processes, leading to a deficiency in prioritising quality. The primary objectives of QA organisations are to uphold and enhance quality, establish accountability, assess institutions and activities, and furnish stakeholders with pertinent information. Hence, the adoption of these quality frameworks has significant consequences for HEIs in the quality information distribution.

3.1.2 Quality improvement

Quality improvement includes providing stakeholders with the necessary time, authorisation, expertise, and resources to address the challenges that affect the quality of assistance (Provost and Murray 2022). Hildesheim and Sonntag (2020: 895) emphasise the need for organisations to give top priority to ongoing quality improvement, promoting a culture of shared values, and showing unwavering dedication to quality. Introducing and applying these measures can enhance the quality of HE and continuously boost satisfaction, especially among students (Cudney *et al.* 2020: 232). There are noteworthy disparities that exist in the implementation of quality improvement methods among HEIs, necessitating an evaluation of performance to examine the extent of enhancement in quality (Jasti *et al.* 2022: 99) especially relating to clubs and societies. Human development relies on the use of management and quality improvement techniques to advance both the means and the goal of human advancement (Kooli and Abadli 2022: 483). Prior to undertaking any quality improvement initiative, HEIs initially establish the fundamental tenets of quality (Sciarelli *et al.* 2020: 51). Quality enhancement initiatives are crucial in HE and are indispensable for HEIs in a globalised market. The involvement of the academic community enhances the credibility of quality-related activities (González-Bravo *et al.* 2020: 322), specifically in relation to the clubs and societies. It is crucial to prioritise the enhancement of the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies.

3.1.3 Maintaining quality

The continuous assurance and consistent upholding of high-quality standards are increasingly vital imperatives for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), directly impacting not only their institutional reputations but also critically influencing student recruitment and retention (Mfecane *et al.*, 2022: 13). Consequently, it is incumbent upon HEIs to systematically assess and respond to student perceptions of quality, thereby facilitating both its ongoing improvement and sustained maintenance (Ntoyakhe and Ngibe, 2020: 106). Academic discourse suggests that to effectively uphold high educational standards, adaptive modifications to existing quality assurance (QA) procedures are frequently necessary (AIDhaen *et al.*, 2023: 46). Hence, achieving a more efficient and impactful distribution of information necessitates that HEIs unequivocally prioritize the preservation of its quality (Zvavahera, 2021:

189). However, HEIs frequently encounter significant systemic difficulties in consistently upholding their quality standards (Mulenga, 2020). These challenges are often compounded by the evident lack of adequate training provided to student organizations, such as clubs and societies, hindering their capacity to effectively distribute information while simultaneously adhering to rigorous quality benchmarks. In South Africa, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) plays a pivotal national role. It conducts comprehensive institutional audits, performs national evaluations of academic disciplines and credentials, accredits learning programmes, and actively fosters a culture of quality within the South African Higher Education System (Yende and Mthombeni, 2023: 10). Established as a national body to enhance sector monitoring and accountability, the HEQC's mandates are designed to ensure institutions adhere to established quality requirements.

Despite the critical oversight provided by the HEQC, a significant lacuna exists currently, no formal evaluations or audits are routinely performed on the information distributed by clubs and societies. This is a critical oversight given their crucial function in directly engaging and informing prospective students. This absence of systematic oversight inherently leads to a deficiency in upholding the consistent distribution of high-quality information by these influential student organizations, thereby exposing prospective students to potential misinformation and undermining the HEI's broader commitment to quality.

3.2 GLOBAL POLICIES GOVERNING INFORMATION QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The global landscape of higher education is characterized by a diverse array of policy frameworks pertaining to quality assurance and enhancement. Within this context, the quality of information distributed emerges as a critically crucial segment, directly impacting an institution's capacity to attract and effectively enrol prospective students. Policies concerning access to HE must fundamentally prioritize not just entry, but also the feasible chance of student success, as access devoid of genuine opportunities for achievement is ultimately rendered ineffectual. This research critically examines selected global policies, drawing insights from the higher education systems of China, the United States of America, and Russia. These nations are strategically included in this review. Their selection is not solely predicated on their status as advanced

economies, which developing nations, including South Africa, frequently seek to emulate in their HEs programme development. More critically, their varied policy approaches to educational quality, particularly concerning governance, oversight, and student recruitment within large and complex HE systems, offer a rich comparative lens. By analysing how these diverse global players address information quality, particularly in relation to external stakeholders like prospective students, this study aims to identify best practices, common challenges, and potential policy recommendations relevant to the South African context. The insights gleaned from these international perspectives will thus contribute to a more nuanced understanding of effective information quality governance in HEIs.

3.2.1 China

The Chinese government is actively establishing thorough policies to evaluate and enhance HE performance, despite the limited history of QA in HE there (Song 2022: 175). Feng (2023: 3) states that information quality is the system's capacity for sharing information significantly. Chinese HEIs are in their first phase of their sustainable growth since the implementation of reforms and the opening-up policy in 1980 (Yasmin *et al.* 2021: 3). The Chinese Ministry of Education launched the Evaluation of University Baccalaureate Programmes Project in 2002 with the aim of enhancing governmental oversight of QA in HEIs. Before the introduction of this project, several evaluation-related were conducted. In 1985, the government undertook an assessment of recommendations on engineering schools as a pilot test. Subsequently, the Draft Regulation of Higher Education Institution Evaluation (Chinese Ministry of Education 1990) was introduced. In 1994, China initiated three assessment initiatives: the University Evaluation Standards Project, Exemplary Evaluation, and Random Evaluation (Raza and Irfan 2018). In 2002, China consolidated these three assessments into what ultimately evolved into the Evaluation of University Baccalaureate Programmes Project.

The significant expansion of the Chinese economy has garnered interest from other countries regarding economic, commercial, and educational collaborations with China. The main variables that enhance student experiences in an institution are the quality and the satisfaction of students. Student involvement is seen as a significant indication

of institutional success in China, due to the increasing emphasis on evaluation, transparency, and accountability in HE quality discourse (Tian *et al.* 2021: 2). However, there is a gap in literature pertaining to the distribution of quality information by clubs and societies. In China, clubs and societies only participate in the Edu fares where they introduce themselves to prospective students. During the Edu fares they only distribute information concerning their organisations and not about admissions. Hence it was crucial to conduct the current study to establish the quality of information distributed.

3.2.2 United States of America

A common approach to improve quality at an HEI is by creating a quality policy and quality objectives (Guangul *et al.* 2020: 529). In the United States of America internal QA involves academic institutions monitoring and enhancing the quality of their education provision, while external QA involves policies and practices at a higher level ensuring the quality of HEIs and their programmes (Maatuk *et al.* 2022: 29). The Paperwork Reduction Act (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35) imposes obligations on several agencies with respect to certain areas of their information gathering and distribution activities which also include HEIs (Reylea 2000). Therefore, American HEIs consistently develop and improve the quality of knowledge supplied in HE. This involves several stakeholders in the distribution of high-quality information. As a result, HEIs' conceptualisation of quality has developed over time, with an emphasis on how students are prepared to be effective contributors to the economy and society (Strydom and Loots 2008: 20). Policies function as a framework for the execution of HE practises, thereby fostering the attainment of enhanced quality standards in HE outcomes (Maatuk *et al.* 2022: 29).

3.2.3 Russia

Over the past few decades, the Russian HE sector has been transforming, and the main focus has been quality. There are initiatives to assure and sustain quality that are being identified, developed, and practised at HEIs (Prakhov 2023: 2). Russia has experienced significant economic and demographic changes, as well as changes in official educational policies (Motova and Navodnov 2020: 35). Modern education systems need to adopt significant reforms to keep up with the fast expansion of

scientific information (Yachina 2015). The challenge is to provide equitable access to higher education, which is declining due to regional differences in Russia's educational landscape, resulting in uneven placement of institutions across the country (Kulikova *et al.* 2021: 3). Hence the development of the National Higher Education Equity Policy. In May 2018 the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation was established as the new governing body responsible for formulating policies related to higher education. As a result, the fourth Sustainable Development Goal was implemented with the aim of fostering inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, aligning with Russia's HE system's strategic planning. New educational standards have been developed based on the current requirements of the information society. HEIs are obliged to incorporate excellence into their quality systems and cultures. The concept and technique apply to both external and internal quality procedures which also includes the information distributed. Institutions have greater control over internal processes and may focus on ensuring quality requirements. Although HE is considered a fundamental aspect of education policy in many European countries, it is not accurate to say that access to it is completely unrestricted and free. Higher education, including both the provision of courses and study programmes, as well as the resulting diplomas and qualifications, can be subject to trade and exclusion of certain individuals.

3.2.4 Continental policies (Africa)

The African continent has several hurdles, particularly in terms of its growth and development, especially when it comes to the distribution of high-quality information. An essential concern in the African HEIs is the calibre of their approaches and processes, which encompasses the information provided. Consequently, several initiatives have been developed, but the implementation of these measures has been challenging owing to a lack of resources in terms of technology and funds to reach the target audience and distribute high-quality information. Since the global community continues to advance in terms of technology, African HEIs have continuously been changing their approach to new technology methods; however, there is a lack of prioritising the improvement of the quality of information in HE, despite the many problems they encounter. The African Union has developed a data/information policy framework to unify national data systems in accordance with the criteria of

accessibility, availability, transparency (while ensuring anonymity), compatibility, safety, security, quality, and reliability. The capacity of African nations and regions to address these patterns relies on their capacity to provide a conducive environment for generating value from data that is fair and inclusive. The data policy framework aims to address the issues of policy development in the rapidly evolving field of data by promoting a shared purpose and collaborative efforts across governments. Although there is presently no information quality site in Africa, it is crucial to build robust QA procedures. Experts propose that HEIs in Africa should strategically establish these frameworks, as described by Ansah *et al.* (2017: 8) to guarantee the quality of information in the African continent. There are many strategies that can facilitate the propagation of information, one of which is the engagement of clubs and societies. Students in Africa get information from many sources such as the official websites and prospectuses of HEIs, visiting HEIs on open days, and accessing online student sources (Mogaji *et al.* 2020: 280). The growing number of prospective students is placing significant strain on HEIs which have limited resources so are struggling to finance the rising needs of a larger student population without compromising on quality (Ndofirepi *et al.* 2020: 3). Hence the propagation of information continues to be facilitated by clubs and societies.

The African Union Commission is actively advocating for the standardisation of QA in HE throughout Africa, in partnership with the Association of African Universities and the European Union. Harmonisation aims to establish a consensus on the criteria and standards for quality, as well as a uniform method for evaluating quality. This also incorporates the quality of information that is propagated to prospective students in HEIs. According to the African Union (2015) it is essential to standardise criteria and standards to govern all colleges based on similar benchmarks. Harmonisation does not imply the imposition of a standardised system on every organisation or nation. It signifies that the fundamental structure for evaluating quality is the same. Despite the high importance placed on the overall quality of HE in many countries, there is a lack of assessments addressing the quality of information provided by clubs and societies. There are signs of the existence of clubs and societies, and most of their declared responsibilities include helping pupils progress and succeed within the school system. As a result, South African HEIs have a significant number of clubs and societies that engage in activities like those in other countries. However, other nations provide less

information in this regard. This occurrence underscores a deficiency in the current study on the operational mechanics of clubs and societies in countries other than South Africa.

3.2.4.1 Malawi

The enrolment of students in the HE system in Malawi is the smallest in the Southern Africa Development Community region. A minuscule proportion of students hailing from low-income households could pursue HE (Altinyelken and Hoeksma 2021). HEIs encounter several obstacles that may impede the realisation of national development objectives. The National Education Policy is a formal document issued by the Government of Malawi that outlines the government's official stance and guidelines on education. This policy stipulates that the provision of technical, entrepreneurial, and vocational education and training must adhere to industry standards and meet the expectations of the industry in terms of quality and relevance. The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) was established by Act of Parliament No. 15 of 2011 with the purpose of advancing quality, accessible, relevant, and inclusive HE and training in Malawi. This is achieved through the implementation of the most effective methods of regulating HE. Although the country is encouraging participation in the education sector, the problem of quality remains a significant concern. Mapulanga *et al.* (2023: 4) states that the presence of skill inadequacies in students has a direct impact on the overall quality of information they can access. This, in turn, might have consequences for the actions that are taken based on the available information. Mapulanga *et al.* (2023: 4) highlighted that in Malawi HEIs utilise information and communication technology to improve the distribution of information and facilitate teaching and learning (e-learning) which offers significant promise to promote access HE, notwithstanding the challenges faced in developing nations. To effectively complete these duties, students in clubs and societies need access to information sources of high-quality.

3.2.4.2 Nigeria

The objective of HE in Nigeria is to foster and maintain a culture of quality, while observations indicate that there is a need for improvement. This includes policies that assist in maintaining quality. The quantity, quality, and allocation of resources, which

include information dedicated to execution, significantly influence the timing and way a policy is applied. An ongoing concern over resources extends beyond their availability and quantity for implementation but also encompasses their utilisation and the purpose of the resource strategy (Asiyai 2022: 835). The Nigerian education system is founded upon the National Policy on Education document of 1977, which was last modified in 2013. Nwajiuba *et al.* (2020: 359) highlight that the policy outlined the national educational objectives, namely: the establishment of a society that is both free and democratic; the creation of a society that is fair and equal; the formation of a country that is unified, resilient, and independent; the development of a thriving and dynamic economy; and the provision of abundant opportunities for all people. The policy acknowledges certain concerns that it tackles, such as the quality of HE (Eze *et al.* 2020: 6). However, it fails to address the quality of information available to prospective students, revealing a deficiency in the safeguarding of accurate and reliable information. This is a common trend in developing nations, especially in Africa.

3.2.4.3 Egypt

Distribution of information in relation to Egyptian HEIs is through two primary media channels: social media and conventional media platforms. El Alfy and Abukari (2020) assert that the development of communication tools will be restricted to short-term initiatives, namely tactical policies. The presence of social justice and equality concerns in HE is apparent, particularly in efforts to broaden access to HE via increased enrolment capacity and various admission pathways. Policy development has shown noticeable variation due to the varying levels of commitment from successive governments and institutional administrations. In the context of education, the term 'quality assurance' refers to the deliberate efforts and planned actions used to ensure high standards of quality (Mourad *et al.* 2020). Quality in the sector of HE might be defined as exceptionalism, excellence, absence of mistakes, suitability for its intended purpose, reform and restructuring, meeting a minimum standard, or improvement. Consequently, QA in HE should be thorough and assess the inputs, processes, and results. According to Badrawi and Rashwan (2024) the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE) Institutional guide to the accreditation of HEIs is responsible for promoting the adoption of quality

standards in educational institutions and society. It aims to produce national standards that align with worldwide quality standards.

3.3 NATIONAL POLICIES – SOUTH AFRICA

Since 1994 the government has prioritised access, equity, redress, and quality in educational reforms, supported by a comprehensive legislative, policy, and regulatory framework to assure inclusion (Mestry 2020: 3). As a result, information is increasingly sought after as governments and HEIs adjust their legislative frameworks in response to shifting market conditions, societal expectations, and competitive dynamics (Hiran and Henten 2020: 443). The purpose of these regulations is to ensure the proper functioning of HEIs and to ensure that students get the best quality education, including accurate and comprehensive information provided for prospective students. Over time, various guidelines have been created to guarantee that the quality of teaching and learning in HEIs is excellent. However, there is a gap in the regulations that govern the distribution of high-quality information by both the institutions and clubs and societies.

The present regulations lack precision on the role of clubs and societies in distributing information to prospective pupils and exerting an impact on quality. Consequently, there have been instances when clubs and societies have distributed substandard information without incurring significant repercussions from HEIs due to the absence of laws governing the quality of information being distributed. The quality of information distributed in South African HEIs is determined by many aspects. The Evaluation of the Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act from 2008 to 2016, as reported by the DHET in 2018, identifies many challenges encountered in the execution of policies inside institutions (Branson *et al.* 2020: 30). The White Paper for Post-school Education and Training (DHET 2013) proposes that all these institutions, along with other stakeholders such as business sector groups and trade unions, collaborate to establish a unified, coordinated, and diverse system.

3.3.1 The white paper of 1997

Since 1994, South Africa has been constructing various policies for the education and training system with the objective of fulfilling the requirements of a democratic society.

The policy initiatives were established to democratise the education system, addressing amongst many things, increased access to education and training opportunities, as well as enhancing the quality in HE (Republic of South Africa 1997). To enhance the quality in HE the aim was to combine different components of the post-school system and increase its supply (Allais 2020: 148). Significant policy tools have been created, such as laws, official government reports, and preliminary discussion documents, one of which is the white paper for PSET. This white paper sought to provide ideas for enhancing the existing education and training offerings in South Africa. The fundamental tenets of democracy, fairness, excellence, broadening access to education and training, and the harmonisation of education and training align with the guiding principles of this white paper. A study conducted by Mpungose (2020: 52) indicates that policies are another factor that influence the distribution of information.

Enhancing the quality of education and training services is vital. There has been a significant decrease in the level of educational achievement in many HEIs that cater to most of the people meaning that a high level of quality is necessary in all areas. Despite the implementation of various policy measures, South Africa has encountered a range of issues that have compelled students in HE to consistently pursue solutions. Since 1994, there has been a lack of sufficient resources to fully restructure HE, resulting in negative effects on equality, quality, and development (Badat 2020: 25). The student demonstrations that took place during the 2015-2016 academic year resulted in the allocation of substantial state funds to improve access to HEIs in a fairer manner. However, those protests did not address the issues related to the quality of education provided by HEIs, their contribution to development, and the specific roles played by different HEIs. The students that were demonstrating were members of clubs and societies, especially political clubs.

3.3.2 Post-school education and training information policy

The purpose of the PSET information policy is to provide guidelines and fundamental principles for developing an integrated higher education and training management information system that can be used to collect and transmit the country's data on skills provision (Strydom and Foxcroft 2017). The PSET information policy (DHET 2019) is

based on several fundamental principles related to the quality of information. Those that are relevant to this study are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: PSET information quality concepts

Quality components	Description
Accessibility	The Department, in collaboration with DHET organisations and PSETs, shall ensure that data is presented in a transparent and comprehensible format, published in a suitable and easy way, and made accessible on the departmental website together with accompanying metadata.
Accuracy	This is an essential component of quality, with evident ramifications for the usefulness and significance of the data in terms of interpretation or further analysis. The Department, in collaboration with DHET organisations and PSETs, shall implement suitable and thorough QA procedures at every level of the system to guarantee the accuracy of the data pertaining to the PSET sector.
Credibility	Every PSET institution and DHET organisation must guarantee that the data it provides to the Department and shares through its own channels is reliable.
Relevance	Relevance is assessed through consultation with internal and external stakeholders.
Reliability	Reliability pertains to the capacity of a system to operate under specified conditions for a predetermined duration. Reliability may be assessed based on the data's quality and the capacity to manage exceptions.
Timeliness	Data will be promptly published, considering data audits conducted by PSET institutions and DHET organisations.

Source: Author

These ideas are synonymous with fundamental elements of quality. These principles of quality in HE primarily pertains to HEIs. There is no guidance on how clubs and societies might utilise these components to effectively distribute information. The policy only highlights the necessity of enhancing the quality of PSET. The area that requires enhancement is the delivery of quality information. It is envisaged that the HEIs will incorporate these quality components to guarantee the distribution of information (DHET 2017). The distribution of information to prospective students does not have any discernible effects for stakeholders such as clubs and societies. DHET recognises the significance of student structures, such as clubs and societies in HE (Duncan 2021: 44). They are fully governed by the SRC and are expected to operate inside the HEIs to facilitate students' growth through programmes. Recently, in addition to fulfilling their national organisations' purpose, clubs and societies have also been actively engaging with communities with the aim of distributing information. The delivery of high-quality information by them is subject to debate, mostly due to insufficient training and skills.

3.4 INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES RELATED TO QUALITY OF INFORMATION DISTRIBUTED

The importance of quality and QA systems in South Africa has been growing, with a focus on government policies and frameworks (Stander 2016: 43). HEIs develop strategies to effectively draft and implement policies. Although there have been discussions and debates about improving education, there is still a dearth of thorough analysis that evaluates the unique contributions, problems, and possible obstacles of various policy frameworks in promoting beneficial transitions (Maama 2023: 20). Therefore, it is crucial to assess the distribution of high-quality information in HE by using current legislative frameworks and adopting the dimensions of information quality as a reference of the measurements of quality. Hence, it is important to identify the elements that impact the quality of information distributed by students at HEIs, especially those associated with clubs and societies.

As much as South Africa has a multitude of policies and laws that regulate HE such as the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 (Republic of South Africa 1997) which established principles for the operation of councils, institutional forums, and SRCs (Nthontho *et al.* 2021: 50). As a result of this deficit HEIs have embarked on formulating various policies as means of regulating the quality of information being distributed by its members, including social media policies.

3.4.1 Admissions policy

The admission procedures for undergraduate programmes at South African HEIs have been marked by various difficulties and a sequence of adverse outcomes. These challenges are related to the information that prospective students need in order to complete their application. The main objective of student recruitment activities at an HEI is to establish a pool of applicants that is varied in terms of backgrounds and geographical areas. Student recruitment endeavours to enhance the HEI's visibility and promote its programmes through the development and distribution of promotional material, both in print and electronic formats. This information should be clear, accurate, thorough, and suitable for the intended audience. It is also crucial for individuals in charge of admissions should undergo training in order to "discern authentic potential in addition to accomplishments and render equitable judgements"

(Greenbank 2006: 253). At this UoT there are various policies that assist in guiding its members on how to distribute information in addition to the admissions policy. This study argues that there exists a troubling deficiency in the participation and comprehension of clubs and societies about these prominent policies.

3.4.2 Social media policy

The UoT has implemented a social media strategy to mitigate the distribution of erroneous information. This policy includes provisions to prevent students or staff members from distributing or establishing social media platforms on behalf of the university. Nevertheless, the implementation of that strategy is still an aspect that has to be investigated. This is derived from the ongoing distribution of information that lacks quality particularly on Facebook. The proliferation of these platforms persists. The primary objective of this policy is to ensure the distribution of quality information. Through this policy, the UoT promotes the distribution of up-to-date, useful, and engaging information that is consistently accurate and professionally presented across all social media platforms. The policy does not intend to limit academic freedom and the exchange of ideas, information, and opinions among staff and students. However, it does require that the information posted on social media does not harm the positive reputation, quality, and professional connection between the user and the HEI (Rabatseta *et al.* 2021: 25).

3.5 SUMMARY

The existing HE policies do not explicitly delineate the responsibilities of students regarding the distribution of high-quality information. Given this discrepancy, it is crucial for the current research to present a model that will precisely delineate the involvement of clubs and societies in improving the distribution of quality information regarding HEI admissions to prospective students. The measures taken to promote progress, organisation, implementation, funding, supervision, and evaluation in the PSET system have been inadequate. These institutions aid educational and training providers, including QA organisations in the post-school sector. Specifically, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) establishes a strong framework that promotes a positive environment for the implementation of projects. Clearly, these national and

institutional efforts have failed to eliminate the persistent distribution of poor-quality information to prospective students.

CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS RELATED TO QUALITY INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter articulates the foundational theoretical frameworks that underpin this research, serving as conceptual lenses through which the phenomena of information quality and distribution within student organizations are examined. A robust theoretical framework is paramount in doctoral studies; it provides a structured blueprint for inquiry, guides the research design and methodology, informs the analysis of empirical data, and ultimately facilitates the generation of novel scholarly contributions rather than merely confining the investigation to existing paradigms. For the comprehensive exploration of the research problem, this study strategically adopts two complementary theoretical frameworks: the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle and Organisational Information Theory (OIT). The Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle, a widely recognized iterative management method for the continuous improvement of processes and products, is deployed in this study to contextualize and analyse the operational dimensions of quality information management within Higher Education (HE). PDCA's principles, though extensively applied in various academic sectors to enhance educational quality and operational efficiency, have seen limited explicit application in systematically assessing and improving information distribution processes, particularly within the specific context of student organizations. Its cyclical nature offers a pragmatic lens to understand how information distribution practices are planned, executed, monitored, and refined, thus highlighting the critical role-players and the continuous pursuit of quality in HE communication.

To complement PDCA's process-oriented focus, Organisational Information Theory (OIT) is adopted to provide a deeper understanding of the inherent complexities of information processing and distribution within organizational settings. OIT, primarily developed by Karl Weick, offers insights into how organizations manage equivocal (ambiguous) information, the importance of requisite variety in information processing, and the mechanisms of sense-making. This theory is particularly pertinent to this study by illuminating the challenges student organizations face in collecting, interpreting, and distributing clear, consistent, and useful information to diverse audiences like

prospective students, especially given the often informal and resource-constrained nature of such groups. Together, these frameworks offer a holistic analytical approach, enabling a comprehensive examination of both the operational practices and the communicative intricacies underpinning quality information distribution.

4.2 PDCA CYCLE AS THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopted the PDCA cycle as a theoretical framework to elucidate the significance of quality information in higher HE. The PDCA cycle refers to plan, do, check and act (Desai 2016: 1). Also known as the plan-do-check-act methodology, this cycle was first formulated and described by Walter A. Shewart, an esteemed American statistics specialist, during the 1930s. Subsequently, throughout the 1950s, Deming refined and popularised the process, making it widely recognised as one of the most prominent approaches for facilitating development globally (Isniah *et al.* 2020: 72), including in HE sectors. It is a pragmatic framework that enables teams and organisations to engage in a process of ongoing quality enhancement (Tari 2023). This approach seeks to assess and enhance quality (Mohamed 2019: 26). The discussion of quality is crucial inside the organisation as it enables the elimination of waste and enhances the organisation's ability to thrive and endure. The objective of this research was to evaluate the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies in HEIs.

4.2.1 Principles of PDCA

During the "Act" phase, clubs and societies utilise the acquired insights from the assessment to make informed modifications to their communication tactics. This may entail the process of improving communications, revising information, or embracing new communication channels to effectively connect with and captivate prospective students (Ma *et al.* 2022: 2). The utilisation of the PDCA cycle to enhance the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students is based on its iterative and methodical approach to ongoing development. Utilising this theory is of utmost importance in this study due to its proven efficacy as a valuable instrument in HE. HEIs have utilised the concept as a tool for enhancing the quality of learning outcomes (Amalia *et al.* 2023: 43). The PDCA has also been applied in the fields of policies and legislation, which are a relevant component in this study. Regular

analyses of data and information pertaining to applications in HE concerns are necessary. To ensure the proper implementation of these initiatives, it is essential for the management to diligently monitor and track the progress of action items.

Figure 4.1 illustrates the necessary steps of the PDCA:

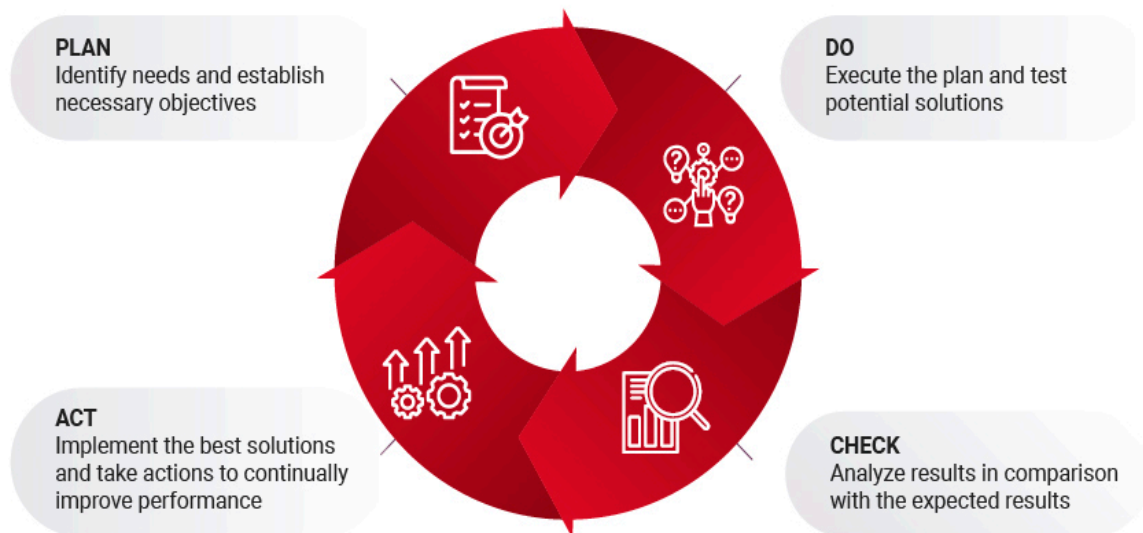


Figure 4.1: PDCA cycle
Source: Desai (2016: 1)

4.2.1.1 Plan

The PDCA cycle can be utilised when initiating a new improvement project, when creating a new or enhanced design for a process, when establishing a repeated work process, and when executing any type of change (Mathur *et al.* 2023: 18). The "Plan" phase entails the identification of the requirements and interests of prospective students, as well as the development of focused communication tactics. This stage necessitates comprehensive investigation and active involvement of stakeholders to guarantee that the information presented is pertinent and captivating (Ibidunni *et al.* 2023: 2). The Plan phase commences with preliminary assessments to evaluate potential impacts on systems and subsequently advances towards more substantial and targeted quality enhancements (Jelenc *et al.* 2020: 12). Within HE, the process of planning encompasses distinct cohorts of students, including the SRC but excludes the participation of clubs and societies. Quality management training should be arranged for leading group members to acquire knowledge on the PDCA management cycle (Ma *et al.* 2022: 2), in this case, for members of clubs and societies. Leaders of

each quality control team, along with team members, should thoroughly study the detailed explanation of quality standards and evaluate their understanding of the subject. This will enhance their inspection capabilities. In this study the clubs and societies can be assisted with various elements of planning to ensure that they distribute quality information to prospective students.

4.2.1.2 Do

During the "Do" phase, clubs and societies utilise several strategies for distributing information. These strategies encompass the utilisation of social media, brochures, direct interaction at the HEI gates, and visits to high schools (Ibidunni *et al.* 2023: 2). The execution and efficiency of this step are crucial to guarantee that prospective students obtain accurate and high-quality information. The Do phase encompasses the execution stage, during which all relevant stakeholders carry out the scheduled activities. To guarantee a successful project implementation plan, a comprehensive assessment of all factors related to the execution of this project needs to be carried out (Mohamed 2019: 26). Within the realm of clubs and societies, the execution strategy gets intricate due to their intention of distributing knowledge, hence compromising its quality. The quality throughout the implementation phase is crucial (Malega *et al.* 2021: 10) as it directly influences the enrolment decisions of prospective students. It also includes developing and execution a strategy for analysing and evaluate performance (Ikram and Kenayathullan 2023). Hence, the involvement of clubs and societies is crucial and for them to be aware of their strategies to ensure that quality information is distributed to prospective students.

4.2.1.3 Check

The "Check" phase is essential for evaluating the quality of interactions among several individuals, including clubs and societies and prospective students. This step involves collecting feedback to evaluate the quality of the information that is provided for prospective students. Nevertheless, the effective execution of this phase may be impeded by the accurate assessment of the impacts of quality distribution. Consistently monitoring the quality of the information distribution system can effectively address unexpected shortages and imbalanced capacity utilisation (Ojdjja 2023: 146). The underlying issue with the capacity utilisation for HEIs is the high

numbers of prospective students and minimal resources. Hence the checking phase is crucial to ensure that quality information is distributed by the clubs and societies who have demonstrated the ability to assist. This phase implements short-term operational strategies to resolve these issues in a timely and efficient manner (Sanchez *et al.* 2023: 819). The checking stage comprises multiple processes, specifically:

- **Monitoring-** The concept of quality in higher education is multi-dimensional and intricate. While there are several perspectives on monitoring quality in higher education, it is widely recognised that quality, regardless of its specific emphasis, serves to ensure accountability. Hence, the present research focuses on the issue of ensuring high-quality information in higher education, since it is crucial for clubs and societies to be held responsible.
- **Evaluating-** Assess the overall efficacy of the process of distributing information. Evaluate the extent to which the offered information enables prospective students to comprehend and successfully navigate the HEI application process. These processes enable the stakeholders to ensure that quality is not compromised (Isniah *et al.* 2020: 72), in this context the clubs and societies.

4.2.1.4 Act

During the "Act" phase, clubs and societies can obtain insights and evaluate the message, enabling them to make well-informed decisions. This phase facilitates the enhancement of communication channels and the improvement of information quality. In the act phase, efforts are made to enhance outcomes and surpass or fulfil requirements (Kovalenko *et al.* 2020: 5; Zailani *et al.* 2023: 4). For instance, in this stage institutions can arrange meetings to address unresolved matters and establish the subsequent corrective course of action, building upon the preceding verification stage (Ruzicic and Micic 2020: 23). This will assist to complete the process to guarantee the long-term viability of outcomes resulting from the measures implemented (Utkirov 2023: 4). These measures are essential since they enable this phase to completely assess the viability and impact of the procedures. Typically, this entails creating or revising protocols, workflows, best practice manuals, and templates

(Cochran and Borbieva *et al.* 2023: 259). The manuals in a form of handbooks are available in the HEIs website as well as physically on campus which makes it easy for clubs and societies to access them. It is also a matter of recognising enhancements and reverting to execute them.

4.2.1.5 Criticism of the theory

The set structure of phases generally allows little flexibility for other concepts or variables. Furthermore, the process of conceptual planning is time-consuming due to the gradual advancement resulting from the four phases. PDCA is mostly characterised by a reactive approach, where the person or team largely reacts to problems rather than proactively managing the process efficiently from the beginning and making changes to the process (Odjidja 2023: 146). The PDCA cycle as a theory in this context assists in understanding how clubs and societies can enhance the quality of information that they distribute to prospective students. However, there are hindrances in implementing the theory. The criticism includes the lack of planning by clubs and societies which has an impact on the implementation of the PDCA cycle. Implementing the PDCA in the context of the clubs and societies to enhance quality distribution of information encounters various objections.

4.2.1.6 Implementing PDCA cycle in this study

This study utilised the PDCA cycle as a theoretical framework to examine the essential components of quality information. The aim of this study was to evaluate the facilitation of the distribution of information in response to the rapidly evolving technological and social landscape, enhance the quality of information distributed by HEIs, and offer prospective students improved information quality within the context of HE, through clubs and societies. This theory serves as a continuous quality improvement process. HE holds the potential to offer greater benefits to the academic community, while also imposing new responsibilities on its members (Tari *et al.* 2023), when the PDCA cycle is adopted. However, there is insufficient empirical research that exists regarding the impact of implementing the PDCA cycle technique in education (Gong *et al.* 2023: 3). The connection between the quality function and quality improvement is often overlooked by HEIs (Alzahrani *et al.* 2021: 22).

The ability to act in a manner that yields measurable improvements in quality is crucial for effectively implementing initiatives aimed at enhancing quality inside and beyond HEIs (Little 2015: 325). Typically, PDCA cycles are used in the manufacturing sector to minimise various forms of waste, such as waiting time, idle periods, failures, faults, and so on. However, this study used the PDCA to examine its application in an HEI for the purpose of quality improvement and other related outcomes. The study utilised a qualitative research method. The successful implementation and execution of the PDCA is a standardisation process that hinges upon effective process management, overall stakeholder mobilisation, and a full understanding of the individual circumstances of each participant (Pan *et al.* 2007). The club and society controversies in HE, especially with the quality of information they distribute, have led to a lot of issues. Various scholars have proposed strategies for quality in HE but not applying explicitly to clubs and societies. The current study assessed their roles and how they distribute information.

Although the PDCA cycle has a systematic methodology, its success in this context might be impeded by many factors, including the difficulty of precisely recognising and attending to the requirements of prospective students, the fluctuation in the quality of execution caused by limitations in resources, and the possibility of encountering opposition to change within clubs and societies. Furthermore, maintaining up-to-date and pertinent information in response to criticism can be difficult, particularly in ever-changing and rapidly moving settings. To optimise the advantages of PDCA, it is crucial for clubs and societies to cultivate a culture that promotes ongoing enhancement, utilisation of technology to enhance the gathering and examination of data, and an unwavering commitment from leadership to the process. By doing this, clubs and societies may improve the quality and efficacy of the information they distribute, thereby providing greater help to prospective students in their decision-making process.

4.3 ORGANISATIONAL INFORMATION THEORY

This study used OIT to examine the intricacies of information dynamics within the HE context. OIT was formulated by Weick in the year 1969. The OIT approach was initially conceptualised as a strategy for managing information within organisations. However,

through time it has undergone critical evaluation by numerous researchers and has ultimately been acknowledged as a theoretical framework (Ali *et al.* 2015: 4). This theory offers a comprehensive perspective on the diverse mechanisms via which information is distributed (Mathiassen and Sorensen 2008: 8; Ali *et al.* (2015: 4).

4.3.1 Principles of OIT

This study placed great focus on the comprehension of information and its relevance in order to generate high-quality outcomes, therefore employed OIT; its scope in this research encompasses the distribution of information as well. This theory presents an extensive perspective regarding the various methods of how information is distributed (Mathiassen and Sorensen 2008: 8). OIT encompasses various fundamental concepts, including the information environment, information equivocality, and cycles of communication.

4.3.1.1 Information environment

The concept of the information environment encompasses a diverse array of individuals, organisations, and technological frameworks that engage in the activities of acquiring, analysing, distributing, and utilising information (Vladimir 2023: 1). The information environment refers to the specific setting in which individuals engage with others to exchange or acquire information that is necessary for their daily activities or to complete a particular activity (Oladokun 2014). In this context, It can also pertain to the circumstances in which information is obtained, controlled, utilised, and provided for the benefit of prospective students seeking admissions information (Morze 2014). The sources and conduits of information include clubs and societies, among other options. The information environment encompasses both conventional and digital media, as well as computer and telecommunication technologies (Bopko *et al.* 2020: 25). All these sources are utilised by clubs and societies.

4.3.1.2 Information equivocality

Information equivocality posits that while the receiver may perceive the signal itself, they may not fully comprehend its underlying meaning due to the presence of several sources (Mann 2018: 5). It also refers to the presence of ambiguity or several

opposing interpretations, sometimes resulting from ill-defined criteria (Lorentz *et al.* 2020: 5). Information is distributed via diverse channels, including social media. While social media can serve as a valuable source, it can also be a platform where information is ambiguous and open to interpretation (Kumalasari *et al.* 2022: 135). The presence of ambiguous information may compel those using social media to dedicate a substantial amount of time to processing it, resulting in an overwhelming amount of information (Wang *et al.* 2023: 5). To decrease the ambiguity of information, it is necessary to employ effective methods of exchanging and modifying information in various communication settings (such as in-person or technology-mediated) and through different communication elements (such as hints, individual languages, or voice tone) (Cho *et al.* 2023: 215).

4.3.1.3 Cycles of communication

According to Lewis (2019: 30), the communication process consists of several interconnected stages, namely idea formation, message encoding, message transmission, decoding, and feedback. This encompasses the procedure of distributing information, encompassing the tools utilised in the information milieu (de Luna 2023: 19). Scholars examine information quality as the successful receipt of what the sender intended to transmit to the recipient (Azemi *et al.* 2018: 413). Hence effective communication is crucial, as it ensures that the receiver comprehends the sender's message and intention, thereby completing the communication cycle (Oyeniran *et al.* 2020: 45).

The diagram in Figure 4.2 below illustrates the cycle of communication.

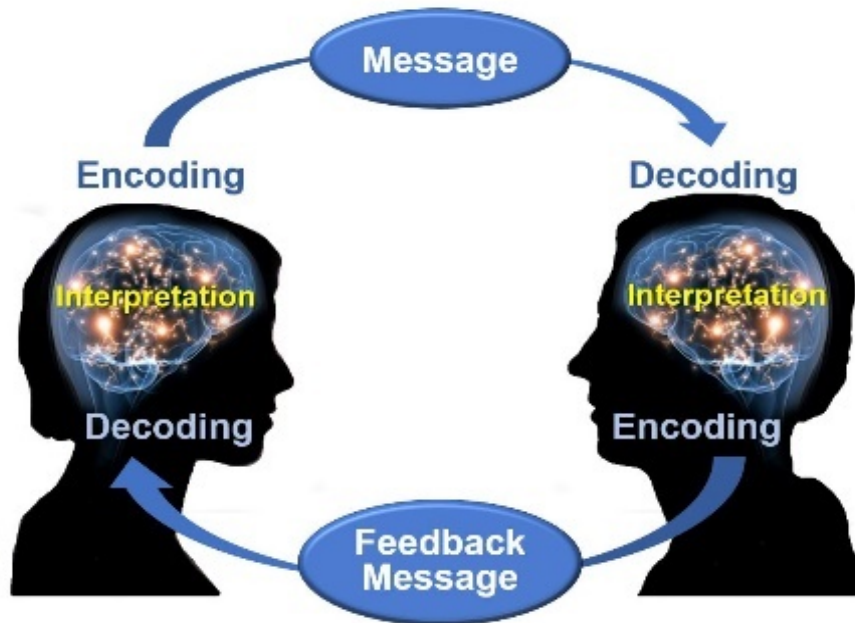


Figure 4.2: Cycle of communication
Source: Smith (2019: 1)

The life cycle of communication enhances the vitality and vigour of both the communicator and the recipient by highlighting the significance of meaning residing in the mind rather than in the message itself (Momeni 2021: 9; Taleb *et al.* 2017; Pan *et al.* 2007).

4.3.1.3.1 Sender

The sender assumes the role of initiating communication. In the present context, the clubs and societies are responsible for sending information to prospective students. This process can be influenced by external stimuli, such as documents or radio, or it can be initiated internally through contemplation of specific subject matter (Taleb *et al.* 2017). The source concept serves as the fundamental basis for communication.

4.3.1.3.2 Encoder

This device transforms the message into a coded format for transmission. Clubs and societies utilise smart phones to distribute information on Facebook to communicate to students which has proven to be vital in the technology advancements and the high demand for access to HE. The message is transformed into an appropriate format for transmission and includes information that is needed by prospective students. The mode of transmission dictates the manner of communication. For instance, the way

the message is conveyed will vary depending on whether it is communicated orally or in written form.

- **Medium:** The medium is the means or technology employed to convey the message from the encoder to the decoder. The channel can manifest as a tangible medium such as paper, a mode of communication like radio, or an electronic medium like email. A channel functions as the medium via which information is sent from the sender to the recipient. Emails utilise the internet as a medium for communication.
- **Decoder:** This device is responsible for decoding the message that is going to be received. At this step of the process, the recipient assesses the message by comparing it to past experiences or external cues.
- **Receiver:** The recipient is the ultimate recipient of the information. The receiver has the capacity to interpret the information as a comment and then send it back to the sender. The party utilises the channel to receive communication from the transmitter. The nature of the recipient may differ according to the communication channel employed, encompassing things such as a television, a computer, or even a tangible medium like a piece of paper.
- **Feedback:** This is the final stage in the progression of communication modalities. This thread notifies the sender that the receiver has understood the message they sent. The recipient formulates an appropriate reply to the first sender, considering the communication pathway, and sends it back to the original message sender.

Effective communication is vital for every organisation, and it is only considered successful when the recipient comprehends the message and intention of the presenter (Oyeniran *et al.* 2020: 47). It is essential to assess clubs and societies as the integrity of the information they provide may be compromised.

4.3.1.4 Criticisms of OIT

Critics of the theory argue that OIT inadequately addresses conflict and hierarchy, which are the primary components of organisational communications (Ngirigacha and Kwanya 2016: 3). There is an historical conflict between clubs and societies and HEIs due to reasons such as fees and exclusions. A further significant consideration is the

complex theoretical structure of the theory, which would pose difficulties when implementing it in clubs and societies. The primary cause is the intricacy of distributing information online, particularly in relation to the spread of disinformation on social media platforms.

4.3.1.5 Implementing OIT in the context of this study

The theory entails various methods that enable stakeholders to distribute information. Implementation may be hindered by alterations in organisations' external contexts, such as variations in financing, modifications in contracting methods, advancements in technology, new policies, and changes in educational practice standards and recommendations, or other HE contextual changes (Manaf *et al.* 2013: 55). Clubs and societies belong to external organisations that have different ideologies to those of the HEI. Due to this, a lot of ambiguous information is circulated by clubs and societies, and this can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. Typically, members of an organisation will clarify ambiguous signals by going through the steps of enactment, selection, and retention (Lorentz *et al.* 2020: 5). According to Röttger and Vedres (2020: 2), the theory posits that communication within an organisation serves as a regulatory mechanism for the organisational environment, hence exerting an influence on individuals' conduct and productivity.

4.4 SUMMARY

This chapter has established the theoretical foundation of this study through the strategic adoption of the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle and Organisational Information Theory (OIT). The PDCA cycle, recognized as a robust methodology for continuous quality improvement, was instrumental in structuring the inquiry into the operational processes of information distribution. Its core tenets of systematic planning, execution, monitoring, and corrective action provide a pragmatic framework for understanding the mechanisms by which student organizations manage and refine their communication practices. Complementing this process-oriented perspective, Organisational Information Theory (OIT) offered critical insights into the inherent complexities of information processing, particularly how student organizations navigate ambiguity and make sense of information within their unique contexts. OIT's concepts elucidate the challenges of achieving clarity and consistency in

communication, especially when targeting diverse external stakeholders such as prospective students.

While both PDCA and OIT provide invaluable frameworks for analysing information quality and organizational communication dynamics, their traditional applications do not explicitly delineate or comprehensively account for the specific agency and unique roles of student leaders within the context of informal, volunteer-led organizations in driving information quality. Neither theory singularly offers a prescriptive model for empowering student actors to consistently enhance the quality of admission-related information for prospective students. Recognizing this specific contextual gap in the existing theoretical landscape, it becomes imperative for this study to culminate in the proposition of a novel model. This proposed model will specifically outline and define the critical roles and strategic interventions that student leaders can undertake to systematically enhance the quality of information distributed about university admissions to prospective students, thereby directly addressing an identified area for scholarly and practical contribution.

CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Building upon the theoretical frameworks established in the preceding chapter, this chapter meticulously delineates the systematic research approach adopted for this study. It outlines the philosophical underpinnings that guided the inquiry, detailing the sequential stages of the research design, from the selection of the methodological paradigm to the precise procedures employed for data generation and analysis. Specifically, this section provides a comprehensive explanation of how data were rigorously collected from executive members (chairpersons and secretaries) of various clubs and societies, complemented by an in-depth examination of their official social media platforms (primarily Facebook), all aimed at understanding the quality of information distributed to prospective students.

This methodology chapter is structured to provide complete transparency and replicability of the research process. It commences by articulating the chosen research philosophy, followed by a detailed exposition of the research methodology and design. Subsequent sections address the specific research setting, the participant recruitment procedures, the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the purposeful sampling method employed to select key informants. Furthermore, it elaborates on the determined sample size, the nature of the data collected, the data production techniques utilized, and the rationale and execution of the pilot study. The chapter then details the rigorous approach to data analysis, elucidates measures taken to ensure trustworthiness, acknowledges the researcher's positionality, and concludes by outlining the inherent limitations and delimitations of the study. Through this comprehensive exposition, the chapter aims to provide a robust justification for the chosen investigative path.

5.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

Research philosophy constitutes the fundamental beliefs and assumptions that underpin a study, shaping its scope and guiding the selection and elucidation of its methodologies (Abdelhakim, 2021: 99). It represents a researcher's worldview regarding how knowledge about a particular phenomenon should be acquired, analyzed, and ultimately utilized, based on a set of inherent assumptions (Kivunja &

Kuyini, 2017: 28). These philosophical assumptions are, as Boucher (2014: 2320) aptly describes, a "pragmatically justified perspective or way of seeing" that carries significant methodological implications. Broadly, research philosophies are categorized into positivism, realism, interpretivism, and pragmatism.

For the purpose of this study, an interpretivist philosophical paradigm was rigorously adopted (Fellows & Liu, 2021). This stance is particularly pertinent given the research's objective: to explore the subjective experiences, perceptions, and contextual realities surrounding information quality within student organizations. Interpretivism posits that reality is socially constructed and complex, emphasizing the need to understand phenomena through the lens of those who experience them. This aligns perfectly with the qualitative methodology employed, which seeks to delve into the nuanced meanings participants ascribe to the distribution and quality of information. By embracing interpretivism, this study acknowledges the fluidity of information interpretation and the social dynamics that influence its perceived quality among student leaders and prospective students alike.

To comprehensively contextualize the various stages of the paradigm chosen for this study, including its epistemological and ontological assumptions, the Research Onion framework (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019) is presented in Figure 5.1. This framework systematically illustrates the hierarchical layers of research design, from philosophical stance to data collection techniques, thereby providing a clear visual representation of the methodological choices made.

Figure 5.1: The Research Onion illustrating methodological choices

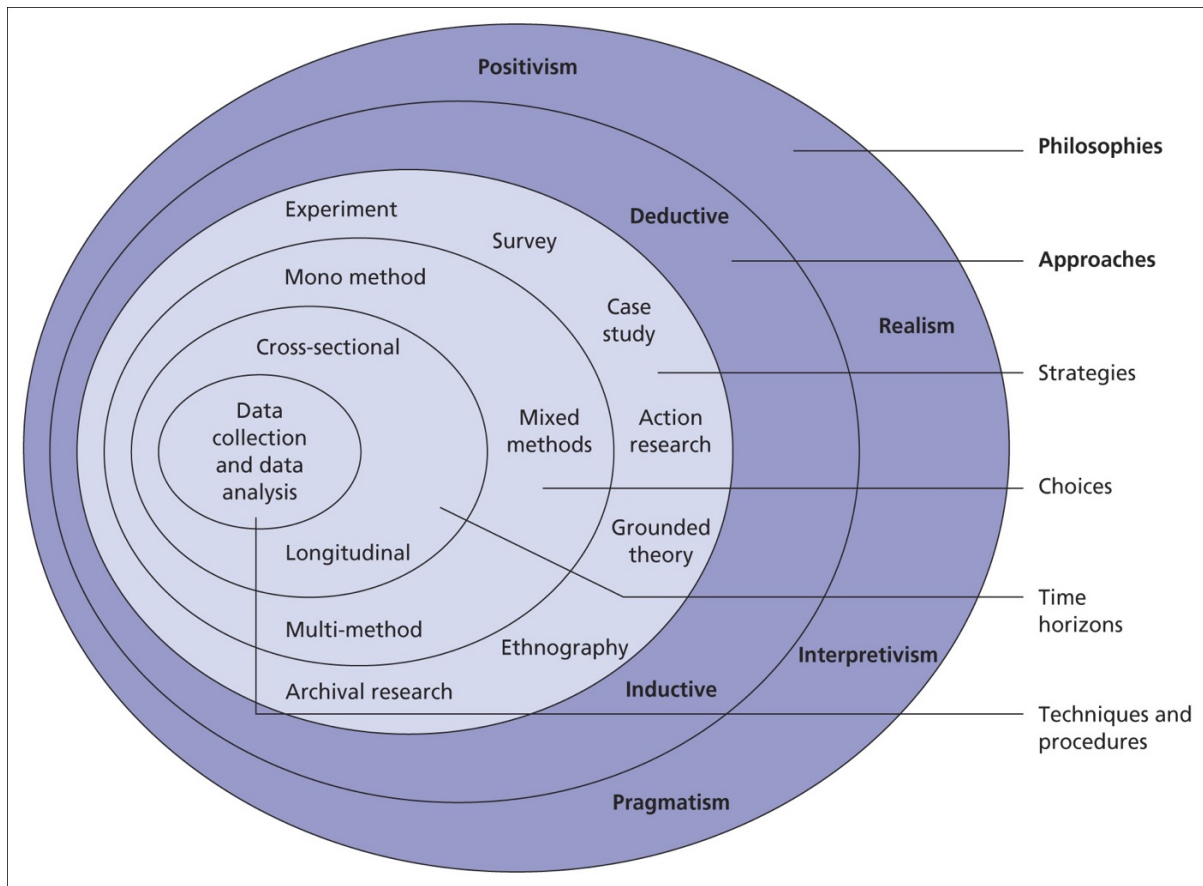


Figure 5.1: Research onion
 Source: Saunders *et al.* (2019)

The development of the research onion is attributed to Saunders *et al.* (2007) and depicts the sequential steps that need to be taken to formulate a research plan. Saunders *et al.* (2007) state that, externally, each stratum of the onion delineates a more intricate phase of the research process. In this study it was utilised to clearly outline the steps taken to choose the research method. The research onion offers a systematic framework for designing a research plan. Bryman (2012) argues that the utility of this tool rests in its applicability for nearly all research methodologies and its use in many situations. The phases of the research onion adopted in this study are elucidated below.

5.2.1 Interpretive paradigm

The research embraced an interpretive paradigm, which focuses on comprehending the world as it exists through subjective experiences. It was a suitable framework of this research endeavour as it seeks to evaluate the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students. According to Terre Blanche and

Durrheim (1999: 344), the research process comprises various dimensions which include ontology, epistemology, and methodology (axiology). The study's underlying philosophy was interpretivism, since it was aimed at providing HEIs with the necessary tools to effectively address the quality of information that is distributed by clubs and societies and the consequences of distributing information that lacks quality.

The phrase "interpretive research" is frequently used in a broad and interchangeable manner with "qualitative research", even though these two ideas are distinct from each other (Pervin and Mokhtar 2022: 420). The experiences of clubs and societies in distributing information have a direct role in determining the quality of information as well as the types of information that they distribute to prospective students. This study interprets their experiences to examine the quality of information they distribute. This approach recognises that the best way to study social reality is by considering its socio-historic context and by incorporating the subjective interpretations of the individuals involved (Sprake and Palmer 2022: 50). The quality of the information was therefore interpreted based on participants engagement with prospective students and experiences in clubs and societies. The interpretivism philosophy suggests that each business circumstance is distinct and diverges from other situations. This technique is unsuitable for generalisation due to the dynamic nature of commercial organisations, diverse interpretations by individuals, and the intricate and distinctive nature of the world (Al-Ababneh 2020: 78).

Interpretivism as a research paradigm is often accompanied by constructivism as an ontological and epistemological grounding (Junjie and Yingxin 2022: 11). The study adopted ontological and epistemological constructivism. Creswell (2014), argues that constructivism pertains to the formation of subjective interpretations and comprehensions of individuals' personal experiences related to specific subjects, influenced by their social and historical context. The personal experiences of clubs and societies in this study therefore assists in understanding the constructivism grounding. Constructivists and interpretivists argue that to comprehend reality or ascertain the truth, researchers must engage in interpretation. The researcher explores the process of constructing meaning and describes how meanings are manifested in the language and acts of social actors (Chipindi *et al.* 2020: 109). Therefore, it was pertinent in the context of this study, which aimed to assess the

information propagated by clubs and societies through their interpretations and assess how the quality of this information is influenced by various factors derived from their personal experiences, ultimately assessing whether the information they distribute is of high quality.

The objective of this study was to gather data about the accuracy and reliability of information distributed by politically, religiously, and socially associated students in clubs and societies to prospective students. Conflicts emerge due to the distribution of propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation, among other factors. This has also impacted clubs and societies because of their affiliation with external organisations. Therefore, it is essential to assess the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students specifically.

5.2.2 Ontology

Smith (2012: 50) states that ontology is a philosophical discipline which is concerned with the study of existence, encompassing many types and arrangements of objects, attributes, events, processes, and relationships throughout all domains of reality. It is referred to as the characterisation of reality and knowledge that exists outside of the researcher, or it may alternatively be stated as the very nature of the social phenomena under inquiry (Khanyile 2020: 42). Ontology is crucial to a paradigm in this research because it facilitates comprehension of the fundamental elements that make up reality, which is the subject of study (Ugwu *et al.* 2021: 117). It is critical for the study to adopt this paradigm since it posits that knowledge flourishes within a dynamic context of evolving events encompassing individuals, technology, social organisation, and ideas (Turyahikayo 2021: 212). This assertion is reinforced by numerous methods implemented by clubs and societies to distribute information, which have subsequently influenced overall quality. Within the framework of ontology analysis in this research, there is a clear and constructivist perspective that argues that reality is shaped by social activities.

5.2.3 Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the study of knowledge and the process by which individuals acquire information and understand that they possess it (Victor *et al.* 2021: 480). It is

a branch of philosophy that focuses on the methods and processes used to acquire knowledge and understand reality. Epistemology, as a discipline of research philosophy, addresses the definition of knowledge, the possession of knowledge, how to acquire knowledge. In this study, interviews are a tool through which data was collected. Furthermore, epistemology is an intrinsic element, since it pertains to the ability to discern between correct and incorrect information. It also encompasses the researcher's perspective on the world (Alharahsheh and Pius 2020: 40). In general, the epistemological perspectives of researchers have significant consequences for the questions they pose, the methodologies they employ, and the explanations they formulate.

Acquiring insight into epistemological positions can assist HE professionals and policymakers in conducting a thorough analysis of study outcomes and in taking into account the wider social, cultural, and political circumstances that influence HE, especially in this context, where there is a notable gap of policies that guide the distribution of quality information by clubs and societies. Emphasis is placed on theories and policies about the execution, availability, and lack of consistency in the accountability for distributing information to assure its quality. This research focused on evaluating the policies in terms of their efficacy in promoting compliance among clubs and societies. The objective of this study was to get a more profound comprehension of the importance of adhering to the set policies. A comprehensive evaluation was undertaken on the individuals serving as planners and organisers, namely the chairpersons and secretaries, within clubs and societies. The purpose of this investigation was to examine the calibre of information that they provide. The individuals were interviewed, with analysis of the interviews contributing to assessment of the quality of the information they distribute.

5.2.4 Methodology

The identification of a methodology for this study was done through a step-by-step process. According to Mkhize (2021: 44), a methodology chosen for a study discusses and explains the data production and analysis methods used. It is a systematic plan that delineates the specific steps and procedures used to conduct a particular research study. The term refers to the methodologies or protocols employed to ascertain and

scrutinise data pertaining to the subject of investigation (Almulla 2022: 653). The methodology addresses variables, builds connections between variables, and identifies causalities within these connections. It has the ability to tweak a single variable while keeping the other variables constant, allowing for an examination of how changes in one variable impact the outcome (Puranik 2020: 68). In this domain, the researcher elucidated several sequential procedures often employed to investigate a research problem. The systematic strategy used to conduct research is referred to as methodology. A methodology does not aim to offer solutions; hence, it is distinct from a method (Kurilovas and Kubilinskiene 2020: 14). Instead, it provides the theoretical foundation for comprehending the appropriate approach, collection of methodologies, or optimal procedures that may be employed in a certain scenario, such as calculating a specified outcome (Klimova and Pikhart 2021: 128).

5.2.5 Qualitative research method

HEIs are facing several challenges due to the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies. The presence of these impediments can be attributed to the lack of quality of the information distributed, which has therefore sometimes led to protests and interruptions in academic activities. Mohajan (2018: 25) states that HEIs and government organisations have utilised terminology such as academic standards, standards of degrees, student evaluation and accountability to indicate quality in HE, but little has been mentioned on the standards or the quality of information that is distributed by clubs and societies and little qualitative research has been conducted on this topic. The qualitative method is appropriate when little study has been done on a topic (Mohale 2017: 189). This study argues that there is an existing gap regarding the quality of information that is distributed by clubs and societies, and the study therefore adopted a qualitative approach to study the phenomenon. This study also argues that the quality of information that is distributed by clubs and societies is inadequate necessitating the adoption of a qualitative approach.

Asehabi (2019: 79) defines qualitative research methodology as primarily exploratory research which seeks to understand a research problem or topic from a certain chosen population in their natural settings. In this study, a case study design was adopted to enable an in-depth exploration and understanding of the phenomenon within its real-

life context (Ansari *et al.* 2020: 24). It shifts the scientific method's focus from validating existing theories and generalisations to one that prioritises building support for creating generalisations and developing theories. Qualitative research comprises many methodologies such as interviews, focus groups, and observations. Qualitative research has the potential to provide a substantial volume of data. Since clubs and societies are mostly student leaders, their contribution was expert and the data produced was high in volume. Table 5.1 presents the advantages, disadvantages and features of qualitative research.

Table 5.1: Advantages, disadvantages and features of qualitative methodology

Advantages	Disadvantages	Features
<p>In qualitative research the following is analysed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotions. • Viewpoints. • Encounters of the individuals are thoroughly documented. • Significance of their acts are analysed. <p>(Lareau 2021.)</p>	<p>There are concerns with contextual sensitivity, which are typically overlooked in favour of highlighting the significance of personal encounters (Silverio <i>et al.</i> 2022).</p>	<p>Although naturalistic and interpretive, it is also systematic, involving a careful process of identifying the problem, collecting, analysing, explaining, evaluating, and interpreting data (Nassaji 2020: 429).</p>
<p>According to Tomaszewski <i>et al.</i> (2020) Truth and reality are typically shaped by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals' perceptions of their surroundings. • Personal experiences. • Interactions with events • circumstances in their life. 	<p>Interpreting qualitative research can be intricate due to the researcher's reliance on personal experiences and expertise (Almulla 2022: 653).</p>	<p>It also involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data that includes text, video, or audio to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences (Deghani <i>et al.</i> 2019: 87).</p>
<p>The researcher's aim with using this method was prompted by the understanding that quality information may be obtained from the entirety of the human experience in certain situations (Khanyile 2020: 42).</p>	<p>Generalisation.</p>	<p>Data collection can occur either in a central location or in the natural surroundings of the participants, depending on the objectives and design of the study.</p>
<p>Various researchers utilise distinct terminologies, such as "investigative," "do-it-yourself," and "bottom-up," to elucidate the unique and autonomous characteristics of the qualitative research methodology (Lareau 2021).</p>	<p>Interpreting and analysing data is likewise considered to be a very time-consuming task (Silverio <i>et al.</i> 2022).</p>	<p>A thorough analysis based on theme extractions to present data is adopted (Nassaji 2020: 429).</p>

Source: Author

5.3 SAMPLING

Sampling, in the context of research, involves the systematic selection of a subset (sample) from a larger population to gather data and draw inferences about that population (Chaturvedi, 2018). For the purpose of this qualitative study, a purposive sampling strategy was primarily employed. This method was specifically chosen to identify and select information-rich cases; that is, participants who possessed direct, in-depth knowledge and experience relevant to the research questions concerning information quality distribution by student organizations. To augment the initial purposive selection, a snowball sampling technique was also utilized. This method involved asking initial participants to identify other potential participants who met the study's inclusion criteria and who might possess similar valuable insights.

5.3.1 Purposive sampling

This study used the purposive sampling method also known as the judgemental, selective, or subjective sampling method (Sharma 2017: 756). According to Obilor (2023: 4), the purposive sampling method is a non-probability sampling method which is based on the characteristics of a certain population and the objective of the study. This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially informed about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Palinkas *et al.* 2015: 536). In this study, participants have experienced the distribution of information regarding admission process at the UoT.

These participants were sampled because of their role in distributing information to prospective students and the study evaluated its quality using accuracy, integrity, consistency, completeness, validity, timeless and accessibility as the variables to study the phenomenon. The composition of the sample comprised individuals holding the positions of chairpersons and secretaries within clubs and societies, as their roles involve the organisation and coordination of work within these structures. The secretaries and chairpersons were identified through the SGD unit.

5.3.2 Snowball sampling

A snowballing sampling method was adopted in addition to the purposive sampling method since the researcher could not meet the desired number of participants. This

method is commonly used when it is difficult to find participants with the desired characteristics (Naderifar *et al.* 2017: 2). In this study, a snowballing strategy was adopted when chairpersons and secretaries were unable to participate; they recommended their deputies and treasurers who had been actively responsible for distributing information to prospective students and were a part of the BEC to participate in this study.

5.3.3 Sample size

The sample size utilised in qualitative research methods is smaller in comparison to the sample size employed in quantitative research methods. Qualitative methods are commonly used to acquire an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon or to concentrate on the interpretation of meaning (Dworkin 2012: 1319). The sample size in this study was, 46 drawn from all the political, social and religious clubs and societies. A research population is defined as the targeted audience used to conduct the study David (2017: 56). It is referred to as a manageable subgroup of a larger population researchers intend to target in line with the problem identified in the study (Etikan and Bala 2017: 2). The target population of study was the clubs and societies chairpersons and secretariats at the HEI under study. The population size of the BEC members of the clubs and societies of the HEI was approximately 230; 10 committee per club. Table 5.2 shows the range of clubs and societies.

Table 5.2: List of Clubs and societies

Type of Club and Society	Number of groups	Names of Clubs and Society
Political	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Freedom Fighters Students Command (EFFSC) • South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) Student Chapter • South African Students Congress - SASCO (PMB) • African National Congress Young Women's desk (ANCYWD) • African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) • Young Communist League South Africa (YCLSA) • Inkatha Freedom Party Youth Brigade (IFPYB) • South African Democratic Students Movement (SADESMO)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa (DENOSA) Students Movement • Umkhonto WeSizwe Student Movement
Religious	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nazareth Tertiary Students Association (NATESA) • The Twelve Apostles Church In Christ Student Organisation (TTACCSO) • Association for Tertiary Zion Students (ATEZS) • Students' Christian Organisation (SCO) • Twelve Apostles Student Association (TASA) • The Threshing Floor Bible Church Student Organization • Association for Tertiary Zion Students (ATEZS) • Methodist Students Society (MethSSoc)
Social	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex (LGBTQIA+) • African Cultural Students Organization (ACUSO) • Izimbali ze (HEI) Virgins • Choir • Ubuciko bomlomo-ngamagama

Source: Author

The political clubs and societies are highly visible in the distribution of quality information. It is important to note that there has been a shift in the political space in South Africa so that now several political parties have student organisations registered as clubs and societies in this UoT. The intentions of clubs and societies surpass the distribution of information; their primary interest is the recruitment of new members for their clubs and societies as well as fulfilling their political party interests of gaining more members that are young. This also includes the national elections in South Africa, 30 years after the dawn of democracy. One of the purposes of distributing information on campus is the desire for these clubs and societies to win SRC elections. Hence the evaluation of the quality of the information they distribute was crucial.

Like political clubs and societies, religious clubs and societies partake in the distribution of information to prospective students. They are also stationed around the HEI gates and have social media platforms that they use to distribute information. Religious clubs and societies are formed with reference to the various churches in KZN. The affiliation after the COVID19 period was moved to online. This also affected the distribution of information since they moved to online platforms thus creating more

platforms on social media. Over the years churches have been a trusted source for information by communities, however in the student context they differ. Clubs and societies are also registered to participate in student parliament which is the body for accountability for all student structures. The distribution of information to underrepresented groups (minority groups) is a crucial function that is performed by social clubs and societies. These groups constitute a significant section of the communities, and their features are distinct from groups who receive more support from students. Since various people in the society hold diverse opinions, it was necessary to investigate the quality of the information that they distribute. Their contribution to the distribution of quality information is significant since their target groups have issues with approaching general members of the society.

The selected participants for this study comprised members from the abovementioned clubs and societies which includes religious, social and political clubs and societies. The individuals that were included in this study satisfied the specific criteria that were of interest for this exploration, in line with the identified problem. The selection of clubs and societies was contingent upon their demonstrated experience in distributing information to prospective students during registration periods and on social media throughout the year. As indicated on the table, political clubs constitute a significant proportion of the participants, resulting in a higher numerical representation in comparison to religious and social clubs.

5.3.4 Demographics

The participants must hold a position of chairpersons and secretaries to participate in this study. Only clubs and societies members affiliated for 2024 were able to participate and the proof of their affiliation was obtained through the SGD office. They needed to be registered students at the UoT for the 2024 academic year which was double checked through provision of a student card or proof of registration.

Table 5.3: Demographics of participants

Pseudonym	Level of study	Gender	Type of club
Participant 1	Advanced Diploma	Female	Religious Club
Participant 2	2 nd year	Female	Political Club
Participant 3	3 rd year	Female	Social Club
Participant 4	Master's Degree	Female	Social Club

Participant 5	Advanced Diploma	Male	Political Club
Participant 6	Third year	Male	Religious Club
Participant 7	Third year	Female	Political Club
Participant 8	Third year	Male	Political Club
Participant 9	Advanced Diploma	Female	Political Club
Participant 10	2 nd year	Male	Political Club
Participant 11	2 nd year	Male	Religious Club
Participant 12	Post graduate Diploma	Male	Social Club
Participant (FG-1)	3 rd year	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-2)	Third year	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-3)	Advanced Diploma	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-4)	Third year	Female	Political Club
Participant (FG-5)	Second year	Female	Social Club
Participant (FG-6)	Advanced Diploma	Male	Religious Club
Participant (FG-7)	4 th year	Male	Religious Club
Participant (FG-8)	2 nd year	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-9)	Master's	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-10)	Second year	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-11)	3 rd year	Female	Political Club
Participant (FG-12)	2 nd year	Male	Social Club
Participant (FG-13)	Advanced Diploma	Female	Religious Club
Participant (FG-14)	4 th year	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-15)	Third year	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-16)	Postgraduate Diploma	Female	Religious Club
Participant (FG-17)	3 rd year	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-18)	3 rd year	Female	Political Club
Participant (FG-19)	Advanced Diploma	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-20)	Third year	Female	Political Club
Participant (FG-21)	2 nd year	Female	Social Club
Participant (FG-22)	3 rd year	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-23)	4 th year	Male	Religious
Participant (FG-24)	Advanced Diploma	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-25)	3 rd year	Female	Political Club
Participant (FG-26)	2 nd year	Female	Social Club
Participant (FG-27)	Advanced Diploma	Male	Religious Club
Participant (FG-28)	4 th year	Male	Religious Club
Participant (FG-29)	3 rd year	Male	Religious Club
Participant (FG-30)	Third year	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-31)	Advanced Diploma	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-32)	2 nd year	Male	Social Club
Participant (FG-33)	2 nd year	Female	Social Club
Participant (FG-34)	2 nd year	Male	Political Club

Source: Author

5.4 INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

The inclusion criteria are defined as a study of a population in a consistent, reliable, uniform and objective manner (Quintero *et al.* 2019: 1). Common inclusion criteria are demographic and geographic factors. Inclusion criteria in this study included demographic and geographic characteristics such as age and gender in addition, their level of study, if they were registered students at the particular UoT, membership and BEC position in a club or society. These characteristics were considered to selectively choose participants. Exclusion criteria refer to certain qualities of potential research participants who satisfy the inclusion requirements but possess extra attributes that may hinder the study's success or raise their likelihood of experiencing an unfavourable outcome. As a result, the study has selected participants with different demographic and geographic characteristics and will ensure the representation.

The exclusion criteria include factors or characteristics that make the recruited population ineligible for the study (Amir-Behghadami and Janati 2020: 2). This study's exclusion criteria consisted of non-registered students, students that were not affiliated in clubs and societies, students that did not hold a position as a BEC member within a club or society. The exclusion criteria also encompassed attributes of eligible individuals that significantly increase the probability of them being lost to follow-up, missing scheduled data collection appointments, providing inaccurate data, having comorbidities that could introduce bias to the study results, or heightening their susceptibility to adverse events. The study ensured that only stipulated criteria of clubs and societies were sampled.

5.5 RESEARCH SETTING

The research setting is defined as the location or community where the data is produced (Goundar 2022: 10). The study was conducted in KwaZulu-Natal at a particular UoT. The study was conducted in two satellite campuses in one city, located across two areas. The selection of the campuses was based on the informal observations of the researcher as a former student and employee in these campuses. During registration periods, they have personally observed multiple clubs and societies stationed at campus gates, distributing information to prospective students.

Furthermore, in her previous capacity as an employee of SGD, she personally observed the information that was distributed to prospective students.

5.6 RECRUITMENT PROCEDURE

A wide range of recruitment strategies can be adopted to facilitate participant engagement and enrolment in research. The strategies employed depend on factors such as the study's intended target population, the study size (number of participants and recruitment sites), the study and intervention design, ethics approval recruitment of research participants processes, and the recruitment budget. In this study the researcher utilised emails to extend invitations to potential participants. These invitations were delivered directly to the individuals concerned through emails. The evaluation of participants availability was done, and interviews were scheduled based on the participant's availability. An impartial and just recruiting method was utilised, while refraining from any activities that may expose participants to force or undue influence.

5.7 Data type and production process

The study adopted two types of data production processes, namely, primary and secondary data production. Figure 5.2 below illustrates the primary and secondary data collection.

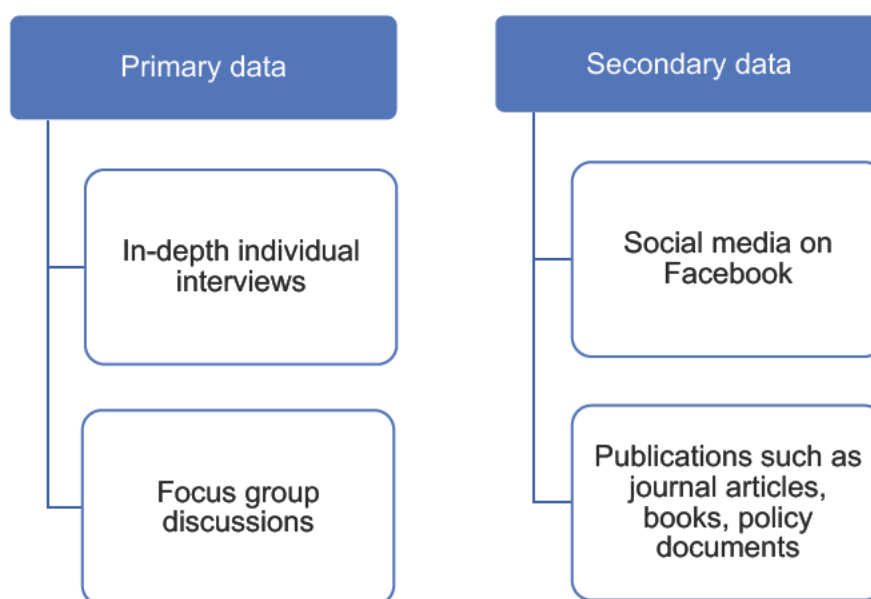


Figure 5.2: Primary and secondary data production (Source: Author)

5.7.1 Primary data

The data in question is categorised as primary data due to its design and its unique purposes and objectives. In this study, an interview schedule was created, and participants were interviewed utilising that schedule. The study utilised semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions to as the primary tool for data gathering tools. A semi-structured interview refers to pre-prepared questions that the interviewer poses to the participant (De Leeuw *et al.* 2023: 10). Data production methods in qualitative research are usually unstructured or semi-structured, which involve focus groups discussion or individual interviews and participation (Spiers *et al.* 2018: 10).

5.7.1.1 In-depth individual interviews

In-depth interviews are a qualitative research method that entails conducting thorough individual interviews with a limited number of participants to delve into their viewpoints on an idea, programme, or situation (Scanlan 2020: 13). In-depth interviews are valuable when the research requires comprehensive insights into an individual's beliefs and behaviours, or when there is a need to thoroughly investigate new topics. Interviews are often used to give contextual information to complement other data, such as results data, so presenting a more comprehensive understanding of the events and their underlying causes. In-depth individual interviews allow for an adaptable framework which encompasses many subjects outlined in a guide, enabling the interviewer to address relevant areas for the interviewee (Matyas 2020: 3). The researcher in this study was able to outline all the relevant information regarding the participating in the study. In this study the interviews were interactive with the interviewer analysing the content generated during the interview.

5.7.1.1.1 Interview instruments and reflections

Interviews were conducted in a semi structured manner, where the interviewer asked open-ended questions on the quality of information that was distributed by clubs and societies and the approach was adjusted according to their replies. The essence of most successful research interviews is in the narratives of first-hand experiences. A detailed semi-structured interview schedule was developed to produce primary data.

Given the qualitative method utilised in this study, the interview schedule was designed to align with the perspectives and experiences of clubs' and societies' chairpersons and secretaries with quality when they distribute information, aiming to address the research objectives. The interview schedule was designed to specifically target variables related to the phenomena being investigated. Since the study was aimed at establishing the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies, different variables were used (See section 1.3).

During the interview, the interviewer presented the first questions in a favourable way to motivate the participants to provide answers. The whole procedure was inherently human, therefore making it less monotonous and tedious (Syaharuddin *et al.* 2022: 62). Several investigative methods were used to ensure thorough investigation and clarification. The researcher posed follow-up questions in order to get a more profound insight and comprehend the participant's perspective (McCallen and Johnson 2020: 320). The engagement with the participants frequently led to the generation of novel insights. Participants provided ideas and offered answers for certain issues and the challenges presented (Heilporn *et al.* 2021: 4).

5.7.1.1.2 Approach to interviews

To evaluate the efficacy of the data generating tools, a pilot study was conducted. A pilot study, often referred to as a preliminary study, is a research method commonly employed to assist in the preparation and adjustment of a larger-scale study. It serves as the beginning phase of the comprehensive research methodology (In 2017: 601). A pilot or preliminary study is a small-scale investigation conducted to assess the effectiveness and suitability of a research instrument, in this case an interview schedule. An initial investigation assesses the efficacy of the techniques employed in collecting and evaluating data. It equips the researcher with the necessary readiness for unforeseen challenges before commencing fieldwork. A pilot study further provides researchers with the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the participants and the research methodology. Conducting pilot research is thought to enhance the validity and methodological rigour of a qualitative inquiry.

In this study, the interview schedule was piloted using five students belonging to clubs and societies at the UoT, but the campuses were in a different city. It was chosen

because the campuses have different geographical dynamics, and they also have clubs and societies that are recognised by the same HEI. The individuals were selected based on convenience, accessibility, and geographical proximity, and represented a range of religious, political, and social backgrounds. The office of SGD facilitated the connection with participants for the pilot study. Regarding their profile and quantity, the selection was made based on three criteria. Firstly, the amount of time available for the pilot study. Secondly, the belief that having five participants would be enough to identify any potential weaknesses in the research design or methods. And thirdly, the fact that these clubs and societies possess very similar characteristics to the target sample.

5.7.1.2 Focus group discussion

Focus groups typically consist of 8-12 selected individuals and are conducted to explore group dynamics and get collective perspectives on a certain issue (Mathotaarachchi and Thilakarathna 2021: 945). Focus groups are a form of interview for groups in which a small number of participants are brought together to discuss a certain subject or topics of interest (Beyene *et al.* 2020: 36). Research asserts that to meet the following criteria, a focus group can be a suitable option (Hasan and Bao 2020: 118; Oliveira *et al.* 2021: 59; Paudel 2021: 5):

- This type of interview is characterised by immediate, unedited reactions on a certain subject or the interactions among participants in a conversation. The interest is in real-time, unfiltered comments.
- The inquiries are based on emotions or perspectives and cannot be readily responded to with a simple "yes" or "no".

There were two focus group discussions conducted which comprised seven participants in the first group and six participants in the second group with 13 participants in total. The interviews and focus group discussion sessions were recorded using a recorder to ensure the preservation of the records.

5.7.2 Secondary data

The collection of secondary data might be enhanced by utilising online sources, including social media platforms such as Facebook. In this study secondary data included the Facebook pages created by clubs and societies.

5.7.2.1 Social media

Social media platforms provide users with an online means of communication to engage in discussions, exchange information, and generate web content (Alhussain *et al.* 2020). The copious volumes of data generated from the growing incorporation of social media into individuals' everyday routines are not only intriguing to platform providers, but also to scholars in several scientific domains of digitalisation study (Kyngäs 2020: 13). Information extracted from social media sites provides valuable insights on a wide range of behavioural use and interaction habits of clubs and societies. The Facebook groups and pages of these clubs and societies were assessed, and data was collected by extracting screenshots of the information they had posted. The analysed Facebook sites were specifically designated for the UoT clubs and societies. The Facebook data consisted of posts on the clubs' and societies' pages. This was accompanied by extracts to support specific points, which assisted in ensuring that reliable information or data was collected from social media.

5.7.2.2 Documents

In addition, publications such as journal articles, books, policy documents were utilised to collect data. Document analysis is a methodical process of examining and assessing various types of documents, including both physical and digital information (Wood *et al.* 2020: 456). In this study, documents such as journals, books, policy documents and articles were critically analysed. Like other analytical techniques in qualitative research, document analysis necessitates the examination and interpretation of data to extract meaning, acquire comprehension, and cultivate empirical knowledge (Paulus and Lester 2021). Documents consist of unaltered text and photos that have been recorded without any involvement from a researcher.

5.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data analysis is the process of examining, assessing, identifying, categorising, visualising, investigating, and documenting patterns, trends, themes, and categories within raw data (Fona 2024: 140). Themes were derived from the data collected from participants and presented in the findings. The purpose was to understand the data and uncover their underlying meanings (Cardano 2020). The analysis of texts is frequently enhanced by using additional sources of information to adhere to the idea of triangulation and enhance confidence in the study's findings (Timmermans and Tavory 2022: 50). Analysis of transcribed interviews, observational field notes, and materials created by the respondents themselves is a typical practice. The objective of utilising various sources of data is to achieve corroboration and convergence of evidence (Muzari *et al.* 2022: 15). Qualitative data analysis ultimately reaches a state known as saturation, which indicates the conclusion of the study (O'Connor and Joffe 2020: 16).

Saturation occurs when there is a perception of declining returns and little necessity for further sampling. At this stage, the new data and their arrangement only validate the existing categories that often range from three to six themes and conclusions. Data analysis may lead to a result that is accurately conveyed using a metaphor, such as comparing outcomes (O'Sullivan and Jefferson 2020: 16). The conclusion is reinforced by providing a detailed account of the process and rationale behind reaching saturation (Guest *et al.* 2020). The data was analysed thematically using content analysis. To achieve this, NVivo 15 software was utilised. NVivo is a software program that is used for storing, managing, and analysing qualitative data (Jackson and Bazeley 2019: 13). The programme analyses unstructured text, audio, image data, individual interviews and focus groups discussion (Brandao 2015: 10). For both methods NVivo is a suitable tool.

5.8.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis was adopted to analyse the data obtained from individual and focus group interviews. This involves identifying common and conspicuous themes within the acquired data to simplify the data gathered through interviews (Badat 2020: 34). Dawadi (2021: 63), Braun *et al.* (2023: 20), and Peel (2020: 2) outlined a six-phase

guide for conducting thematic analysis which was adopted in this study, and included the following steps: (1) becoming familiar with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. This study adopted the six steps to thoroughly analyse data thematically. During the translating and transcribing process, the researcher regularly listened to the audio recordings, to become thoroughly acquainted with the information and be familiar with its substance.

5.8.2 Content analysis

The study analysed data from social media using content analysis. Andreotta *et al.* (2019: 1767) state that qualitative researchers can obtain extensive and varied access to individuals, as well as the content they produce, through the utilisation of social media platforms; hence, content analysis was adopted. Dehghani *et al.* (2019: 87) argue that social media is a great method for obtaining information pertaining to the perceptions that are being investigated, using images and text. Social media is often utilised to provide HE information. However, it has also facilitated the spread of inaccurate information and ill-informed viewpoints. This has resulted in worried prospective students encountering false perspectives expressed on social media. Content analysis involves identifying and organising concepts, categories, and themes from the data. These findings can then be used to develop models, conceptual frameworks, and conceptual maps that provide a description of the subject being studied (Kyngäs 2020: 13). In this study, the content of social medial platforms was analysed. These were Facebook posts published in 2023 and 2024 by clubs and societies on their pages.

5.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS

The study adopted a qualitative research approach. Trustworthiness is significant in qualitative research, since it establishes trust between the researcher and reader on how the researcher conducted the study. It also minimises bias because the researcher transparently describes the research process (Adler 2022: 601). Lincoln and Guba (1986) indicated that there are four fundamental aspects for assessing trustworthiness which contribute to the rigorousness of a study, namely: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The strategies are interconnected and

mutually reliant, providing alternate approaches to quality (Rose and Johnson 2020: 433). Enhancing the trustworthiness of a qualitative research study entails various factors, such as having a clear understanding of the underlying knowledge principles through conducting a comprehensive and thorough review of relevant literature (Johnson *et al.* 2020: 19), ensuring the argument is grounded in appropriate theoretical frameworks (Cheung and Tai 2023: 65), carefully selecting and utilising multiple data collection and generation techniques that may present conflicting information (Pratt *et al.* 2020: 7), employing rigorous analytical procedures (Bruggeman *et al.* 2021: 10), establishing connections between empirical findings and broader theories and discourses (Casanova *et al.* 2021: 14), and effectively integrating these different aspects of the research (Johnson *et al.* 2020: 19). The researcher ensured the quality and trustworthiness of the data generated from Facebook by using information from public pages only where there were no restrictions or rules on the extraction of information. They were all explicitly identified as belonging to the clubs and societies.

5.9.1 Credibility

Credibility assesses whether the research findings accurately interpret the participants' initial perspectives and represent trustworthy information derived from their original data (Korstjens and Moser 2018: 121). Credibility was maintained in the data obtained from Facebook, with all comments and posts being recovered in their original form. Credibility is a crucial factor to evaluate, since it indicates the extent to which the conclusions of a study align with the reality being investigated. Credibility can be achieved by combining three key elements: a rigorous methodology, the credibility of the researcher, and a philosophical conviction regarding the importance of qualitative inquiry. The reputation of the researcher and the study methodology selected is significant.

5.9.1.1 Triangulation

This study used triangulation which is defined as the application of several techniques or data sources to create thorough trust (Lemon and Hayes 2020: 606). The approaches used were individual interviews, focus group discussion and analysis of social media sites (Facebook posts). The researcher ensured that participants did not influence each other during the focus group interview sessions. The researcher

diligently reviewed and scrutinised the data, conducted analysis, formulated theories, and adjusted the concepts correctly which also contributed to a thorough triangulation.

5.9.2 Transferability

Transferability is a result of thorough description of the participants and the study procedure so that a reader can determine whether the findings are applicable to their own context (Stahl and King 2020: 29). The research findings incorporated participant quotations as supporting evidence for the assertions made. The study described the participants and explained the applicability of findings in this study. Transferability also considers if the researcher can guarantee that their research method is rational, traceable, and well-documented (Nowell *et al.* 2017: 3). This encompasses a comprehensive description of the research setting, the process of participant selection, and the presentation of findings in a manner that guarantees precision and reliability. This is clearly outlined in the study, and its interpretation is not based on personal preferences and points of view, but rather on the evidence provided by participants and Facebook posts.

5.9.3 Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which the researcher's interpretations and findings are clearly derived from the data, requiring the searcher to demonstrate how conclusions and interpretations have been reached (Cloutier and Ravasi 2021: 116). Confirmability is based on the findings being an accurate representation of the opinions of the participants. To ensure confirmability, transcripts were generated by an independent third party and then cross-referenced with the recordings for verification. Notes were also gathered throughout the interviews and constitute a part of the auditing process. The study demonstrated reflexivity which is described as the consideration and acknowledgement of how one's beliefs and experiences can influence the research process, including participant responses and how data are collected, interpreted, analysed, and presented (Nyirenda *et al.* 2020: 2). There are different types of reflexivity processes, namely, personal, interpersonal, methodological and contextual. Cloutier and Ravasi (2021: 116) outlined the following steps in ensuring reflexivity:

- Personal reflexivity requires researchers to contemplate and elucidate their anticipations, presumptions, and deliberate and involuntary responses to circumstances, participants, and data.
- Interpersonal reflexivity pertains to the impact of relationships on the research process, encompassing the setting, individuals participating, and outcomes.
- Methodological reflexivity refers to the critical examination by researchers of the intricacies and consequences of their methodological choices.

5.10 RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

Currently, I am employed in the field of residence life at a particular HEI. I collaborate extensively with clubs and societies and first-year students. This indicates that I am a researcher who has a thorough understanding or expertise in the topic under investigation. An individual is an "insider" in research when they possess qualities that are like those of the study participants (Bukamal 2022: 327). Therefore, this research will be carried out in a familiar context. Being in the same place provides the benefit of having access to information. I was consistently aware of any pre-existing ideas that may have influenced my results. I also explored the concept of critical subjectivity, wherein my experiences are not repressed but rather employed as an integral component of the research process. Consequently, I maintained a process of introspection and conducted thorough examinations and professional verification throughout the duration of the study.

5.11 ETHICAL CLEARANCE

The study adhered to the guidelines that are set forth by the ethical committee of the DUT. Before collecting data, an ethical clearance and gatekeeper letters were obtained. A letter of information was provided to participants to inform them about the guidelines of participating in the study. The guidelines were outlined once again before commencing with the interview to make sure that participants understood. The essential element that pertains to maintaining the confidentiality of participants, their identities, was protected using pseudonyms in this study. The participants received notification of the voluntary nature of their participation. The researcher also provided an illustration of the guidelines and explained that the participants had the right to withdraw from the interview at any stage. The institution was concealed, and a

pseudonym was utilised to ensure that the reputation is protected in case of negative statements since the participants were students. Utilising Facebook as a secondary source for research necessitated careful and responsible use of the data due to ethical concerns.

The rules considered were specifically focused on privacy, consent, and data utilisation. The confidentiality of the individuals who posted on these platforms was ensured through privacy and anonymity. The researcher took measures to anonymise the data gathered from Facebook, so preventing the identification of specific individuals. This was particularly important given that the data included names and Facebook may contain personal or sensitive information. Facebook played a significant role in generating secondary data and it was essential to ensure that ethical standards were upheld. I adhered to the restrictions set by the Institutional Research Ethics Committee to ensure the production of high-quality data. This data was extracted and developed into themes. The information collected was presented anonymously, using pseudonyms.

5.11.1 Informed consent

Informed consent is a crucial component of ethical research. To provide informed consent, two essential elements must be present: being well-informed and giving consent (Xu *et al.* 2020: 6). Informed consent is a formal agreement between study participants and researchers. The informed consent procedure is used by researchers to ensure that prospective participants are fully informed about the potential hazards and advantages that may relate to their involvement in a research project (O'Sullivan *et al.* 2021: 4). Individuals in this study were provided with complete transparency on the tasks they would be required to do, the utilisation of their data, and any potential repercussions or hazards that may arise. Voluntary consent is essential, requiring the participants to have a clear comprehension of the task at hand, and all individuals involved must possess the capacity to provide permission. The researcher ensured that participation was voluntary. It was important for participants to have comprehensive information about the study, fully comprehend the specifics, and be able to make an educated choice about whether to participate before signing the consent form. The study ensured that participants possessed a comprehensive

understanding of their entitlements regarding access to their information and the prerogative to withdraw at any moment. One of the primary certainties that researchers depend on is obtaining written permission forms that have been signed. This form is an essential element of the research protocol. It includes a clear invitation for the participant to take part in the study. In this context it ensured that the participants have read, comprehended, and signed the document. The researcher also outlined the specific requirements for obtaining informed consent.

5.11.2 Providing relevant information

Providing relevant information is vital and this includes the attributes of the research, any instances of discomfort, the precise intervention to be implemented, and any other choices that may be available. Prior to commencing the interviews, the researcher explained the procedure. The researcher provided a clear explanation of the guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity, as well as their responsibility to assure the feasibility of these aspects, this was also contained in the information sheet (Appendix A) (Badat 2020: 34). The researcher ensured that all participants were informed of their right to seek withdrawal from the interview if they experienced discomfort and were unable to continue. After the intervention, the researcher provided a debriefing to the individual and offered to address any inquiries if some information was intentionally omitted for research reasons. The researcher verified that all pertinent information was presented to the participants in the study (Peel 2020: 2). The request letter and permission form provide comprehensive details about the subject, goal, and study questions. The permission form (Appendix C) explicitly outlined all expectations for the participant. It further stated explicitly that every necessary measure would be used to guarantee the preservation of anonymity and confidentiality. It also stated that participation in the research was optional and that the subject had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any negative consequences. Approval was acquired from the HEI involved in this project. The researcher first received provisional approval, but complete authorisation to perform the study was only provided by the HEI once ethical clearance was obtained from the UoT.

5.11.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity of personal information is important for a study to safeguard participant information and refrain from sharing any personal data that might potentially reveal the identity of the participants to other researchers. In this study, participant confidentiality was maintained by allowing the researcher access to the participant's identification but preserving anonymity of information by coding the data to conceal identities. Braun *et al.* (2023: 20) stipulated that anonymity of participants in research is crucial to safeguard their perspectives from being compromised. Anonymity and confidentiality are sometimes confused, yet they are distinct concepts. Anonymity, as the term suggests, pertains to the condition where the researcher is unaware of the participant's identity. The right to privacy is consistently ensured in situations of this kind. In a confidential study, such as an interview, it is typical for the researcher to be acquainted with the participant (Braun *et al.* 2023: 20). Interviewers possess the participant's name and may be aware of their address or other identifying details. In this study, the researcher ensured that any personal, identifiable information disclosed during the interview was modified to safeguard the participant from potential harm. For example, the researcher assigned pseudonyms to the participants.

Similarly, when participants mentioned other persons, clubs, societies or HEIs by their actual names, the researcher designated a pseudonym for them or used an asterisk (*****). Preserving the privacy of participants in research is of utmost importance, necessitating both secrecy and anonymity. Participants are more inclined to conduct an interview if they have confidence that their information will remain confidential (Pascale *et al.* 2022: 550). All information, particularly that of the individuals involved in the study process, was regarded as a secret. Participants were required to sign an information protocol which stated that the data would only be used for the study goals explicitly specified in the protocol. It is essential at every step of a study process to include procedures that safeguard the privacy of participants, in order to avoid any unintentional disclosure of their personal information (Mirza *et al.* 2023: 444). Ensuring the utmost respect for study subjects during the whole of the research process was crucial, thereby necessitating rigorous adherence to principles of confidentiality and privacy. Participants were promptly notified anytime there was any update or new information. The study enabled participants to voluntarily withdraw and alter their

decisions during the study process to promote autonomy and ensure the continual respect for their well-being (Badampudi *et al.* 2022: 2). All data collected for this research, including participant interviews and conversations, were kept anonymous. Despite being recorded via recorder, all data were securely stored in password-protected electronic files on the researcher's computer and was shared with the supervisor only.

5.11.4 Beneficence and maleficence

To have a more profound comprehension of the significance of these two notions in research, it is necessary to analyse each of them individually. Beneficence refers to the objective of maximising the societal advantages that the research will provide (Nii Laryeafio and Ogbewe 2023: 98). This means that participation needs to be advantageous to the individuals being studied and is closely linked to the notion of promoting well-being. Beneficence extends beyond individual commitments and encompasses the duty of a profession towards society in terms of quality information that is distributed by clubs and societies. This involves the undertaking of research to enhance the quality of information distributed to prospective students. To maintain beneficence, it was essential to engage in research that not only adds to the existing body of knowledge but also offers direction for activities that promote the well-being of individuals (Taquette *et al.* 2022).

Research ideally contributes to society and future generations by generating new documented knowledge and offering solutions, such as effective therapies or answers to theoretical questions that society and future generations may seek (Nii Laryeafio and Ogbewe 2023: 98). Following philosophical and ethical principles, the concept of non-maleficence takes precedence over beneficence. This means that if it is not feasible to do good, it is crucial to at least avoid causing damage (Arrant 2020: 4). Scholars argue that the principle of non-maleficence requires researchers and participants to thoroughly assess the potential repercussions of the study on both parties involved, i.e., any adverse impacts on participants and researchers. The study ensured the well-being and safety of all participants. This study is based on the quality of information that is distributed by clubs and societies. It envisions a positive future for HEIs. The research was conducted in five phases, and its goal was to enhance the

information that is distributed by clubs and societies by ensuring that they are aware of the quality of information they distribute. Therefore, neither the institution nor the volunteers had any drawbacks. In fact, all parties participating in this research benefited from exchanging best practices.

5.12 LIMITATIONS (OUTSIDE THE RESEARCHER'S CONTROL) AND DELIMITATIONS (WITHIN THE RESEARCHER'S CONTROL)

The limitations inherent in qualitative research pertain to the challenges associated with accessing study participants, such as their geographic locations, time zone variations, and the presence of gatekeepers (Queirós *et al.* 2017: 372). At the time I collected data, I was residing in the Northwest province which required me to travel to KZN to interview participants. It was challenging since I had to accommodate the timetable of the participants who had crucial academic obligations. Additionally, this had an impact on the planned participant number resulting in the use of the snowball sampling approach to get access. It was imperative to acknowledge the constraints of social media (Facebook) data, which may include errors, misinformation, or prejudices, over the course of the research.

I opted to use the qualitative research method because the study's aim was to understand the perspectives of clubs and societies on the information, they distribute to prospective students to determine its quality. The variables considered to achieve the study of this phenomenon were the information quality dimensions. I selected chairpersons and secretaries based on their role to organise and plan the campaigns. Prior to collecting data, I ensured the availability of all participants. All the participants were notified beforehand regarding the interviews and the discussions. Implementing a snowballing method and collecting data was facilitated by the participants' frequent presence in their offices and at the campus gates, where they could efficiently arrange and attract students to join their clubs and societies. To resolve these limits, it was crucial for the researcher to promptly obtain gatekeepers permission and maintain timely contact to schedule interviews. The participants in this study were interviewed from only one campus where most participants attended their lectures. This was a central venue for all the participants. The restrictions pertaining to social media were

eliminated by specifically targeting platforms that regularly provide content and have the UoT being studied in their description.

5.13 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter has provided a comprehensive and transparent exposition of the methodology employed in this doctoral research. It commenced by articulating the guiding research philosophy, elucidating the systematic decision-making process for methodological choices, often conceptualized through the "research onion" framework. The study firmly adopted an interpretivist paradigm, meticulously exploring ontological, epistemological, and axiological considerations to ensure a coherent and context-rich investigation. This philosophical stance naturally led to the deployment of a qualitative methodology, characterized by an inductive reasoning approach to generate deep insights from the data. Subsequent sections meticulously delineated the study's specific research setting, precisely defined the inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants, and explained the rationale behind the chosen sample size. The participant recruitment strategy, alongside the detailed data generation process, including the use of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and secondary data analysis from social media platforms, was comprehensively described. A pilot study was judiciously undertaken to rigorously evaluate the efficacy and appropriateness of these data generation methods, ensuring their validity prior to full-scale implementation.

The chapter further elaborated on the systematic approach to data analysis, which primarily utilized thematic and content analysis techniques to identify patterns, categories, and core themes within the qualitative data. To guarantee the rigor and integrity of the findings, the study rigorously applied established criteria for trustworthiness, specifically addressing credibility, dependability (often used interchangeably with reliability in qualitative research), and confirmability. Recognizing the inherent influence of the researcher, a dedicated section addressed researcher positionality, acknowledging my background in higher education and expertise in the subject field, and discussing its implications for data interpretation. Finally, the chapter transparently addressed the inherent limitations and deliberate delimitations of this research, providing a comprehensive overview of the methodological journey.

CHAPTER 6: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Building directly upon the detailed methodological framework established in Chapter 5, this chapter systematically presents, analyses, and interprets the empirical findings pertaining to the quality of information distributed by student clubs and societies. The data underpinning these findings were meticulously gathered through a robust combination of individual semi-structured interviews, focused group discussions with key informants, and a comprehensive examination of information distributed via the official Facebook platforms of the participating clubs and societies. Given the qualitative nature of this research, the data generation process, as fully elucidated in Chapter 5, leveraged a purposeful sampling technique. As detailed previously, 46 participants, comprising chairpersons and secretaries, were invited to contribute their insights. In instances where initially invited participants were unavailable, designated deputies assumed their roles, a process consistent with the flexible, network-based participant recruitment strategy outlined in the preceding methodology chapter.

This chapter primarily examines and analyses the rich qualitative data obtained from these secretaries and chairpersons. The systematic analysis of this data was facilitated using NVivo software, enabling rigorous thematic and content analysis. Specifically, this chapter seeks to provide comprehensive answers to the core research questions guiding this study:

- What are the types of information distributed by clubs and societies?
- How is the quality of the information distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students ascertained?
- What are the factors that influence the quality of the information distributed by clubs and societies?

The insights derived from the direct engagement with chairpersons and secretaries, both in individual in-depth interviews and through focus groups, form the basis of the subsequent findings. A detailed list of these participants can be found in Table 6.1.

6.2 BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

This study engaged participants representing diverse academic levels, including second-year, third-year, fourth-year, Advanced Diploma, Postgraduate Diploma, and Master's degree candidates. These individuals were drawn from a spectrum of student organizations, specifically political, religious, and social clubs and societies officially affiliated with the University of Technology (UoT). The UoT officially recognized 23 clubs and societies at the time of the study. Initially, the primary target for participation focused on the secretaries of these organizations, given their central role in information management. However, due to academic commitments and other unforeseen unavailability, some secretaries delegated their role to other executive members, including deputies and treasurers, to participate on their behalf. This substitution process ensured a robust representation while accommodating participant availability, consistent with the recruitment strategy outlined in Chapter 5.

Table 6.1 (assuming the table number is still 6.1) below comprehensively presents the demographic profile of all participants. This profile includes details such as their level of study, gender, and club affiliation, providing essential contextual information that forms a foundational basis for interpreting the subsequent findings.

Table 6.1: In-depth individual interviews conducted from participants

Pseudonym	Level of study	Gender	Type of club
Participant 1	Advanced Diploma	Female	Religious Club
Participant 2	2 nd year	Female	Political Club
Participant 3	3 rd year	Female	Social Club
Participant 4	Master's Degree	Female	Social Club
Participant 5	Advanced Diploma	Male	Political Club
Participant 6	Third year	Male	Religious Club
Participant 7	Third year	Female	Political Club
Participant 8	Third year	Male	Political Club
Participant 9	Advanced Diploma	Female	Political Club
Participant 10	2 nd year	Male	Political Club
Participant 11	2 nd year	Male	Religious Club
Participant 12	Post graduate Diploma	Male	Social Club

Source: Author

Table 6.2: Focus group 1 discussion conducted from participants

Pseudonym	Level of study	Gender	Type of club
Participant (FG-1)	Third year	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-2)	Third year	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-3)	Advanced Diploma	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-4)	Third year	Female	Political Club
Participant (FG-5)	Second year	Female	Social Club
Participant (FG-6)	Advanced Diploma	Male	Religious Club
Participant (FG-7)	4 th year	Male	Religious Club

Source: Author

Table 6.3: Focus group 2 discussion conducted from participants

Pseudonym	Level of study	Gender	Type of club
Participant (FG-8)	Second year	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-9)	Master's	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-10)	Second year	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-11)	Third year	Female	Political Club
Participant (FG-12)	Second year	Male	Social Club
Participant (FG-13)	Advanced Diploma	Female	Religious Club
Participant (FG-17)	3 rd year	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-18)	3 rd year	Female	Political Club

Table 6.4: Focus group 3 discussion conducted from participants

Pseudonym	Level of study	Gender	Type of club
Participant (FG-19)	Advanced Diploma	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-20)	3 rd year	Female	Political Club
Participant (FG-21)	2 nd year	Female	Social Club
Participant (FG-22)	3 rd year	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-23)	4 th year	Male	Religious
Participant (FG-24)	Advanced Diploma	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-25)	3 rd year	Female	Political Club
Participant (FG-26)	2 nd year	Female	Social Club

Source: Author

Table 6.5: Focus group 4 discussion conducted from participants

Pseudonym	Level of study	Gender	Type of club
Participant (FG-27)	Advanced Diploma	Male	Religious Club
Participant (FG-28)	4 th year	Male	Religious Club
Participant (FG-29)	3 rd year	Male	Religious Club
Participant (FG-30)	Third year	Male	Political Club
Participant (FG-31)	Advanced Diploma	Male	Political Club

Participant (FG-32)	2 nd year	Male	Social Club
Participant (FG-33)	2 nd year	Female	Social Club
Participant (FG-34)	2 nd year	Male	Political Club

Source: Author

6.2.1 Word frequency

To facilitate preliminary data exploration and identify prominent themes within the qualitative dataset, the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 15 was employed for word frequency analysis. This technique enabled the identification of recurring terms and phrases used by participants, providing an initial insight into their focal points and shared conceptual language. Participants' interview responses and focus group transcripts were subjected to this analysis, culminating in the generation of a word cloud, visually represented in Figure 6.1. Word clouds (or tag clouds) are visual representations that display the frequency of terms within a textual dataset; commonly, words appearing more frequently are rendered in larger font sizes, allowing for rapid identification of dominant vocabulary. While word frequency analysis can arrange up to 1,000 words in alphabetical order for exhaustive review, its primary utility in this qualitative study was to highlight the most prevalent terms, which in turn aided the subsequent identification of primary and sub-themes.

It is crucial to acknowledge that, as articulated by Waykole et al. (2020), word frequency analysis primarily indicates the occurrence of terms and does not inherently denote their relevance or significance within the nuanced context of qualitative inquiry. Therefore, the word cloud served as an exploratory tool, guiding the deeper thematic and content analysis rather than replacing it. The creation of word trees further supported this initial exploration by illustrating the contextual usage of key terms, revealing patterns in how participants connected concepts.

Figure 6.1 below illustrate the word frequency representation of themes on quality Information distribution.

themes or sub-nodes that arise are included in the discussion. Researchers in the qualitative tradition often extract themes from text, a practice known as 'open coding' in grounded theory (Oliveri *et al.* 2021). The majority of the topics in this research were derived from the literature survey, resulting in the prevalence of 'deductive theoretical thematic analysis'.

6.2.3 Pattern interpretation

The researcher analysed the patterns and provided a logical explanation of the occurrences to ensure the study's reliability. Rigour, as a term, may be seen as a measure of excellence in the research process (Ningi 2022). A more stringent research approach provides more reliable conclusions. To ensure a reliable result, it was important to use the most suitable method, preferably face-to-face interviews at the campuses. It was also crucial to establish a good rapport with the interviewees by employing appropriate techniques. Sufficient time was allocated for each interview, with at least 30 minutes to an hour, to allow the interviewees to elaborate on their input. Incorporating probing questions that help clarify the true significance of each response was essential in this study. The researcher ensured openness by meticulously considering the sampling process, including the individuals involved, the methods used, and the source of the sample. The researcher excluded anybody who did not meet the necessary requirements or who could possibly introduce bias into the findings (Oliveri *et al.* 2021). To enhance the overall value of the study, the participants were encouraged to go beyond their usual boundaries and provide thoughtful insights.

The themes were generated from thematic analysis of the data collected from participants is shown in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4: Themes generated

	Theme	Subtheme
Theme 1	Understanding the concept and types of quality of information to be distributed (What?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtaining quality information for distributing to prospective students • Maintaining the tripartite relationship to ensure the quality of the information distributed • The accuracy and reliability of information • Consistency of information distributed due to a lack of credible sources
Theme 2	Determining the quality of the information that is distributed and the sources used. (How and Where?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biased information distributed compromises quality • Misleading information that compromises quality • Confusing information that perpetuates challenges for prospective students • Distributing information at the university gates • Using social media to distribute information
Theme 3	Factors affecting the quality of the information distributed (Why?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circulating propaganda • Populism • Training • Policy frameworks • The Importance of PDCA cycle • The importance of Organisational Information Theory
Theme 4	Policy frameworks governing the quality information distribution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy frameworks • Quality assurance practices

Source: Author

6.3 THEME 1: UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT AND TYPES OF THE QUALITY OF INFORMATION TO BE DISTRIBUTED

The conceptualisation of high-quality information distributed by clubs and societies is of paramount significance. The findings highlight the challenges caused by a lack of comprehension of the concept of the quality of information to be distributed by clubs and societies.

Figure 6.2 illustrates the findings for theme 1.

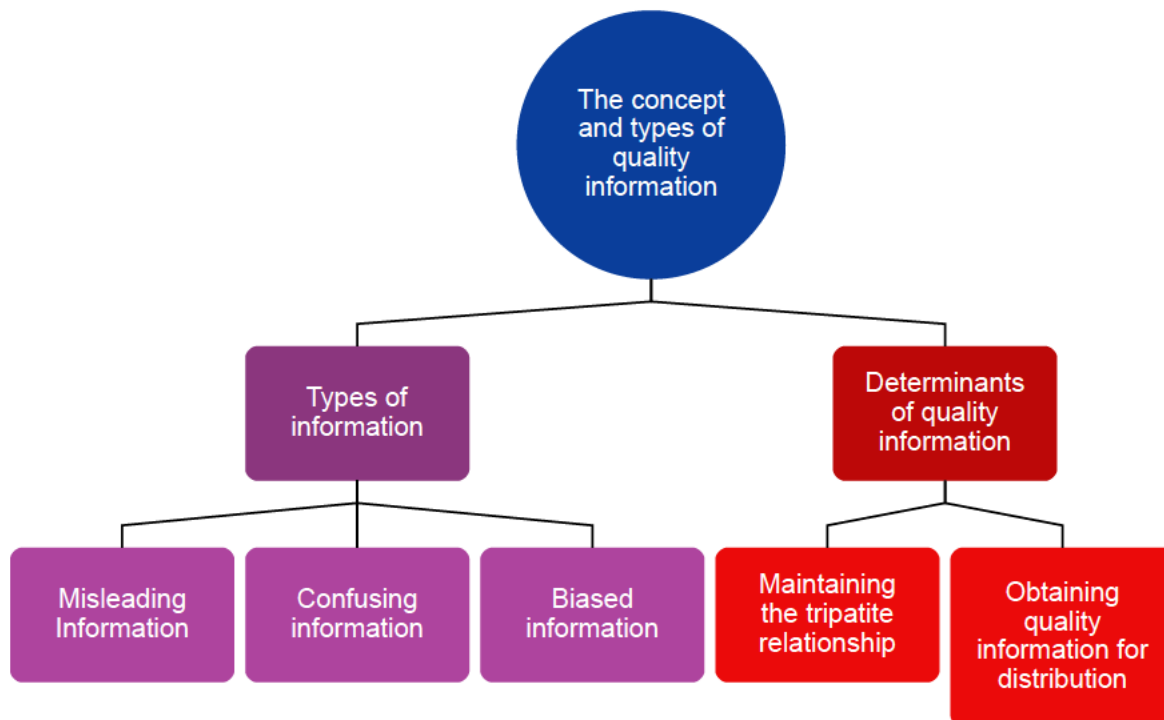


Figure 6.2: The types and determinants of quality information distributed in Higher Education Institutions

Source: Author

A fundamental challenge identified in this study pertains to the conceptualization and operationalization of quality information within student organizations, leading to various irregularities in practice. Scholarly discourse underscores that information quality is often ascertained by evaluating whether the recipient has accurately understood the intended message (Azemi et al., 2018: 413). Participants in this study similarly highlighted pervasive issues associated with the interpretation of the 'quality concept,' which consequently manifested in numerous dysfunctions within the Higher Education Institution (HEI). Key insights from participants illustrate these challenges:

I've assisted students with information in different levels including prospective students. (Participant 1)

The information I have distributed to prospective students is based on my knowledge, I wouldn't say it is quality since the university changes things all the time. (Participant 10)

We are always visited by comrades who are from other campuses, and they distribute information to prospective students. For me that is a red flag since

they do not understand the operations, so yes, the information we distribute sometimes lacks quality. (Participant 7)

These excerpts underscore several critical issues. Participants frequently acknowledged that the information they distributed to prospective students often originated from their personal knowledge and experiences rather than from official HEI sources. This reliance on individual understanding introduced inherent risks to information quality, a concern amplified by participants' recognition of the university's frequent policy and operational modifications. They admitted that their own investigations into these changes were often inadequate, leading to potential inaccuracies. Furthermore, a significant observation pertained to external actors: participants reported visits from colleagues affiliated with other HEIs who, despite lacking comprehensive understanding of local institutional operations, proceeded to distribute information to prospective students on campus. This practice, identified by participants as a "red flag," clearly indicates a lack of contextual comprehension, frequently resulting in the provision of inaccurate or outdated information.

The literature substantiates these concerns, asserting that information quality is determined by various intrinsic concepts, including value for money, fitness for purpose, and perfection (Taber et al., 2020: 2). These determinants fundamentally demand accuracy and reliability. The findings of this study, illuminated through participant narratives, indicate a clear deficiency in the consistent understanding and application of these quality concepts among student clubs and societies. This deficiency has tangible adverse consequences for prospective students, who rely on accurate and reliable information for critical decision-making processes.

6.3.1 Obtaining quality information for distributing to prospective students

To obtain high-quality information for clubs and societies, individuals must conduct comprehensive research and use the institution's platforms. The research participants argue that there are several methods for acquiring high-quality information with the purpose of distributing it to prospective students, one of which involves engaging with departments from which they need information. The establishment of conceptual norms and roles aims to enhance the effectiveness and promptness of information

exchanges (Koliouisis *et al.* 2020: 345). Prakash (2018: 733) argues that quality of information is characterised by accuracy, integrity, consistency, completeness, validity, timeliness, and accessibility. Hence, the issue of quality of information circulated necessitates that clubs and societies engage with relevant departments in accordance with the research results.

We approach departments for information. (Participant 7)

We conduct research first, by requesting it from the departments. (Participant 12)

The participants noted that there were many concerns pertaining to the acquisition of high-quality information. It was emphasised that clubs and societies have challenges in acquiring information, but those with SRC members who serve as their representatives can get excellent information for distribution to prospective students. Participants stated the following:

It is easy to obtain quality information if your club is in governance (SRC). (Participant 3)

If you are not in governance, it is hard to get quality information from the institution. (Participant 8)

It is apparent from the research findings that clubs and societies have challenges in accessing high-quality information directly from the institution. The distribution of quality information is a subject of argument due to the identified gap.

6.3.2 Maintaining the tripartite relationship to ensure the quality of information distributed

The relationship between the HEI, clubs and societies, and prospective students significantly influences the preservation of high-quality information. The findings revealed that the relationship between clubs and societies and the institution had deficiencies, resulting in the distribution of low-quality information. Consequently, the experiences of prospective students in accessing high-quality information are impacted. Literature illustrates that the insufficiency of quality information distributed inside HEIs often leads to various adverse outcomes, such as operational disruptions, hindered decision-making processes, and compromised interpersonal communication and understanding among prospective students (Marcellina 2020: 3). On this, the

distribution of poor-quality information significantly contributes to the prevalence of instability in the HES (Omoregie 2022: 2). Participants also emphasised a lack of relationships which affects the distribution of high-quality information. Participants indicated the following:

Consulting departments is hard because they always say that they want to only communicate with the SRC and they are always busy during the registration period.
(Participant 4)

Staff members are arrogant and do not assist with the information we need.
(Participant 12)

The abovementioned findings highlight a concerning pattern where clubs and societies have issues pertaining to staff members, they need information from. However other participants highlighted the following:

To obtain information from departments, there needs to be respect. I believe that staff members are always open to distributing quality information to clubs and societies that respect them. The value of the institution emphasises this. (Participant 3)

The statement emphasises that the method used by clubs and societies has a significant influence on the acquisition of high-quality information from the institution. In addition, they referred to the HEI values and principles that govern the behaviour of its members. The outcomes of this study emphasise the need to maintain relationships to efficiently distribute high-quality information.

6.3.3 Biased information distributed that compromises quality

The findings delineated that the information distributed by clubs and societies is biased and lacks quality due to being biased. The participants highlighted that the information is always in favour of clubs and societies, which has led to various disruptions. The literature supports this assertion and emphasises that the amount of time dedicated to making a decision is also relevant to the believability of the information (Figl *et al.* 2019: 2; French *et al.*, 2024). Participants highlighted the following:

Clubs and societies distribute information that is biased. (Participant 1)

*There have been instances where ***** distributed information that is biased because they want to go on strike to be popular.* (Participant 8)

The results provide evidence that reveals a worrisome pattern in the distribution of low-quality information, which in turn undermines the integrity of the HEI. This information has had an impact not only on the functioning of the HEI, but also on its prospective students, who are unable to distinguish between truth and falsehood. Consequently, this creates an inequality whereby prospective students possess little or no information.

6.3.4 Misleading information that compromises quality

Misinformation has been identified as a significant factor contributing to instabilities in HEIs. The findings emphasise a recurring pattern of distributing incorrect information that misleads prospective students with the intention of causing disorder. As such there has been detrimental effects because of misinformation, Olagunju (2022: 5) highlighted that in South Africa has even experienced fatalities because of student protests perpetuated by a lack of quality information as well as misinformation circulated by students. There are several occurrences in which clubs and societies engage in deceptive practices towards prospective students, with the intention of ensuring that the SRC or the HEI encounters challenges, therefore establishing themselves as persons who prioritise the welfare of students (Gumede 2023). The information presented in the results highlighted many instances that led to the arrest of prospective students because of their involvement in unlawful strikes. The following was indicated by participants.

In some cases, prospective students are misled intentionally. (Participant FG-34)

The information is misleading sometimes because there is a shortfall from the university's side. (Participant 10)

The findings indicate that there are instances in which prospective students are deliberately misled. The findings underscore the potential for misguidance among prospective students if the HEI fails to distribute accurate and reliable information. This is particularly significant since clubs and societies heavily depend on HEI for such information.

6.3.5 Confusing information that perpetuates challenges

The findings obtained from the data production indicate that clubs and societies distribute information that is confusing. The participants emphasised that because of the lack of guidance from the HEI, they distribute information they might obtain from the SRC or other clubs and societies, resulting in significant confusion. Confusing information refers to the amalgamation of diverse information that have similar meanings (Annala 2023). Distribution of confusing information influences the decisions made by prospective students. The participants indicated the following:

There is a lot of information that is confusing distributed by clubs and societies, especially political clubs. (Participant 6)

Prospective students get confused by the information distributed by clubs and end up losing spaces. (Participant 9)

Sometimes the information we distribute is confusing for example when we hear from SRC and not the HEI itself. (Participant 11)

This study reveals a disparity between HEIs and clubs and societies, resulting in a state of confusion. Moreover, the disparities between the SRC and clubs are a significant component in the uncertainty, particularly for prospective students who may find themselves in a precarious situation. The uncertainty significantly impacts the stability and reputation of HEIs since prospective students have a wide range of options to select from when they choose to pursue their studies.

6.4 THEME 2: DETERMINING THE QUALITY OF INFORMATION DISTRIBUTED BY CLUBS AND SOCIETIES

This theme outlines the quality of information that is distributed by clubs and societies. The participants in this study highlighted the information they distribute to prospective students' which is illustrated in Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.3 below illustrates theme 2.

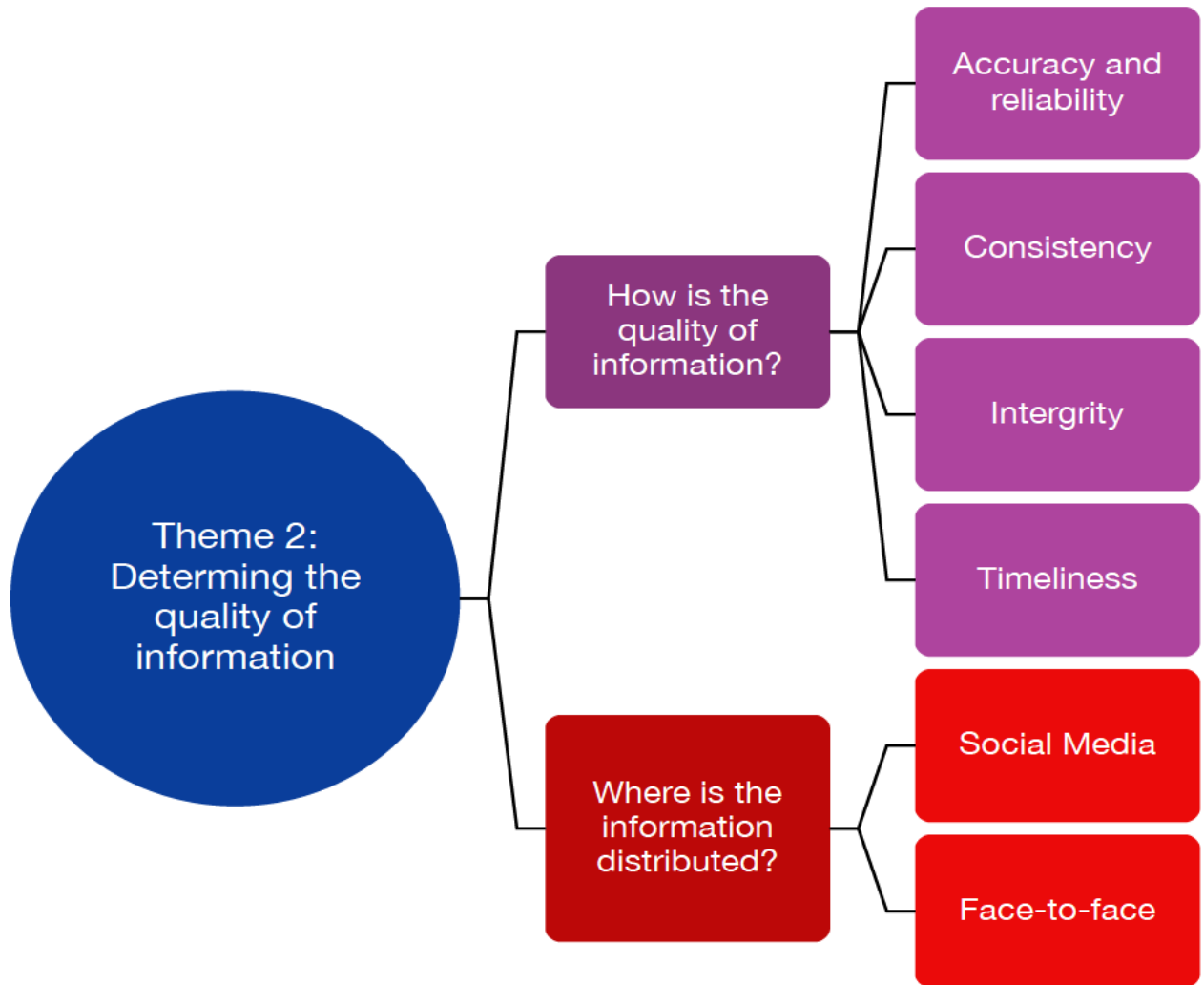


Figure 6.3: Determining the quality Information distributed by clubs and societies in Higher Education Institutions
Source: Author

6.4.1 The accuracy and reliability of information

The quality of information, particularly in the context of admissions information at HEIs, is primarily determined by its accuracy and reliability. The study's findings have brought attention to many problems, namely the inaccuracies and reliability of the information, which often results in shortcomings in quality. It is evident that the quality of information is compromised if it is inaccurate and unreliable. Therefore, the low-quality of information distributed in HEIs often leads to many adverse outcomes, such as disruptions in operations, hindered decision-making, and compromised interpersonal communication and understanding (Marcellina 2020: 3). The research

identifies these characteristics as the main factors influencing satisfaction with quality. The participants highlighted the following:

The information distributed by clubs and societies is not accurate and reliable because they are always promoting a particular agenda. (Participant 4)

We distribute inaccurate information because of spreading propaganda, in order for us to remain popular and to get votes. (Participant 5)

There has been numerous inaccurate and unreliable information distributed by clubs and societies. (Participant 7)

We sometimes distribute information that is inaccurate. (Participant 10)

The findings suggest that the information distributed by clubs and societies is characterised by inaccuracies and a lack of reliability. Research highlights that precision refers to the characteristic of being highly exact and accurate (Blake 2021: 196). There have been clubs and societies that distribute inaccurate and unreliable information to prospective students, some not even recognised by the HEIs (Council on Higher Education 2010). This demonstrates that prospective students face significant obstacles while attempting to get admission to HEIs. Several participants noted that the distribution of inaccurate information is motivated by the promotion of a certain goal. Further to that, they pointed out that there are several instances in which they must guarantee that they are seen as proactive and resolving student concerns. According to the participants, these incidents mostly originate from political clubs that distribute information with the aim of gaining popularity among students and securing votes for the SRC elections.

6.4.2 Consistency of information distributed due to a lack of credible sources

The underlying concept of consistency plays a crucial role in the provision of quality information within this context, as it ensures the equitable treatment of potential students. According to the participants, there is a lack of consistency in the information distributed by clubs and societies. The findings reveal deficiencies in the information they distribute, resulting in ambiguity. It is evident that there is a lack of cross-referencing or referral of students to appropriate sources of assistance (Roe *et al.* 2024). This phenomenon has a significant role in the process of student transition and the quality of students that the institution can retain. To substantiate this claim,

scholarly literature has brought attention to many concerns pertaining to the distribution of consistent information. Nachman and Pryor (2023: 3) argue that ensuring the transmission of consistent information is crucial in the field of HE. Participants identified significant inconsistencies that have persisted over time. Consequently, this compromises the quality of the information they distribute.

We distribute information we know but there are times where the information is different because other clubs and societies have connections with a certain department. On their side they say something and us we say something else and that results in inconsistent information. (Participant 3)

The information we distribute is not consistent because we rely on the staff members to assist us with information. They usually give us information that is not consistent. (Participant 5)

It is difficult to distribute information that is consistent because we get different information every day. (Participant 11)

The participants acknowledge that there is a deficiency in the uniformity of information distributed to prospective students, resulting in several challenges that impede the distribution of information of excellent quality. Notably, one of the primary difficulties in HEIs is ensuring the delivery of consistent information to users across different communication channels and digital platforms (Tungpantong *et al.* 2022: 12) including clubs and societies. The findings emphasise the distribution of inconsistent information, resulting in several discrepancies. This issue is further exacerbated by the modifications made by the institution throughout the registration process.

6.4.3 Timely distribution of quality information

The findings indicate that timely distribution of information enhances the likelihood of prospective students being admitted. The participants emphasised that prospective students often face a lack of resources and skills for application, leading them to depend on the information distributed by clubs and societies. The participants acknowledged the significance of staff members' responses from the HEI in providing the necessary information, as it directly impacts the timeliness of the information. The distribution of accurate and reliable information in an appropriate and timely way is crucial for informing individuals about potential possibilities and obstacles related to

the admissions process (Mai 2013: 677). Su *et al.* (2007: 193) indicates that it is crucial to “define, measure, analyse, and improve the quality of information, treating information as a product” because “creating quality information and organisational knowledge is the prerequisite for any organisation to gain a competitive advantage”. Therefore, it is essential to guarantee that the information that is distributed is of high-quality. Participants provided the following responses:

By the time we inform prospective students, it would be too late. (Participant 1)

*The departments take too long to reply to our requests, and you find that we inform a student that there are 40 spaces and when they arrive at ***** the spaces will be finished.* (Participant 9)

As a result of all these variables, there exists an issue in timely distribution of information highlighted by participants. There are clearly shortcomings in the timely distribution of information, which undermines its quality.

6.4.4 Integrity of the information distributed

The importance of ensuring integrity of information is central for HEIs. Participants in this study highlighted a deficit in integrity that compromises quality of information that is distributed by clubs and societies. This also influences the image of clubs and societies as well as the HEI. Research findings are that students' perceptions of quality of information provided by HEIs is influenced by whether it is adequate and trustworthy (Mijač *et al.* 2022: 178). The findings concur that clubs and societies approach to integrity is crucial because this influences the experiences of prospective students and their perceptions about the HEI. The participants highlighted the following:

There are many scamming cases, and they negatively affect prospective students. (Participant 7)

The information we distribute is not guaranteed since there are always changes. Students have also been scammed because they do not know who they must approach to obtain information. (Participant FG-30)

Participants indicated that there are scammers targeting prospective students using the name of clubs and societies as well as the HEI's name. This has a negative influence on student enrolment. Findings also highlighted that another contributing

factor regarding the integrity of information is the fact that information quality cannot be guaranteed since the implementation of changes is continuous. On this, participants highlighted that it is difficult to keep up since they also have academic commitments. The aforementioned highlights the influence of integrity in ensuring the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies.

6.4.5 Social media as a source of quality information for distribution

Social media is one of the fastest-growing platforms all over the world. Findings in this study highlighted that clubs and societies use Facebook to distribute information. The use of Facebook was the most convenient one since the participants highlighted that most prospective students go on Facebook to seek information. Social media serves as a means of distributing information, therefore influencing the level of quality (Cele *et al.* 2023: 4). As a result, participants indicated that this mode is highly influential. Participants indicated the following:

We use Facebook to reach prospective students. (Participant 2)

Facebook is easy because it is cheaper, and it can be accessed on Free mode on other cellular networks. Which makes it easier for us to speak to them. (Participant FG-26)

When students search[HEI], we also appear, and they usually use our groups and ask questions there. There are always comrades that assist them. (Participant FG-13)

The abovementioned statements from participants indicate that clubs and societies distribute information on Facebook. The findings also indicate that prospective students rely on Facebook in the absence of resources.

The screenshots in Figure 6.4 are sourced from Facebook as proof of the interactions.

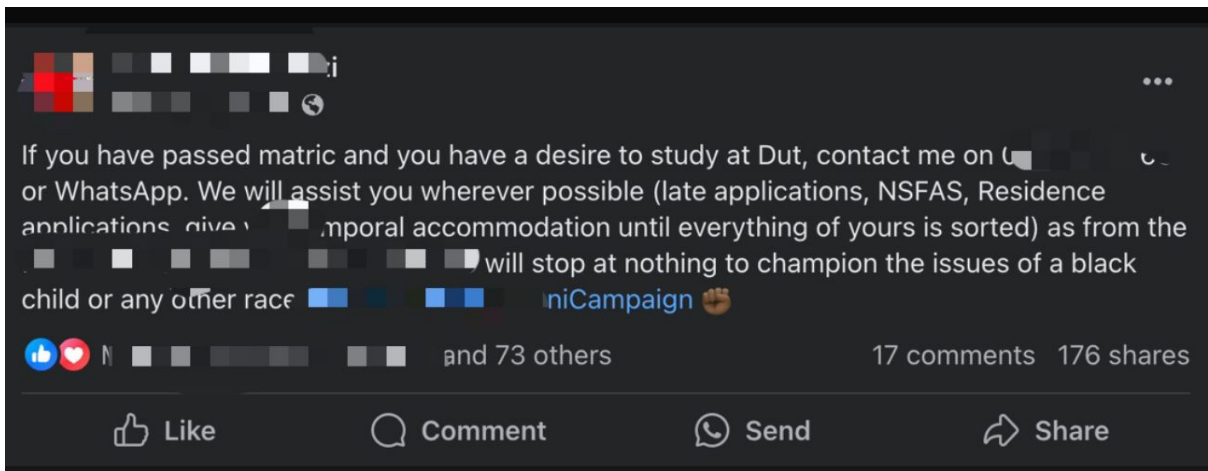


Figure 6.4: Clubs and societies Facebook posts screenshot

Source: (Facebook 2025)

The above screenshot highlights that clubs and societies distribute information that is from the HEI. The author of the post highlighted that this information has been distributed in the platforms from the HEI and they are sharing it to ensure no one is left out. However, in the same platforms there is information that confuses prospective students, as shown in Figure 6.5.

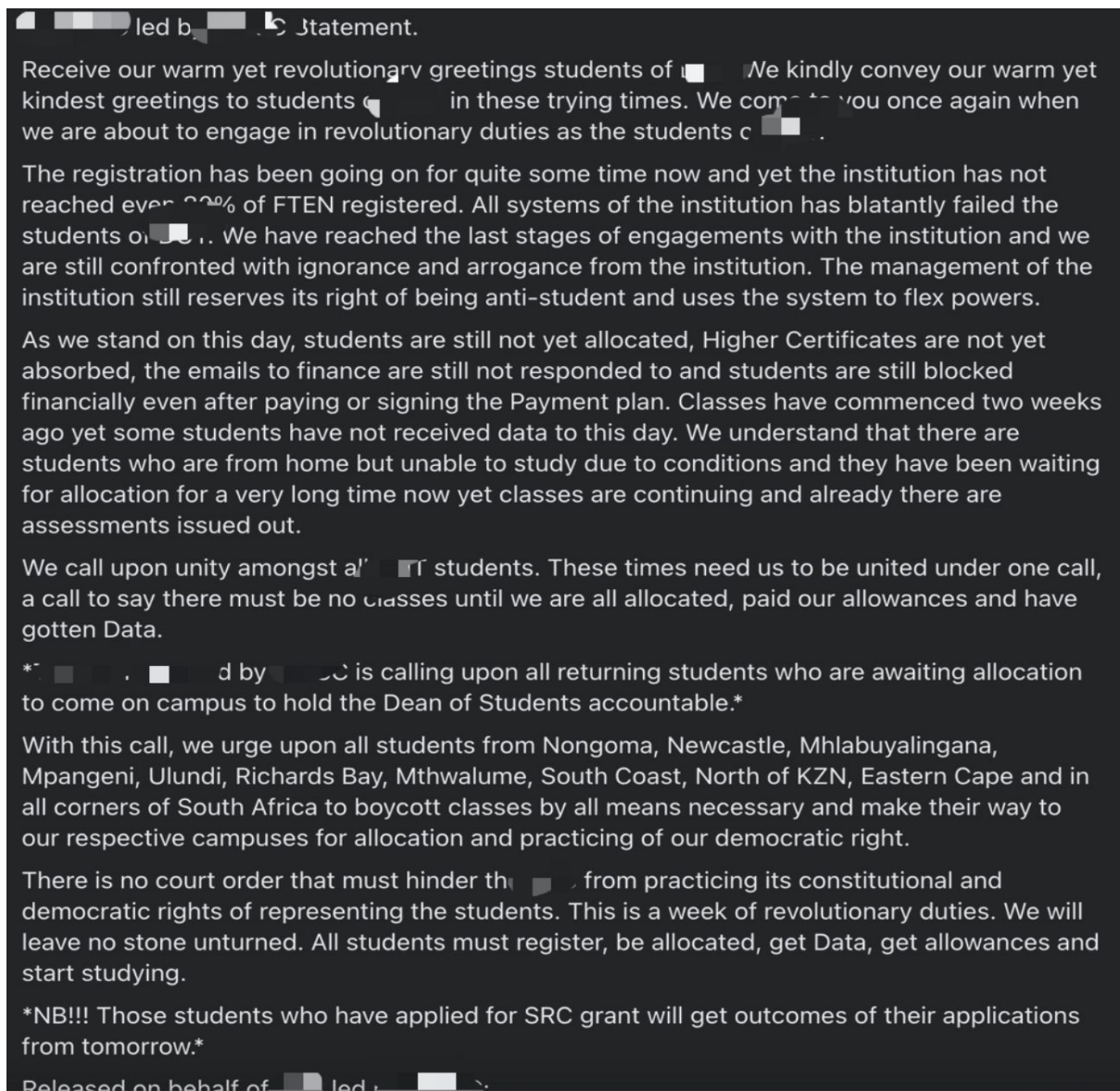


Figure 6.5: Clubs and societies Facebook posts

Source: (Facebook 2025)

The information distributed by clubs and societies is clearly shown in the screenshot above. The demonstrated information is of poor quality and disturbing, as shown by the results. This is an analysis of the kind of information that prospective students are consuming, and it has implications since it is causing the students to join in protests without even taking part in academic activities. According to literature, a significant majority of students (73%) declared that they allocate a great amount of time to utilising technological methods for social interaction so are reducing their face-to-face interactions (Al Rawashdeh *et al.* 2021: 108). It is clear that most prospective students

depend on these platforms, and if there is a lack of quality, there is cause for dissatisfaction.

6.4.6 Face-to-face distribution of quality information at the HEI gates and through school visits

The findings are that clubs and societies provide information to prospective students using a variety of in-person approaches. Moreover, the findings suggest that prospective students prefer visiting the HEI rather than conducting online information searches. In the absence and lack of access to information systems online, signages and proper directions, clubs and societies present themselves as guides for parents and prospective students (Parreira *et al.* 2023: 1). The findings clearly indicate that prospective students encounter hurdles when obtaining information directly from clubs and societies. Face-to-face interaction refers to the act of engaging in a discussion with the visual presence of the other person or individuals involved; this provides a chance to communicate not only through words, but also through the observation and adjustment of body language and facial expressions by both the speaker and listener(s). Participants highlighted the following:

We stand at the HEI's gates in order to interact with the prospective students.
(Participant 9)

*Our branch ensures that our members are at the gates of ***** especially at the beginning of the year. We assist first years with information, in terms of registration, spaces available and many other things. We call our campaign ***** because we believe that someone must assist them and the HEI does not have enough staff to attend to them.* (Participant FG-32)

*On our side, we have a campaign called ***** where we stand at the gate with our gazebo and wear our regalia.* (Participant FG-17)

We don't have any names for our campaign however we distribute information at the gates every year, we also visit high schools and share the information with our church members who are doing matric, so yes that is how we distribute information face-to-face. (Participant FG-4)

The findings clearly indicate that clubs and societies distribute information through numerous campaigns and take measures to ensure their visibility at the campus gates.

In the absence and lack of access to information systems online, signages and proper directions, clubs and societies present themselves as guides for parents and prospective students (Parreira *et al.* 2023: 1). The participants expressed a preference for prioritising face-to-face encounters. Other participants expressed that they even go to the extent of visiting high schools, since this method of distributing information in schools is still widely used.

6.5 THEME 3: FACTORS AFFECTING THE DISTRIBUTION OF QUALITY INFORMATION

There are various factors indicated by participants in this study, including training, circulating propaganda and populism (Figure 6.6).

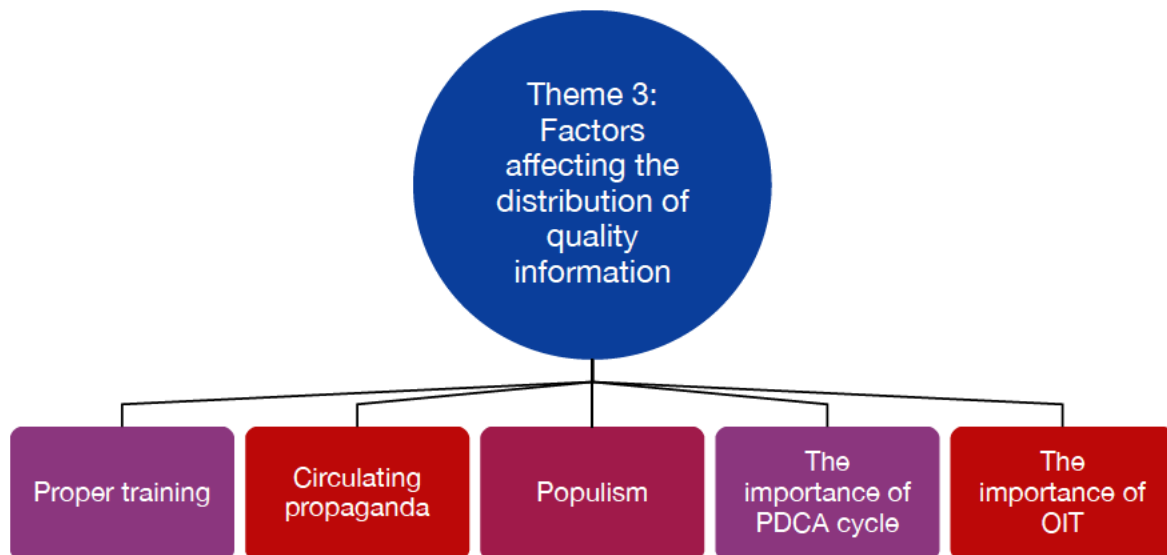


Figure 6.6: Factors influencing quality information distribution at Higher Education Institutions

Source: Author

6.5.1 Proper training and Capacity Building

A paramount theme emerging from the data analysis, and consistently emphasized by participants, was the critical importance of adequate training for student clubs and societies. The findings unequivocally underscore that robust training is indispensable for these organizations, particularly given that their membership comprises students who, by nature of their developmental stage and often transient roles, require continuous guidance and capacity building in information management. This study's

findings corroborate that, for clubs and societies to effectively distribute high-quality information, structured and relevant training programs are essential.

Participants' direct experiences illuminated significant gaps in current training provisions:

We are not trained by the HEI, instead our political party trains us before the campaigns. (Participant FG-3)

Our organisation provides us with training; we do not get trained by [HEI NAME].”
(Participant FG-25)

These compelling statements underscore a critical challenge: the Higher Education Institution (HEI) is largely disengaged from, or perceived as absent in, the formal training of student organizations regarding information distribution. Instead, training, where it occurs, is often provided by external entities (e.g., political parties) or internal organizational structures that may lack institutional oversight or direct relevance to HEI-specific information protocols. This deficiency points to a significant institutional oversight, potentially stemming from resource constraints or a lack of formalized capacity building frameworks within the HEI, as implicitly suggested by participant narratives. Consequently, the fragmented and often external nature of training for clubs and societies presents a substantial problem, demonstrably influencing the quality and reliability of the information they distribute to prospective students.

6.5.2 Populism

Populism is a well-recognised concept especially in political clubs and societies. Participants in this study indicated that there are various issues related to populism that affect the distribution of quality information. Findings further highlighted that clubs and societies distribute information to remain popular amongst students since they want to have students who will vote for them in the elections. Parreira *et al.* (2023: 4) emphasised that the first interactions of prospective students in the HEIs are mostly clubs and societies who seek to recruit students to join their clubs and societies and for recognition to win SRC elections. The participants also highlighted that clubs and societies use this opportunity to attract more members for their organisations. In this

context, clubs and societies have remained popular based on their role in information distribution. The participants indicated the following:

****** always goes on strikes because they want to be popular amongst students and that has led to one of the students losing their lives during a strike action. This badly reflected on the HEI and promoted the club, and they even went on more strikes because of the popularity they gained because of this incident. (Participant 6)*

It is evident from the findings that there are significant issues related to the distribution of quality information especially because clubs and societies do it for popularism. Another concern is that there was a loss of life because of a strike action that was because of populism.

6.5.3 Circulating propaganda

The circulation of propaganda amongst political clubs is common. Findings indicated that there is an influx of information that is propaganda distributed by clubs and societies to make others look bad or the HEI look bad. This type of information damages the reputation of the club, society, or HEI, and contributes to the confusion of students. Investing in building a solid reputation yields substantial benefits for the organisation (Perera *et al.* 2022: 28). Participants indicated that propaganda is intended to destroy a reputation or image. Participants indicated the following:

Other clubs spread propaganda to make them look bad, for instance since we are in governance. They tell students that we are the ones who have information when we do not have. (Participant FG-4)

****** once created a poster that had our logo and invited prospective students to *****. They flooded the institution and there were no spaces available, so yes other things we suffer from is propaganda. (Participant 5)*

The participants' views highlight the existence of concerns about the distribution of propaganda, which is used to provoke instability and destabilise the institution or its associated clubs and organisations. Research indicates that there are several types of propaganda; the examples mentioned here, such as disinformation leading to misinformation, direct calls to action, genuine truths presented in deceptive ways, and manipulative efforts to gain trust, all fall under this category (Mare and Moyo 2019: 6).

The spread of such information leads to a clear compromise in quality and contributes to pandemonium.

6.5.4 The importance of the PDCA in ensuring that quality information is distributed

The findings revealed many concerns pertaining to the organisation and management of clubs and societies. The findings indicated that clubs and societies align their campaign plans with those of their affiliated organisations to distribute information. Research indicates that the PDCA cycle can be utilised when initiating a new improvement project, when creating a new or enhanced design for a process, when establishing a repeated work process, and when executing any type of change (Ma *et al.* 2022: 2). The participants indicated the following:

The institution does not recognise some of us and it is very difficult to distribute quality information. You find that the only clubs and society that they distribute quality information to is the SRC and the rest of us are forgotten and that causes a lot of issues since we need to double check if the information we have is true and we can tell prospective students. (Participant 4)

Our convener is responsible for planning and organising of the resources and tools we need to distribute information to prospective students. But it is very difficult to make sure that everything is going well since we do not have enough funds and we are not recognised by the institution at the beginning of the year. (Participant 8)

The findings clearly indicate that the application of the PDCA may not be feasible due to the inadequate resources available to clubs and societies. The participants emphasised that the meticulous process of ensuring that all aspects are in proper order and that prospective students receive high-quality information is challenging and necessitates financial resources. What was particularly worrisome was the fact that clubs and societies distribute information without being recognised by the institution and the SRC, which potentially has an influence on the HEI's ability to ensure the proper distribution of information.

6.5.5 The use of organisational information theory to ensure that quality information is distributed

The findings suggest that there is a diverse range of information that is not effectively distributed. It addresses many concerns with the efficient distribution of information. The OIT theory proposes that companies can manage and understand information in order to reduce confusion. The findings clearly indicate the need to comprehend OIT to ensure proper distribution of information. The participants emphasised the following point:

*The information is confusing sometimes, and we need ***** to intervene to make sure that prospective students do not get confused. (Participant 3)*

The findings reveal an unfortunate pattern in the distribution of information that is perplexing for prospective students. Literature highlights that the concept of the information environment encompasses a diverse array of individuals, organisations, and technological frameworks that engage in the activities of acquiring, analysing, distributing, and utilising information (Vladimir 2023: 1). Thus, OIT is necessary to address the uncertainty and emphasise the assessment of information that is distributed by clubs and societies.

6.6 THEME 4: POLICY FRAMEWORKS GOVERNING THE DISTRIBUTION OF QUALITY INFORMATION

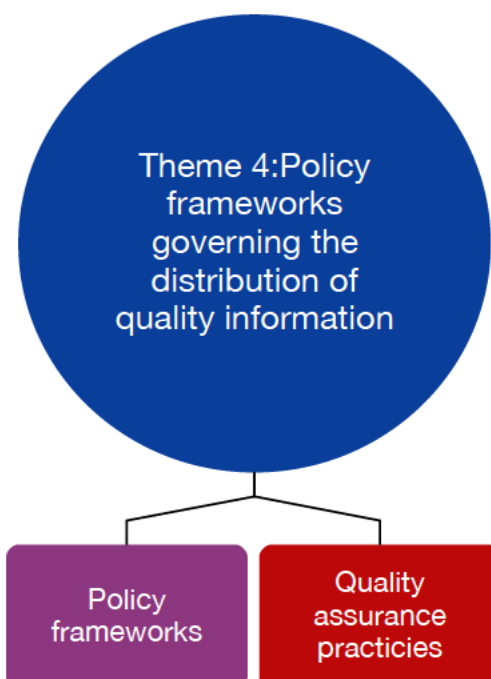


Figure 7: Policy frameworks governing the distribution of quality information

Source: Author

6.6.1 Policy frameworks

The findings highlighted a notable absence of clear and standardised policies that govern quality information distribution. Participants consistently highlighted that the information that they distribute is dependent on what they receive from various institutional strictures without formalised guidelines. It is significant that policies in HE is relevant for all stakeholders (Wang and Gong 2023), including clubs and societies (Setthasuravich and Kato 2022) to ensure accountability. However, it is evident from the findings that there are no clear policies guiding the information that is distributed to prospective students. When participants were asked “Are there any policies in place for the distribution of quality information?” they replied as follows:

Yeah, particularly there is no policy that outlines what information we can distribute (Participant 12)

*Umm, no, but I know that sharing wrong information is quite illegal and yeah it goes against (*****) living values (Participant 1)*

The above statements from participants are concerning and evident that there is a need for policies that guide the distribution of quality information. Quality assurance is the implementation of policies, processes, systems, and practices (both within and outside the organisation) with the aim of attaining, sustaining, and enhancing quality (Jesry *et al.* 2022: 2).

6.6.2 Quality assurance practices

The study's findings underscore the necessity of implementing policies regarding the quality of information distributed. The participants emphasised the significance of policies in higher education, as they play a vital role in ensuring compliance among stakeholders. Existing literature supports the notion that policies are a crucial component. Student involvement is seen as a significant indication of institutional success, due to the increasing emphasis on evaluation, transparency, and accountability in HE quality discourse (Tian *et al.* 2021: 2), as indicated in the assertion below:

*I believe that the quality assurance should also include clubs and societies so that ***** and DHET can understand the dynamics and role they play in distributing quality information.* (Participant FG-21)

According to the participants, incorporating their perspectives into QA methods may facilitate the distribution of high-quality information, thereby enhancing the suitability and security of the distribution of information for prospective students. Literature asserts that the emphasis on handling quality moves from the assurance of information, such as reports and key performance indicators for decision-making purposes, to the management of risks, quality of information, and information security (Robertson 2023). An additional concern identified in the findings was the participants' limited awareness of policies, coupled with the absence of established policies for distributing high-quality information. Participants stipulated the following:

There are no policies that are specific on the distribution of quality information. (Participant FG-6)

*We rely on our own political party constitution that guides all our members on how to distribute quality information to prospective students. The policy is designed for all ***** structures in HEIs.* (Participant 10)

The assertions illustrate the challenges pertaining to policies and their execution. Since 1994, the government has prioritised access, equity, redress, and quality in educational reforms, supported by a comprehensive legislative, policy, and regulatory framework to assure inclusion (Mestry 2020: 3). The mandate of clubs and societies is to increase access and redress inequalities in HE, as per the findings. However, a crucial element in the realm of policies of clubs and societies is that they use their own guidelines that are mandated by their mother bodies and not the guidelines of the HES or of the HEIs. This has a significant impact on the experiences of prospective students and the degree of responsibility shown by clubs and societies.

6.7 SUMMARY

This chapter systematically presented and analysed the empirical findings of the study, derived from the qualitative data and organized into coherent themes. Participants' rich and varied responses directly addressed the core research inquiries, illuminating several key aspects of information distribution by clubs and societies. The findings confirm that clubs and societies distribute diverse types of information, encompassing numerous concepts relevant to prospective students, thereby substantiating the phenomenon under investigation. Crucially, the analysis revealed significant deficiencies in the quality of this distributed information, a factor that negatively impacts prospective students' decision-making processes and potentially tarnishes the university's image. The critical importance of robust information quality, consistent with the foundational discussions in Chapter 2, was strongly emphasized by participants as essential for positive influence.

Furthermore, the insights garnered were robustly interpreted through the lens of the study's two theoretical frameworks, the PDCA cycle and Organisational Information Theory (OIT), as introduced in Chapter 4. These theories were instrumental in conceptualizing and organizing the findings, particularly highlighting how their principles either manifest or are neglected in clubs' and societies' information distribution campaigns. The findings also underscored that the diverse nature of information distributed inherently contributes to, or detracts from, the overall attributes of high-quality information. This chapter additionally detailed findings related to the challenges posed by disinformation and propaganda, along with the inherent

difficulties encountered in distributing accurate and reliable information. Overall, the empirical evidence demonstrates that both the PDCA cycle and OIT provided substantial explanatory power in conceptualizing and understanding the dynamics of information distribution campaigns by clubs and societies.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Building directly upon the systematic presentation and analysis of empirical findings in Chapter 6, this chapter undertakes a comprehensive discussion and interpretation of those results. The primary objective of this doctoral research was to critically evaluate the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students at a specific University of Technology. Guided by an interpretivist paradigm and employing a qualitative methodology, as fully detailed in Chapter 5, the study generated rich data through semi-structured individual interviews, focused group discussions with chairpersons and secretaries, and a thorough examination of information distributed on various social media platforms (e.g., Facebook) and organizational websites. This qualitative data, subjected to rigorous thematic analysis and presented in the preceding chapter, forms the bedrock of the ensuing discussion. This chapter transcends merely restating the findings; instead, it delves into the descriptive "what" and operational "how" aspects of information quality within student organizations, providing deeper insights into the phenomena observed. It meticulously interprets the empirical data by relating it to the established body of knowledge on quality information distribution, as conceptualized in the literature review in Chapter 2. This conceptualization emphasized that quality information inherently encompasses multiple attributes, including accuracy, integrity, consistency, completeness, validity, timeliness, and accessibility.

Crucially, this discussion integrates the theoretical frameworks of the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle and Organisational Information Theory (OIT), introduced in Chapter 4, to provide a robust analytical lens. These frameworks allow for a nuanced examination of how organizational processes (PDCA) and communication dynamics (OIT) explain the observed patterns in information quality. By synthesizing the empirical evidence with theoretical perspectives and existing literature, this chapter aims to offer profound explanations, highlight implications, and ultimately contribute new knowledge to the discourse on information quality within the unique context of student organizations in South African higher education.

7.2 ADDRESSING THE TITLE

This chapter proceeds with a direct and comprehensive discussion of the empirical findings, framed explicitly within the parameters of this dissertation's overarching title: "The Quality of Information Distributed by Clubs and Societies to Prospective Students at a South African University of Technology." The central objective of this research, to establish the intrinsic quality of information distributed by these student-led organizations to their prospective student audience, remains paramount. This evaluation was systematically grounded in several key dimensions of information quality: accuracy, integrity, consistency, completeness, validity, timeliness, and accessibility.

To comprehensively address these aims, the investigation was guided by three precisely formulated research questions, which served as analytical pillars for the data collection and interpretation:

- What are the types of information distributed by clubs and societies? (A descriptive question aimed at mapping the scope of information content.)
- How is the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students ascertained? (An operational question focusing on the mechanisms and perceptions of quality assessment.)
- What are the factors that influence the quality of the information distributed by clubs and societies? (An analytical question exploring the determinants and underlying dynamics of information quality.)

By rigorously engaging with these questions, this chapter synthesizes the collected evidence to provide detailed insights into the complex interplay between student organizations, information quality, and prospective student engagement within the specified institutional context.

7.3 Addressing question 1: What are the types of information distributed by clubs and societies? (Descriptive question)

In Chapter 6 this research question was addressed by examining and presenting data obtained from the interviews. This was the first phase in the qualitative research methodology. Theme 1 of the study focused on the concept and types of information

that clubs and societies distribute, specifically addressing the descriptive "what" question. The many categories of information distributed by clubs and societies were presented. Clubs and societies in HEs are obligated to comply with policy standards, if they all have comparable resources to meet the information needs of prospective students. They are also expected to keep up to date on policies regarding quality information and actively responding to these to be able to continuously understand and adapt to the relevant policies (Aguilar and Richerme 2020). The literature describes various ideas, and the importance of quality information distribution. This data was used to create a written description of the specific types of information that clubs and societies use to advise prospective students. The discovery of the many forms, ideas, and relevance of quality distribution in HE was found to be of paramount importance. The findings indicated that the clubs and societies distributed information tailored to their specific requirements for gaining adherents.

The participants had diverse perspectives about the distribution of quality information and its assurance resulting in significant heterogeneity. The findings revealed that quality information is defined as the information provided by the staff members of the HEI who are careful and thorough in their approach to the clubs and societies who thereafter distribute it to prospective students. Research emphasises that it is crucial to "define, measure, analyse, and improve the quality of information, treating information as a product" because "creating quality information and organisational knowledge is the prerequisite for any organisation to gain a competitive advantage" (Su *et al.* 2007: 193). While the extent of perspectives may have differed, almost everyone recognised the need to guarantee that the content they distribute is of superior quality for all, without choosing who they distribute quality to. The prevailing viewpoint was that quality information entails the equitable distribution of information by the HEI to all clubs and societies, with the aim of ensuring the distribution of high-quality information. This perspective also emphasises the importance of a willingness to continuously improve and transform to achieve the desired outcomes of providing quality information to prospective students.

The behaviours are significant, enduring, and pertinent to the conceptualisation of quality information by clubs and societies. The notion of obtaining quality information in order to distribute it to prospective students assisted in understanding the concept

of quality of information distribution. The types of information accessible to clubs and societies depends on the resources they have at their disposal and are used to the best of their capacity. The participants unanimously agreed that information distribution entails striving for quality in all elements of the process. For an HEI to be effective, it relies on the leader's capacity to handle both official and informal interactions and establish a cohesive communication system that provides access to complete information (Beketova *et al.* 2020: 3). All the individuals questioned emphasised that quality is a social phenomenon rooted in theoretical concerns. However, the group also acknowledged that the notion has pragmatic uses in distribution. The discussion commenced by examining the fundamental ideas and classifications of knowledge as the epitome of excellence. These categories and various types were generated from information obtained from clubs and societies. The most crucial element was the comprehensibility of the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies.

Additionally, a notable topic arose about the three-way relationship between the HEI, clubs and societies, and the prospective students. Findings emphasised that the ties among the stakeholders indicated above were vital for maintaining high-quality information distribution. Studies indicate that establishing a strong rapport among these parties may guarantee effective distribution of accurate information (Fulton 2021: 48). The quality of information distributed in HE has an enormous effect on efficiency and effectiveness of HEIs (Carlo 2018: 2), thus also contributing to the admissions process as well as the experiences of prospective students in the HEI. During the interviews, the participants emphasised that certain kinds of information supplied by clubs and societies had a significant influence on the quality. They referred to the distribution of biased information as a deliberate strategy to incite disturbances. The distribution of prejudiced information was also intended to allure supporters. Another significant feature that they emphasised was the distribution of deceptive information, mostly targeting the HEI. Disinformation refers to intentionally deceptive or biased information, distorted narratives or facts, and propaganda (Fulton 2021: 48). Participants emphasised that sometimes their actions were intended to cause chaos or to expose the incompetence of the SRC or administration. This clearly indicated that there were several underlying concerns associated with the distribution of

information to prospective students to access HE. The misleading information was further emphasised due to the absence of accurate information.

7.4 ADDRESSING QUESTION 2: HOW IS THE QUALITY OF INFORMATION DISTRIBUTED BY CLUBS AND SOCIETIES TO PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS ASCERTAINED? (OPERATIONAL QUESTION)

The findings suggest that the information distributed lacks accuracy, relevance, and clarity, resulting in the provision of incomplete or obsolete information. Additionally, there is a lack of personalisation or relevance to unique prospective student interests. Prospective students who possess complete information are more inclined to acquire high-quality experiences, hence exerting a beneficial influence on the HEI (Anyim 2021: 53). Clubs and societies highlighted that prospective students frequently request comprehensive and current information regarding the application process for admission. Participants expressed that a lack of detail or obsolete information might have a detrimental influence on their perspective and decision-making. Findings emphasise that the need for distributing accurate and reliable information in HE through clubs and societies remains crucial. Offering ostensibly concise representational information regarding the comparative characteristics of specific programmes and HEIs (Stevens and Shibanova *et al.* 2021: 220) allows prospective students to have choices about enrolment. This is essential for upholding integrity and enabling prospective students to make educated choices. Participants emphasised that certain clubs and societies distribute information that promote perspectives, interests, or groupings inside the clubs and societies, which might possibly exclude prospective students.

The findings also revealed that there are clubs and societies who sometimes distribute fraudulent information that creates a false perception or is deliberately misleading about the UoT, so harming its reputation. The participants also stated that one of the approaches used by clubs and societies to attract members is exaggerating the available opportunities. One of the challenges hindering the delivery of excellent information was the presence of confusing information. The findings indicated that unclear, ambiguous, or excessively complicated information posed challenges for prospective students in comprehending the offers or prerequisites of the courses they

intended to apply for. Additionally, high-quality information helps reduce ambiguity by clarifying the fundamental nature and attributes of concepts, thereby aiding individuals in understanding instructions, explanations, examples, and theories (Chaushi and Dika 2013: 3). The participants emphasised the need to obtain information from reliable sources, since information distributed by fellow clubs and societies may lack credibility due to their reliance on hearsay. They emphasised that to guarantee the distribution of accurate information, it is essential to receive it from a trustworthy source.

The participants also emphasised the significance of how information is distributed, such as through internet platforms, pamphlets, emails, and school visits. Participants pointed to several difficulties, including the ineffective utilisation of digital platforms and the abuse of these platforms, particularly social media. Social media also contributes to the distribution of inaccurate or misleading information, which highlights the importance for HEIs to address and correct such misinformation in their responses (Fulton 2021). The selection of methods for distribution is of paramount significance. Digital platforms, such as social media, do not possess a user-friendly interface and require constant updates. Printed documents should possess an aesthetically pleasing appearance and possess a user-friendly layout. While it is technically possible to do this task, there is a clear sign that the quality of this information is not effectively reaching the appropriate stakeholders. The chronological alignment of the distribution of information in relation to the decision-making process for prospective students, in this context the clubs and societies, were the main contributors. Participants indicated that information updates are being delayed. Relevant information was not supplied at critical decision-making times. Participants emphasised the need for prompt distribution of information. They emphasised the need for timely communication from clubs and organisations to students, particularly before application deadlines or during orientation periods.

Other participants noted that a high degree of conjunction and involvement with prospective students is crucial to provide quality information. They stated that the absence of interactive sessions hinders some prospective students in obtaining quality information. Scant social media presence, minimal engagement, and the quality of information were highlighted in the clubs' and societies' Facebook pages where some

posts were of poor quality. Utilising interactive techniques like live chats, webinars, and social media engagements may effectively engage prospective students and foster their comprehension and interest (Goodman 2021). However, the absence of reliable information poses challenges for prospective students. The importance of having access to and being able to utilise resources for the creation and distribution of information was emphasised as a crucial factor. Participants emphasised the lack of skills to oversee the distribution of information inside clubs and societies. Effective information delivery requires enough resources, including financial and human resources. The required resources are mainly human resources capable of distributing high-quality information (Miranda *et al.* 2021: 12). This also relates to the training required for distributing information. Participants emphasised that investing in quality information and qualified individuals at the UoT may greatly enhance the quality of distributed information. Clubs and societies have recognised this gap and the need to address it.

7.5 ADDRESSING QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE QUALITY OF INFORMATION DISTRIBUTED BY CLUBS AND SOCIETIES? (PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTION)

The participants in this study believed that quality information in HE is achieved through adherence to established norms, standard practices, and the utilisation of systems and policies. However, there is a lack of policies governing the distribution of quality information by clubs and societies, which has created vulnerabilities. The Evaluation of the Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act from 2008 to 2016, as reported by the DHET in 2018, identifies many challenges encountered in the execution of policies inside institutions. Although opinions varied on the importance of quality in the information distributed, there was agreement that quality information is primarily focused on satisfying the requirements and satisfaction of prospective students and other stakeholders, as well as assuring its suitability for the intended purpose. Consistently striving for high-quality information for distribution is essential for ensuring that clubs and societies fulfil their intended purpose. The participants emphasised many aspects that impact the provision of high-quality information to prospective students. The findings emphasised the importance of clubs and societies providing high-quality information. The accuracy, reliability,

completeness, and timeliness of this information provide prospective students a chance to access high-quality information. The study revealed that poorly informed decisions and potential dissatisfaction were attributed to insufficiently generated information, which has the possibility to mislead prospective students. Good quality information delivered in the appropriate context at the right time informs potential possibilities and challenges (Mai 2013: 677). Reinforcing that logic, the capability of clubs and societies to provide high quality information is a significant factor that affects the educational paths and decisions of prospective students. Research indicates that clubs and societies providing thorough information about the admissions practice and the available educational programmes plays a crucial role in bridging the information gaps in HE.

The findings suggested that clubs and societies have implemented effective strategies to distribute high-quality information. They primarily use online platforms such as social media, as well as conduct annual campaigns at the HEI gates and visit high schools (Ma *et al.* 2022: 2). Nevertheless, findings demonstrate that there is a lack of standardised frameworks to guide clubs and societies in distributing information. The findings indicate that they play a crucial role in distributing information, therefore highlighting the need to establish frameworks for information distribution to ensure accuracy, integrity, consistency, completeness, validity, timeless and accessibility. Research indicates that insufficient information can lead to clubs and societies distributing low-quality information, thereby misleading prospective students in their decision-making process. Unfortunately, there is a lack of established procedures to address the misconduct of members in clubs and societies due to the absence of regulations to govern this course of action (Dlamini 2017: 20). Additionally, the findings emphasised that clubs and societies have additional obstacles in terms of the allocation of resources for distributing information.

7.6 SUMMARY

This chapter meticulously focused on the comprehensive analysis, in-depth discussion, and rigorous interpretation of the qualitative findings derived from this study. These empirical results were generated from rich qualitative data systematically collected through semi-structured individual interviews and two focused group

discussions. Participants, purposively selected from a cohort of 46 chairpersons and secretaries representing various clubs and societies at a University of Technology (UoT) in KwaZulu-Natal, provided invaluable insights into information quality. The analysis specifically aimed to elucidate the dynamics of high-quality information distribution within HEIs in the KZN region, aligning with the study's central objectives. Through rigorous thematic analysis, information obtained from interviews and discussions was systematically synthesized with the available extant literature and the theoretical frameworks established in Chapter 4. This process allowed for the robust elucidation and substantiation of the study's conclusions, revealing nuanced understandings of how information quality is perceived, achieved, and impacted in this unique context. Beyond presenting findings, this chapter offered profound theoretical and practical knowledge that is anticipated to significantly influence future research directions and institutional strategies in this critical area. The ensuing chapter will present the overarching conclusions of this research, provide actionable recommendations, and outline avenues for future investigation.

CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY, SYNTHESIS, PROPOSED FRAMEWORK, RECOMMENDATION AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This pivotal chapter draws the research to its conclusion by systematically consolidating the empirical findings and demonstrating their direct alignment with the study's overarching aims, specific objectives, and guiding research questions. It commences with a concise overview of the principal results derived from the preceding empirical chapters, followed by an integrated synthesis. This synthesis offers a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how information quality is perceived, managed, and impacted within the unique operational context of clubs and societies at a South African University of Technology.

A significant outcome of this research is the proposition of a novel framework. This framework is meticulously designed to provide actionable guidance for both student organizations and institutional stakeholders, empowering them to systematically strengthen the credibility, effectiveness, and overall quality of the information they distribute to prospective students. Following this, the chapter advances a set of evidence-based recommendations, meticulously derived from the study's findings and aligned with its theoretical underpinnings. The chapter culminates by rigorously delineating the study's scholarly, methodological, and practical contributions to the field. Finally, it offers a critical reflection on the enduring significance of this research and outlines its broader implications for professional practice and future academic inquiry within higher education.

8.2 SUMMARY AND SYNTHESIS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

High-quality information in HE is essential, particularly information that is distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students. Findings in this study highlighted instances of poor-quality information being distributed which resulted in strikes and disruptions to academic activities in HE. Corroborating that notion, a study conducted by Wickens *et al.* (2017: 46) reveals a noteworthy finding, that 68% of HE students

reported encountering difficulties with the information distributed by their peers, citing poor quality as the primary issue. Hence this study was carried out to evaluate the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies in HE. An extensive examination was conducted to analyse the interactions and the tripartite relationship between the HEI, prospective students, and clubs and societies. The focus was on evaluating the quality of information that is distributed and the methods used for distribution to prospective students.

The findings revealed several interconnected subjects and ideal techniques for distributing high-quality information. These findings highlight the need for distribution of high-quality information so that prospective students can apply on time and with appropriate information to gain entrance to higher education. Prospective students depend on clubs and societies, as HEIs lack enough employees to meet their needs (Dlamini 2017: 20). This influences their decision-making and encourages their participation in the HEI. The findings also indicate that information must be unambiguous, precise, and relevant for prospective students. Using widely utilised resources such as social media, direct contacts at the HEI gates, and high school visits is critical to ensure accessibility. This includes the clubs and societies' rapid provision of quality information and frequent updates to prospective students. Credibility and trustworthiness are established by relying on information from reliable and authoritative sources, such as official club members as well as BEC members which helps to foster confidence. Legitimacy is enhanced by genuine testimonies and practical ideas shared by members. Adapting communication to cater to the varied backgrounds and interests of prospective students promotes a feeling of belonging and significance. Inclusive policies guarantee that every prospective student is assisted and has quality information that will assist them in applying to enrol at the HEI. Input mechanisms involve the collection and utilisation of input from prospective students to guarantee ongoing development. Feedback plays a crucial role in identifying areas of improvement, fine-tuning messages, and adjusting communication tactics to effectively cater to the requirements of students.

The principle of PDCA ensures continuous improvement in the distribution of high-quality information. HEIs have utilised the concept as a tool for enhancing the quality of learning outcomes (Amalia *et al.* 2023: 43). The communication strategy, its

implementation, and an assessment of its efficacy based on input from end users (in this case, prospective students) are all included in this process, thereafter, making modifications in accordance with the end users' observations. Subsequently, OIT concentrates on the systematic processing and interpretation of the data to reduce uncertainty. Enacting (gathering pertinent information), selecting (selecting useful sources for distributing high-quality information), retaining (retaining information), and sensemaking (interpreting feedback) are the essential phases that are addressed by the important choice to incorporate both theories. Clubs and societies can distribute clear, consistent, and accurate information with ease thanks to these two notions.

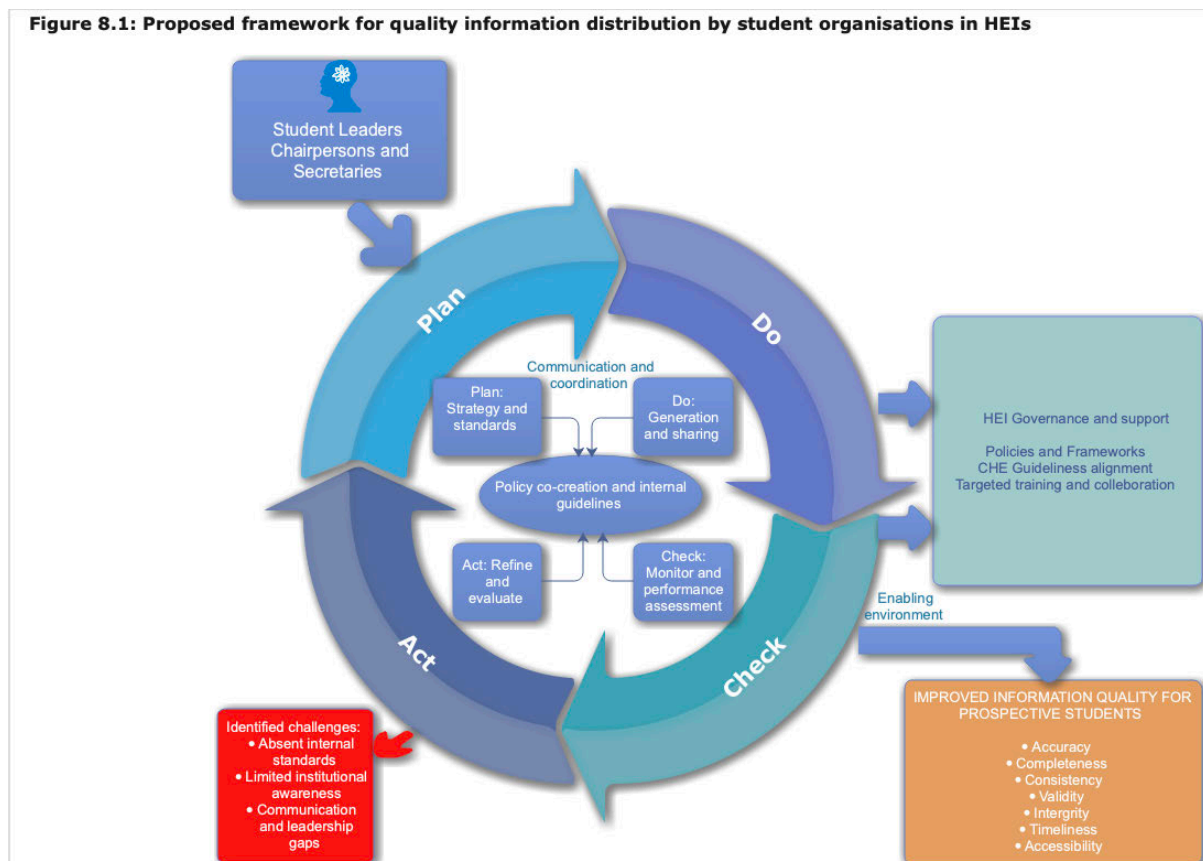
In-person interaction allows for engaging and compelling conversations that can have a lasting influence on prospective students. However, the findings highlighted issues pertaining to the interactions since there have been many issues. The prevalent issues identified are associated with structuring and managing activities, limited area of impact, and the need for highly qualified individuals to distribute high quality information. Another type of problem involves ensuring the consistency and standardisation of the information that is being distributed. Additional evidence suggests that the efficacy of information distributed by clubs and societies can be significantly enhanced through meticulous planning, diligent monitoring, and evaluation of communication sources. This can be achieved by fostering trust between HEIs and clubs and societies, as well as obtaining high-quality information for distribution. Frameworks like PDCA and OIT provide systematic approaches for managing and improving the distribution of information procedures. While face-to-face interactions remain important for sharing reliable information, integrating them with digital platforms ensures a broader reach and greater ease of access. To guarantee the effective engagement of prospective students, it is important to have a dynamic and responsive approach that is informed by feedback and continuous growth when applying to study at HEIs.

8.3 PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR THE DISTRIBUTION OF QUALITY INFORMATION

The findings revealed deficiencies in the distribution of accurate information by clubs and societies, indicating the necessity to develop a framework for the provision of high-

quality information. The objective of this framework presented in Figure 8.1 is to outline the necessary processes for distributing high-quality information and enabling clubs and societies to acquire quality information for distribution to prospective students.

The figure below illustrates the proposed framework for quality information distribution.



Source: Author

8.3.1 Analysis of the Proposed Framework for Quality Information Distribution

The proposed framework (Figure 8.1) offers a structured and comprehensive approach to enhance the distribution of high-quality information by student organizations to prospective students within a UoT setting. This framework is meticulously developed by integrating the study's empirical findings, critical information quality characteristics, the iterative principles of the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle, and the communication insights from OIT, thereby ensuring its practical utility and theoretical grounding.

The framework commences with **Phase 1: Plan (strategy and standards)**, emphasizing the foundational importance of strategic planning and coordination in information distribution. This phase, primarily driven by student leaders (chairpersons and secretaries), necessitates a proactive approach to defining what constitutes quality information. Crucially, this planning must be undertaken collaboratively between student organizations and the HEI. Collaboration, understood as the combined endeavour of diverse individuals to achieve a defined and jointly determined goal, is pivotal. It provides an opportunity for student organizations to not only become acquainted with established quality dimensions, such as accuracy, integrity, consistency, completeness, validity, timeliness, and accessibility, but also to co-create an overarching information distribution policy. As Makola (2021: 15) asserts, robust policies are fundamental in HEIs for defining expectations, ensuring institutional integrity, promoting consistency and efficiency, managing risks, and guaranteeing compliance. Thus, policy co-creation becomes a mechanism to address the *identified challenge of absent internal information standards* within student groups and ensure alignment with HEI governance. From an OIT perspective, this collaborative planning phase reduces information equivocality by establishing shared meanings and expectations regarding quality.

Phase 2: Do (create and distribute / monitor and evaluate) follows, involving the active creation and distribution of information, alongside an initial phase of monitoring and evaluation. Student leaders are responsible for generating and sharing content across various platforms, including social media (e.g., Facebook), which, while offering novel and stimulating avenues for interaction and collaboration (as highlighted by the study's findings), also presents risks if inappropriately managed. This underscores the *identified challenge of communication and leadership gaps* and the imperative for structured training. The framework, therefore, posits that proactive training for student organizations in effective information distribution and quality control is essential, a critical need strongly emphasized by the study's findings regarding the absence of such training. From a PDCA perspective, this 'Do' phase is where the planned policies and strategies are put into action.

The framework's **Phase 3: Check (monitor and evaluate)** is an ongoing, systematic process. Monitoring, in this context, refers to the continuous tracking of information

distribution activities and progression over time, while evaluation assesses the effectiveness of implementation and identifies discrepancies between planned and actual outcomes. This directly addresses the *identified challenge of limited institutional awareness* by integrating HEI oversight. The findings of this study, alongside Ngcobo (2023: 56), highlight the necessity of embedding monitoring and evaluation within student organizations' practices to maintain high-quality information and enable informed judgments on impact. A critical component of this 'Check' phase involves systematically assessing the experiences and perceptions of prospective students who receive the information, utilizing tools such as questionnaires. This ensures that the HEI proactively verifies whether prospective students are receiving relevant, accurate, and empowering information, thereby closing the feedback loop on quality dimensions. OIT is particularly relevant here, as monitoring feedback helps in reducing equivocality and refining communication strategies.

Finally, **Phase 4: Act (refine and evaluate)** completes the iterative cycle. Based on the insights gleaned from continuous monitoring and evaluation, this phase involves refining existing policies, adjusting training programs, and implementing corrective actions to systematically enhance information quality. This iterative process, central to the PDCA philosophy, ensures continuous improvement and responsiveness to both student needs and evolving institutional requirements, leading to *Improved Information Quality for Prospective Students* across all identified dimensions. The overarching **Governance and Support** from HEI policies, CHE guidelines, and targeted training and collaboration mechanisms (Figure 8.1, right panel) provides the essential enabling environment for this continuous cycle to thrive.

8.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

8.4.1 Recommendations for clubs and societies

There are several strategies that might enhance the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies. The research findings and proposed framework offer a multitude of suggestions to enhance the quality of information distributed. It is essential for clubs and societies to prioritise the accuracy and relevance of the information that they distribute to ensure it is of good quality. The findings highlighted that the sources of information and the ability to distribute this information remains an issue. To improve

the efficiency of distributing this information on Facebook for prospective students, it is crucial to consider some strategic recommendations. The lucidity and pertinence of the information can be ensured by evaluating the posts. Posts should be concise, engaging, and tailored to the interests and needs of information by prospective students. This involves distributing information on the benefits of enrolling at the HEI.

Moreover, it is important to authenticate that all content is up-to-date and accurately reflects the club's actions and aspirations to maintain confidence (Deng and Chau 2021: 960). To ensure effective in-person contacts, it is important to provide comprehensive training to representatives, equipping them with substantial information, a high degree of excitement, and a welcoming attitude. These representatives must possess the requisite expertise and competencies to provide personalised guidance and address specific queries from prospective students. Regular and timely distribution of information, particularly during critical periods such as application deadlines and orientation weeks, is crucial for maintaining student engagement and ensuring that they receive pertinent information when it is most needed. It is recommended to include feedback mechanisms, such as surveys and direct feedback forms, to get input from prospective students about the clarity and use of the provided information. The input supplied should be carefully analysed and utilised to improve communication strategies, ensuring continuous improvement and flexibility to meet student needs. Integrating testimonials and real-world observations from current members and alumni would help to enhance the genuineness and relevance of the content.

Furthermore, it is important for clubs and societies to promote inclusivity by tailoring their communication to accommodate the many backgrounds and interests of prospective students including students with disabilities, thereby fostering a sense of welcome and importance. Maintaining a collection of up-to-date information and best practices will ensure the consistency and reliability of information distribution. By following these recommendations, clubs and societies may significantly improve the efficiency of their information distribution, therefore enhancing prospective students' ability to make informed decisions and encouraging more engagement and participation in HEI activities.

8.4.2 Recommendations for the HEIs

To ensure the widespread distribution of precise and trustworthy information from clubs and societies to prospective students, the HEI should employ a variety of strategies. It is crucial to establish clear and specific guidelines and standards for the creation and distribution of information. These regulations should include criteria for accuracy, relevance, and thoroughness to ensure that the content provided is reliable and aligned with the institution's beliefs (Dlamini 2017: 20). Moreover, it would be beneficial to provide training and resources to the clubs and societies, specifically targeting effective information distribution strategies. This may entail providing instruction on creating persuasive and valuable content effectively in high school visits, at the university gates, and on social media platforms (especially Facebook), and engaging with prospective students in a refined and welcoming manner. HE visits entail hosting representatives from HEI at a high school for presentations or discussions with students, parents, and the broader community about the courses available as well as the application process. These visits are a crucial component of the HE exploration process. They provide students with the opportunity to collect information, engage with representatives, and make educated judgements on their educational selections. School visits can assist prospective students in navigating the intricate and often intimidating HE application process.

Fostering collaboration and coordination across clubs and societies as well as with the institution might ensure comprehensive distribution of information through the abovementioned channels. Creating a centralised platform or portal that offers prospective students detailed information about clubs and societies that are recognised by the institution with relevant contact information, will be more secure and will streamline the process and improve students' ability to find the required information. At first, HEIs should provide training and tools to clubs and societies regarding effective communication on different platforms. This training can cover the most efficient strategies for presentation skills during high school visits and at the HE gates, creating engaging content on Facebook, utilising different types of posts (such as text, photos and videos), and understanding Facebook's algorithms to maximise reach and engagement.

HEIs must effectively distribute information far ahead of significant dates, such as application deadlines, event registrations, and orientation sessions and share this information with clubs and societies to make sure that they also distribute it to prospective students. Regular updates ensure that prospective students are kept informed and engaged, ensuring that they receive timely and relevant information. To enhance credibility and authenticity, HEIs should support clubs and societies in the distribution of quality information. Moreover, it is imperative that any provided content is both correct and up to date on the HEI website and on social media pages which assists clubs and societies to have access to this information. HEIs may utilise Facebook's advertising tools to selectively target groups, ensuring that advertisements reach relevant prospective students based on their interests and backgrounds. Furthermore, HEIs have the option to employ Facebook's analytics tools to monitor and evaluate engagement metrics such as likes, shares, comments, and click-through rates. This data is crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of posts and improving future content initiatives. Promoting inclusion should be an essential element of all types of communication. HEIs should offer direction to clubs and organisations on creating inclusive and inviting content that correctly represents the diverse student population. By fostering an inclusive and heterogeneous online environment, prospective students from varied backgrounds may perceive themselves as essential participants in the community. Continuous feedback facilitates the enhancement of the content and methodology, ensuring that the information remains relevant and impactful. By implementing these recommendations, HEIs may ensure that their clubs and societies effectively utilise Facebook to provide high-quality information, therefore attracting and engaging prospective students.

8.4.3 Recommendations for future studies

This study evaluated the varying perspectives of clubs and societies in HEIs in KZN regarding the concept of "quality of information distributed". It aimed to evaluate different types of information as the epitome of quality, determine the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies, and explore the factors that influence the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies. The study also analysed the current literature on the notion of ensuring the quality of information in HEIs. The study's findings are limited by the constraints of time spent collecting and analysing

qualitative data in the field. However, these findings offer an opportunity to conduct more extensive longitudinal studies using larger data sets. This would allow for a more in-depth examination and confirmation of the participants' perceptions regarding the quality of information in HEIs.

Moreover, this research primarily prioritised the perspective of chairpersons and secretaries of the different clubs and societies inside the chosen HEI. Future research might be enhanced by investigating the perspectives of other stakeholders, including first-year students and the wider community. Further research in this field will aid in validating the concepts proposed here and establishing definitive or more widely applicable results. Given the limited literature on the tripartite interactions between institutions, clubs, and societies, it is now the responsibility of the research community to conduct further investigations in this field and test the ideas explored in this preliminary study to potentially develop a grounded theory model. With the growing emphasis on accountability and transformative change in HE, the research community has a responsibility to provide guidance to practitioners on how to improve and strengthen the quality of information that is distributed to prospective students in HEIs (Sokhela and Murhula 2022: 261). By doing this, HEIs, clubs and societies, and their respective communities will be able to implement the necessary level of change that is urgently required and desired to enhance the quality of information that is distributed to prospective students in HE.

The results of this study strongly indicate that conducting future studies involving a larger population of HEIs in and outside of KZN could offer additional evidence regarding the difficulties in providing quality information to prospective students. These studies could also shed light on the effectiveness and success stories of quality information practices in the HES. Case studies could be conducted on HEIs' nationally and internationally to examine how they handle the distribution and assurance of quality information distribution. These studies could potentially lead to the development of frameworks for ensuring quality information in HEIs. Additionally qualitative research could be undertaken to establish grounded theories regarding the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies in the HEIs. This research would aim to validate certain good QA practices that may be unconsciously adopted by some of the top-ranked HEIs in the country. Additional future quantitative studies

can be conducted to evaluate hypothesised ideas about the distribution and guarantee of quality information across the HEIs in the country.

8.5 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The study makes significant contributions to theory, method, and practice. From a theoretical perspective, it extends the understanding of quality information within HEIs by situating it in the context of clubs and societies. It encompasses the importance of aligning the concepts of quality information with the standards and recommendations set by the Council of Higher Education (CHE) and other legal frameworks in the HES. In doing so, the study strengthens theoretical perspectives on how information quality dimensions such as accuracy, consistency, completeness, and accessibility operate within informal institutional structures that play a crucial role in influencing prospective students' decisions and institutional reputation. From a methodological standpoint, this study contributes by providing a framework for evaluating the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies. It proposes measurable indicators and assessment criteria that can be used to examine the effectiveness of information distribution practices within higher education institutions.

This methodological approach can be replicated or adapted in future research, offering a foundation for comparative studies and institutional evaluations focused on quality of information shared in the HE environment. In terms of its practical contributions, the study offers actionable recommendations for HEIs and clubs and societies. It underscores the importance of collaboration between HEIs together with clubs and societies to ensure that the information distributed to prospective students is of high quality and aligned with institutional standards. Moreover, it highlights the need for effective information assurance and distribution procedures, clearly communicated and monitored across all student organizations. The study also advocates for HEIs to develop strategies that address barriers to quality information distribution and to promote a culture of compliance, accountability, and consumers improvement within clubs and societies.

8.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study set out to generate knowledge on how the clubs and societies in the selected HEI conceptualised and perceived the concept of quality of information distributed by clubs and societies. There are two major limitations regarding the generalisation of the results presented here. Firstly, the study was limited to one selected HEI located in KZN with a few specific clubs and societies, and secondly, the study did not include first-year students in the HEI. Regarding the first limitation, the sample of clubs' and societies' secretaries and chairpersons can be regarded as representative of a group beyond the geographical limits implied by the location of the HEIs, because the characteristics of these roles are similar in other HEIs. Regarding the second limitation, it is likely that the results reported here would not have been improved if the sample included ordinary students or first year students in the HEI. Having said this, it awaits further studies to determine how the findings on the issues of quality information may differ from a student perspective, especially first year students.

8.7 CONCLUSION OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter meticulously presented the overarching conclusions and strategic recommendations derived from the comprehensive qualitative analysis of the data. The empirical evidence, gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with chairpersons and secretaries from various clubs and societies at a South African University of Technology, provided critical insights into information quality. In direct alignment with the study's objectives and research questions, the findings unequivocally underscore the imperative for intensified collaboration between the UoT and its student organizations to systematically enhance the quality of distributed information. This necessitates the institutional development of robust policies and tailored quality assurance frameworks, ensuring strict adherence to both departmental standards and the comprehensive guidelines set forth by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the Higher Education Quality Council on the provision of quality information in HE. This research rigorously assessed the diverse perspectives of clubs and societies concerning the attributes of quality information they distribute to prospective students in HE. The study meticulously investigated the types of information distributed, explored the factors influencing its quality, and ultimately

sought to determine the overall quality based on key dimensions: correctness, integrity, consistency, completeness, validity, timeliness, and accessibility. Furthermore, the inquiry elucidated critical elements impacting the delivery of high-quality information by these HEIs and identified significant aspects that could substantially improve and expand the supply of information by student organizations within the HE context.

Employing a qualitative methodology and a case study approach, this investigation engaged 46 participants from twelve clubs and societies at the specified UoT. Data were systematically collected via in-depth individual interviews, focus group discussions, and analysis of social media platforms. Rigorous measures were implemented to safeguard participant identity, utilizing pseudonyms for the HEI and referring to individuals as 'Participant 1, 2, etc.' and focus group participants as 'FG1, FG2, etc.' Social media data was presented through illustrative screenshots. Transcribed interview and focus group data were subjected to inductive thematic analysis using NVivo 15 software, structured around the conceptual themes established in Chapter 6. Building upon these foundations, this chapter culminates in the presentation of a novel framework for the distribution of quality information, accompanied by a comprehensive summary and synthesis of the study's findings. The profound implications of these findings for the provision of quality information by clubs and societies in HEs are discussed, with particular emphasis on the context of the studied HEI. Ultimately, this research offers significant scholarly, methodological, and practical contributions, illuminating critical pathways for enhancing information quality and informing future academic inquiry in this vital domain.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethics clearance



Institutional Research Ethics Committee
Research and Postgraduate Support Directorate
2nd Floor, Benven Court
Gate 1, Steve Biko Campus
Durban University of Technology
P.O. Box 1334, Durban, South Africa, 4001
Tel: 031 373 2375
Email: lr@ihsad@dut.ac.za
https://www.dut.ac.za/research/institutional_research_ethics
www.dut.ac.za

26 February 2025

Ms L P Ngcobo
1250 Willowfontein
Pietermaritzburg
3201

Dear Ms Ngcobo

Evaluating the quality of information distributed by Clubs and Societies to prospective students at a South African University of Technology
Ethics Clearance Number: IREC 331/24

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 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

Professor P Mashau
Chairperson: DUT-IREC

Appendix B: Gatekeeper permission



09 February 2025

Ms L P Ngcobo
c/o Department of Finance and Information Management
Faculty of Accounting and Informatics
Durban University of Technology

Dear Ms Ngcobo

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 "Evaluating the quality of information distributed by Clubs and Societies to prospective students at a South African University of Technology" 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

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Appendix C: Information letter and consent form



LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of the Research Study: Evaluating the quality of information distributed by Clubs and Societies to prospective students at a South African university of technology.

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: Miss Lungile Ngcobo

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s: Supervisor: Dr T Ncube

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: The study aims to establish the quality of information distributed by Clubs and Societies to prospective students. The evaluation of quality will be foregrounded on the quality dimensions of accuracy, integrity, consistency, completeness, validity, timeless and accessibility.

Outline of the Procedures: If you choose to take participate in this study you will be required to participate in individual semi-structured interview that will take place at DUT Riverside Campus. All data collected will be used for the purpose of this study. The interview should take approximately 30 - 45 minutes to complete and your participation in this research project is completely voluntary.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: There are no known risks to the participating in this study.

Explain to the participant the reasons he/she may be withdraw from the Study: Should you no longer wish to participate; you can withdraw yourself from this study by informing the researcher. You can be fully assured that there will be no negative effects.

Benefits: (A description of any benefits to the participant or others which may reasonably be expected from the research—both during and after the research. Detail the nature of the benefits, if any.)

Remuneration: Please note that there are no monetary gain or other type of remuneration for your participation in this study

Costs of the Study: There will no costs for the participating in this study.

Confidentiality: Your responses will remain confidential and anonymous; pseudonyms will be used when presenting the findings. No one other than the researcher will know your individual answers to this questionnaire.

Results: The study will be made available to the participants upon completion.

Research-related Injury: there are no anticipated injuries expected because of this study.

Storage of all electronic and hard copies including tape recordings The recordings will be done through Microsoft Teams, the researcher and supervisor will have access to the recordings. They will be stored google cloud for five years.

Persons to contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries: You may raise any concerns you might have, by contacting my main Supervisor Dr T Ncube or Co – Supervisor Dr V Thuraisingham. Institutional Research Ethics Administrator on 031 373 2375. Complaints can be reported to the Acting Director: Research and Postgraduate Support on researchdirector@dut.ac.za

General:

A copy of the information letter should be issued to participants. The information letter and consent form must be translated and provided in the primary spoken language of the research population e.g. isiZulu.



CONSENT

Full Title of the Study: Evaluating the quality of information distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students at a South African university of technology.

Names of Researcher/s: Lungile Ngcobo

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, Lungile Ngcobo 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 Thumbprint	Date	Time	Signature / Right

I, _____ (name of researcher) 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

Please note the following:

Research details must be provided in a clear, simple and culturally appropriate manner and prospective participants should be helped to arrive at an informed decision by use of appropriate language (grade 10 level- use Flesch Reading Ease Scores on Microsoft Word), selecting of a non-threatening environment for interaction and the availability of peer counselling (Department of Health, 2004).

If the potential participant is unable to read/illiterate, then a right thumb print is required and an impartial witness, who is literate and knows the participant e.g. parent, sibling, friend, pastor, etc. should verify in writing, duly signed that informed verbal consent was obtained (Department of Health, 2004).

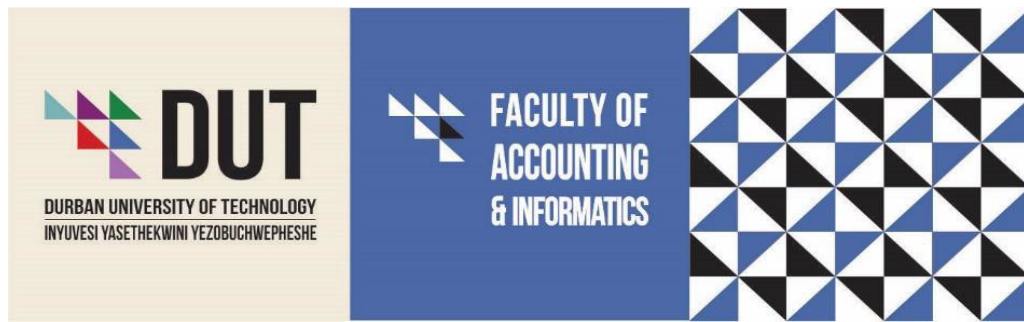
If anyone makes a mistake completing this document e.g. a wrong date or spelling mistake, a new document has to be completed. The incomplete original document has to be kept in the participant's file and not thrown away, and copies thereof must be issued to the participant.

References:

Department of Health: 2004. *Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Structures and Processes*
<http://www.doh.gov.za/docs/factsheets/guidelines/ethnics/>

Department of Health. 2006. *South African Good Clinical Practice Guidelines*. 2nd Ed.
Available at: http://www.nhrec.org.za/?page_id=14

Appendix D: Interview schedule



Evaluating the quality of information distributed by Clubs and Societies to prospective students at a South African University of Technology.

Semi-structured interview schedule for Clubs and Societies members at the Durban University of Technology responsible for the distribution of information to prospective students.

A. Biographical information

1. Faculty:
2. Department:
3. Programme:
4. Are you a political, religious or social club and society member?.....

B. Quality of information distributed by clubs and societies to prospective students.

5. Have you assisted any prospective student with information
6. In your view, is the information that you distribute to prospective students accurate and reliable?
7. Please, mention if the information you distribute to prospective students is consistent.
8. Please, mention how you ensure that you distribute quality information to prospective students regarding the requirements for your programme/s.
9. How influential is the information that you distribute to prospective students?
10. Have you encountered poor quality information distributed to prospective students?
11. What were the consequences of the distribution of information that lacks quality?

C. Types of information distributed by clubs and societies.

- 12 What types of information do you distribute to prospective students?
- 13 Do you understand the specifics of the information that you distribute to prospective students?
- 14 Do you compare the information that you distribute with the university to ensure it is high quality?
- 15 In your opinion, is the information you distribute benefit you're the university or your club's interest?
- 16 Which sources do you use to distribute information to prospective students?
- 17 Why do you use these information sources?

Probe: Please elaborate

- 18 In your view do you think that the sources to distribute the information used are effective?
- 19 Do you think the information you distribute through these sources represents the interests of the university?
- 20 Anything you would like to add regarding the sources you use to distribute information to prospective students?

D. Factors influencing the quality of information distributed by clubs and Societies.

- 21 Do you think students are skilled to distribute information effectively to prospective students?

Probe: please elaborate

- 22 Have you or any student received proper training to distribute information to prospective students?
- 23 What additional support can be offered to assist in increasing the quality of information distributed by university students?
- 24 In your opinion, what is the current state of the quality of information distributed by university students to prospective students?
- 25 Are there any policies in place for the distribution of quality information?
- 26 Do you adhere to the policies?

E. Suggested strategies for improving quality information distribution to prospective students.

- 27 In your opinion, does the quality of information distributed to students impact decisions made by prospective students?
- 28 In your opinion, does the quality of information distributed by Clubs and Societies need improvements for prospective students? If yes, please elaborate on your answer.
- 29 Is there anything more you would like to add?

Appendix E: Editing certificate

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EDITING CERTIFICATE

Re: Lungile Pretty Ngcobo

DUT doctoral thesis: Evaluating the Quality of Information Distributed by Clubs and Societies to Prospective Students at a Higher Education Institution in KwaZulu-Natal

I confirm that I have edited this thesis and the references for clarity and language. I returned the document to the author with track changes so correct implementation of the changes and clarifications requested in the text and references is the responsibility of the author. The intellectual content is the responsibility of the author and supervisors. I am a freelance editor specialising in proofreading and editing academic documents. My original tertiary degree which I obtained at the University of Cape Town was a B.A. with English as a major and I went on to complete an H.D.E. (P.G.) Sec. with English as my teaching subject. I was a part-time lecturer in the Department of Homoeopathy at the Durban University of Technology for 13 years and supervised many master's degree dissertations during that period.

Dr Richard Steele
31 May 2025
per email

Appendix F: Turnitin report

Ngcobo-EvaluatingTIN.docx

ORIGINALITY REPORT

9%	6%	3%	3%
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