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Declaration:

I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the Bachelor of Commerce Honours in Management degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.

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Abstract

Social media is increasingly playing an important role in the everyday lives of young and old people alike. Consumers today turn to online sources more and more to help them make decisions. This has implications for private higher learning institutions (HLI) as the accelerated growth of the internet has led to increased social media marketing competition among recruiters.

Having conducted a broad literature review, it was noted that the research conducted on this topic predominantly focuses on public higher learning institutions in countries outside of Africa. The purpose of this study was to determine how social media marketing impacts the decision making process of students choosing to attend private HLI institutions in South Africa. More specifically, data was collected from students attending private HLI in Pretoria by means of an emailed self-administered questionnaire. The sample was selected using non-probability sampling in the form of convenience sampling. This data collection method was chosen because of the difficulty in identifying pupils attending private HLIs who also use social media given the time implications of this research report.

The results of the proposed study show that social media marketing only plays a moderate role in student's decision making process. It features most as an information source, however only slightly influences student's decision-making when choosing a private HLI.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Contextualisation/Background

Nyangau and Bado (2012) state that the emergence of social media has significantly revolutionized the practice of communication in two key ways. First, it enhances the reach of communication, enabling individuals to send instant messaging to millions of people all over the world. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, social media (SM) facilitates a two-way communication channel between the sender and receiver. Or simply between receivers or “followers” outside the control of the original sender (Nyangau & Bado (2012).

With popular SM platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram, consumers are able to comment on their experiences with service providers like education institutions and share them with almost anyone in the world (Nyangau & Bado (2012). SM platforms make it very easy for marketers to reach their target audiences and allow them to do so in an inexpensive way. According to Lee (2013), these social media attributes serve as significant reasons for why companies are gravitating towards social media marketing in contrast to mass media marketing platforms comprising of televisions, newspapers, magazines and more.

Sudha and Sheena (2017) state that social media has had a dramatic effect on the consumer behaviour model that was developed by Engel, Kollat and Blackwell, which describes the traditional way of purchasing products and services. Due to SM, potential customers are now able to conduct an even deeper analysis of companies and portray their own experiences on social media for other users to see. This creates a type of viral marketing-effect which a lot of companies seek to exploit (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Private higher learning institutions (HLI) are no different. Understanding how social media marketing impacts the decision-making process of students helps marketers better position their social media marketing strategies. The proposed study seeks to explore this in a South African context.

1.1.1 Relevance of the research study

Nyangau and Bado (2012) assert that the recent emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn, and their popularity, especially among young people, has contributed to a growing interest from admissions officers in their use for marketing purposes. DiAna (2014) states that the millennial generation (those born after 1980), who are looking to enter college, have the ability to review a variety of information material when looking to choose which HLI to attend. This generation demands immediate information in a variety of platforms as suggested by a survey conducted by Masterson (2013) for The Chronicle of Higher Education and Salesforce. Masterson (2013) states that for members of the Digital Generation, who grow up connected online, the college experience is increasingly blurred between the experiences of real life and the social networks where they share these experiences. They may even start their college experience that way (DiAna, 2014). The proposed study is thus relevant as it seeks to help HLI marketers learn and understand how their SM marketing strategies impact young consumers as it may offer them leverage in acquiring new students.

Also important to note - The relevance of the proposed study lends itself to the fact that previous studies on this topic have had limitations, which have led to gaps in the existing knowledge base. The proposed study will add to the existing body of knowledge through overcoming some of these limitations. One being by: exploring a unique geographical location (private higher learning institutions in Pretoria).

Examples of geographical limitations can be seen in various academic literatures. Such as that of Dhyani (2017), who's research was limited to respondents from Finland while E.L Alexa, M Alexa, and Stoica (2012) were limited to Romania to conduct their studies on this topic. This study provides an opportunity to explore new data from a South African, private institution perspective, in so doing producing new quantitative information into the existing body of knowledge.

Another being, offering a better understanding of a specific segment of a population (students attending private HLI in Pretoria as opposed to public). Upon conducting a broad review of academic literature, it was noted that many studies on this topic have

been based on public universities in South Africa. Such as that of Khan (2017) for example, who only focuses on the public sector of higher education. Not enough research has been conducted on private HLIs, which also contributes to the proposed studies' relevance.

Rationale:

The proposed study is conducted because it has industry relevance. Social media marketing campaigns have to constantly change as higher learning institutions continuously engage in two-way communications with their students. From the feedback they get, they can then make adaptations to their service offerings and re-market themselves accordingly to acquire more favourable market positioning. This study seeks to make use of Engel Kollat and Blackwell's decision-making theory to explore private HLI student's consumer behaviour from social media marketing platforms to generate new knowledge for recruitment and marketing personnel.

1.2 Research problem statement

According to Nyangau and Bado (2012), social media use by institutions of higher education is on the rise, yet literature on this topic or best practices specific to social media as a higher education marketing tool is limited. Especially in an African (private higher learning) context. Be that as it may, this information is very valuable to marketing and recruitment officials operating in this sector. Which requires that more research be conducted in this field. In summary, the above-mentioned limitations guide the researcher into identifying the following knowledge gaps in academic literature concerning this topic: limited access to certain locations, institutions, demographic groups, and research methods. Therefore, the proposed study seeks to explore the impact social media marketing has on the decision-making process of students that choose to attend private higher education institutions in Pretoria South Africa by using quantitative research methods.

1.3 Research purpose and research question

The purpose of the proposed study is to expand the knowledge base of private tertiary institutions' social media marketing personnel, recruitment, and admission officers, on the impact social media marketing has on the students that choose to attend their institutions. The purpose of this study is also to address some of the above-mentioned gaps. In so doing, adding to the existing body of knowledge in this particular industry.

Research Question

How has social media marketing impacted the decision-making process of students attending private higher learning institutions in Pretoria?

Secondary research questions

- To what extent do students use social media marketing platforms to make decisions about attending private higher learning institutions in Pretoria?
- What social media platforms do students use when they consider studying at private higher learning institutions in Pretoria?
- What type of information do students look for on social media marketing platforms before enrolling at private higher learning institutions in Pretoria?

Objectives

- The proposed study seeks to identify the various impacts social media marketing has on each stage of the decision-making process of students attending private higher learning institutions.
- To identify the extent to which students use social media marketing platforms to make decisions about attending private HLI in Pretoria.
- To identify what social media market platforms tertiary students are using to help them decide what private HLI they want to attend in Pretoria.
- To identify the type of information students look for on social media marketing platforms before enrolling at private HLI in Pretoria.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2. Conceptualisation:

Social media

According to Dollarhide (2019), social media is a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through the building of virtual networks and communities.

Consumer

Lee (2013) outlines that there is a distinction to be made between consumers and buyers. From a general perspective, consumers can be referred to as individuals who purchase or consume products and services. However, upon buyer and consumer comparison, there is a slight difference. Buyers are the people who are acting either as an ultimate, industrial, or institutional purchaser. While Consumers are individuals who purchase for ultimate use, which is more restrictive in meaning. Consumers are the end-users for whom the products or services are ultimately designed for (Lee, 2013). In the context of the proposed study, the consumers are the students attending private HLI in Pretoria, South Africa.

Higher learning institution

IGI Global (2020) asserts that higher education institutions can be defined as “a level of education that is provided by universities, vocational universities, community colleges, liberal arts colleges, institutes of technology and other collegiate-levels institutions, such as vocational schools, trade schools and career colleges, that award academic degrees or professional certifications”.

Recruitment

(Lexico, 2020), powered by the Oxford dictionary defines recruitment as the action of finding new people to join and organization or support a cause. In the context of higher education, recruitment personnel refer to those employees that work to acquire new students that will attend the academic institution.

Admission

Lexico (2020) defines admission as a process or fact of entering or being allowed to enter a place or organization.

Marketing

Lexico (2020) defines marketing as the action or business of promoting and selling products or services; including market research and advertising.

EKB model

Osei and Abenyin (2016) inform that Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell developed a consumer decision-making model that is also known as the EKB model. It describes consumers' decision process and how decisions are made when choosing among a list of alternative variables. This model will be further discussed in the theoretical foundation section of this research report.

Chapter 2.1 Private higher learning education in South Africa

The higher education (HE) environment is experiencing competition, not only in the public sector, but the private sector as well. Nukunah, Bezuidenhout and Furak (2019) source information from DHET (2013 ;2016) stating that private higher learning enrolments constituted a 59.9 percent increase from 2010 to 2015 at 124 private higher education providers. In comparison, 2015 only saw a 10.3 percent enrolment increase in the public sector at 26 universities. The private higher education growth rate in the private sector was considerably higher. The public sector still enjoys significantly larger enrolment figures however the private-provision market in south Africa is growing DHET (2013; 2016).

Some of the reasons for higher growth in private sector enrolments have to do with a lack of space (80, 000 applicants versus 11, 000 places in 2012 for the University of Johannesburg), which still is a problem today for many public HLI (Nukunah *et al.*, 2019). Nukunah *et al.*, (2019) further argues that, opinions on which HE sector is better is a very subjective question due to many different units of measurements, however a consensus is generally expected when academics argue that there is an increase in

competition in both the public and private sector due to the availability of social media marketing.

Chapter 2.2 Social Media as a marketing channel

2.2 Introduction

Fourie (2015) explains that the internet has significantly changed the lives of people, the way they work, the way they communicate and the way they live. A new kind of internet has come forward which is led by social media, online content and applications. In order to understand this new kind of internet, it is important to understand Web 2.0 (Fourie, 2015). This chapter starts with explaining Web 1.0 and the transformation to Web 2.0 along with the changes this brought about. After that, User-generated content, electronic word-of-mouth and social media marketing.

2.2.1 Web 2.0 Bringing new possibilities to the internet

Fourie (2015) states that the beginning of the Web was known as Web 1.0 which was characterised by static pages that were grouped together into websites. The content in these websites were hard to change as technical skills were needed to do so (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008). The Web then evolved from 1.0 to a new platform called Web 2.0.

According to Fourie (2015), the term Web 2.0 was the outcome of a brainstorming session at a conference in 2004 between MediaLive International and O'Reilly. Web 2.0 has been defined as a second generation web platform that places the user in control. In other words users can actively collaborate and share amongst each other (Fourie, 2015). The difference between the Web 2.0 platform and the rest of the web lies in two features, namely user-generated content and social media. These two features will further be examined in more detail.

2.2.2 User-generated content

Mendes-Filho and Tan (2009) state that user-generated content is information that transfers a key idea or thought. It can primarily be generated from two activities. The first is when content is created by a user and uploaded on the internet. For example,

a picture being taken by a university student that gets uploaded on their university's Facebook page. The second activity is the collaboration or communication that goes along with the uploaded content. For example, students making comments about the photo of the university that was uploaded on Facebook (Mendes-Filho & Tan, 2009).

Fourie (2015) sources information from Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011:276) to identify two types of user-generated content, which can either come from the consumer or the organisation:

- *Media generated content:* This type of content stems from marketers or organisations creating content for use on social media sites. For example, the public relations department at a Private HLI running a Twitter account on behalf of the institution and retweets four times a day.
- *Consumer-generated content:* This type of content is created by a consumer by means of a tweet, post or video. For example a student tweeting about the private HLI's new student recruitment campaign.

Consumer-generated content on social media sites in particular has become invaluable to millions of users as they look for authenticity and want to actively participate in the conversation, instead of just being on the receiving end of one way communication (Fourie, 2015).

Court, Elzinga, Mulder, and Vetvik (2009) argue that because communication has changed from one-way communication (marketers to consumers) to two-way communication (marketers to consumers and vice-versa), marketers need a more systematic way to satisfy consumer demand and manage electronic word-of-mouth. The downside of social media for companies is that they have to monitor it very closely, as it can yield positive or negative electronic word-of-mouth. As soon as something is posted, it is accessible to thousands of consumers as Fourie (2015) supports.

2.2.3 Electronic word-of-mouth

Word-of-mouth marketing still stands as one of the most powerful marketing tools available to a company, with twenty to fifty percent of all purchasing decisions resulting from it (Bughin, Doogan & Vetvik, 2010). It is said to be more than twice as effective as traditional marketing when it comes to customer acquisition and lasting results. Bughin *et al.* (2010) identify three types of word-of-mouth:

Experiential word-of-mouth: This type of word-of-mouth is used fifty to eighty percent of the time, which makes it the most used. It occurs as a result of direct experience with a product or service. It often stem from an experience that differs from what was expected (Bughin *et al.*, 2010). For example, a student takes a course and the university does not have enough study material for all the students which results in a negative experience.

Consequential word-of-mouth: This kind of word-of-mouth occurs as a result of a company's marketing campaigns. These campaigns either generate negative or positive word-of-mouth for a company (Bughin *et al.*, 2010). For example, a student is directly exposed to a marketing campaign that a private HLI launched to attract new students. This message can directly be transferred to friends, family and other students. This type of word-of-mouth is the most relevant to the proposed study.

Intentional word-of-mouth: This type of word-of-mouth occurs when companies use celebrity endorsements to generate positive word-of-mouth (Bughin *et al.*, 2010). For example, a private HLI gets a successful Springbok or Bafana Bafana athlete that is part of the alumni to market the institution's sport qualification.

Word-of-mouth marketing has been elevated exponentially with the rise of social media, as user-generated content provides customers with the opportunity to communicate their experiences with companies, company competitors, and thousands of other customers (Fourie, 2015). This electronic word-of-mouth is thus changing the landscape from one to one communication to one to many communications through product review posts, opinions voiced on social networks and even blogs that either praise or punish companies (Bughin *et al.*, 2010).

2.2.4 Social media marketing

Fourie (2015) uses Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) definition of social media, which is quoted as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content." The advent of social media created a new marketing channel which allows marketers to reach their target markets in a different way. This change in the marketplace will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

2.2.5 Change in the marketing landscape

Push Marketing: Traditionally, marketers used push marketing, which is the marketer distributing their marketing message to the customer (Packer, 2011:4). By doing this, they would try to position their products or services in such a way that their consumers would want to buy them. For example, filling television commercial slots with advertisement of their products and services. However, push marketing is very expensive and requires a lot of effort to connect with only a small number of potential customers (Packer, 2011:4).

Pull Marketing: With technological developments, particularly the internet, customers started to search for products and services online which is known as pull marketing. For example, a potential student searching for a private HLI on Google and the search engine coming up with the institution's website at the top of the search result. These search results will pull the potential student to the private HLI's website where they can explore courses offered by the institution (Packer, 2011:5).

2.2.6 Engagement marketing

With social media came a new kind of marketing, known as engagement marketing. This type of marketing requires companies to start an ongoing meaningful and productive conversation with their customers in the form of social media marketing (Packer, 2011:5). For example a private HLI uses Twitter to communicate with potential students. Social media marketing can be defined as positively influencing the target market towards a company, website, brand, product, service, or person by

making use of social media platforms (Fourie, 2015). Barker, Barker, Bormann and Neher (2013:3) emphasize three significant aspects relating to social media marketing:

- *Generating buzz:* This refers to the company generating an environment of excitement by using social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter etc.
- *Promotion through consumers:* Consumers themselves spread the message through social media platforms like Facebook and not the company itself.
- *Online conversations:* Through doing the above, companies encourage customers to start a conversation with one another, not with the company, as this form of marketing is no longer controlled by the company. In social media marketing, the company does not have control over what customers say and do, however it can have a positive contribution by building a trust relationship with customers.

According to Ramsunder (2011), how much social engagement consumers display, has a significant impact on marketing activities as marketers have to be more aware of the factors that affect the consumers' purchase decision. Marketers need to engage in online marketing strategies to influence consumers' purchasing decisions with the goal of acquiring loyal consumers (Ramsunder, 2011). Which leads to the next chapter being about the consumer decision making process.

Chapter 3 Consumer Decision-Making Process

3.1 Introduction

Stankevich (2017) states that the consumer behaviour topic has always been a popular one. This is because knowing how and why consumers act the way that they do, helps companies improve their marketing strategies. Thus, a challenge faced by all marketers today, is how to influence the purchase behaviour of consumers in favour of their products or services (Stankevich, 2017).

Stankevich (2017) further mentions that marketing has a major goal of reaching consumers at the moments that most influence their decisions. When consumers are open to influence. So-called “moments that matter”. For many years, the “moments that matter” have been thought of through the metaphor of a “funnel”. Consumers start with a variety of potential brands in mind (thick side of the funnel). Then marketing campaigns help direct consumers in certain decision directions, which reduces the number of brand options as the consumer moves through the funnel. In the end, they arrive with the one brand they chose to purchase (right end of the funnel as) as Stankevich (2017) outlines. Engel, Kollat and Blackwell’s (EKB) decision making model follows the same principle and is further elaborated upon in this chapter as the theoretical foundation of this research report. The role that social media marketing plays on Engel, Kollat and Blackwell’s decision making theory for students attending private HLI in Pretoria will be explored in this chapter.

3.2 Engel, Kollat & Blackwell’s decision-making theory

The seminal Engel, Kollat and Blackwell (EKB) consumer decision-making model of 1968 is one of the core theories of consumer behaviour. It is based upon prior work in educational philosophy by John Dewey (1910/1978) and proposes a sequential process of decision-making, consisting of: 1) problem recognition, 2) information search, 3) evaluation of alternatives, 4) purchase, and 5) post-purchase evaluation (Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1995). It portrays the purchase process as a series of discrete actions, typically caused by a conscious recognition of an unsatisfied need. Consequently, it conceptualises a solitary, rational decision-maker who systematically

goes through a fixed sequence of distinct stages when they make purchase decisions (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2014).

Some Authors have questioned the utility of the EKB model, and it has been subject to numerous revisions, reviews and extensions, However, the EKB model is still firmly embedded as a cornerstone of consumer decision-making and is not likely to be pushed aside anytime soon. Yet, advances in technology and participatory culture in social media for example compels us to once again scrutinise the EKB model under these new times (Ashman, Solomon and Wolny, 2015). The next section of the research paper discusses social media marketing's impact on the EKB decision making process as it pertains to students attending private higher learning institutions.

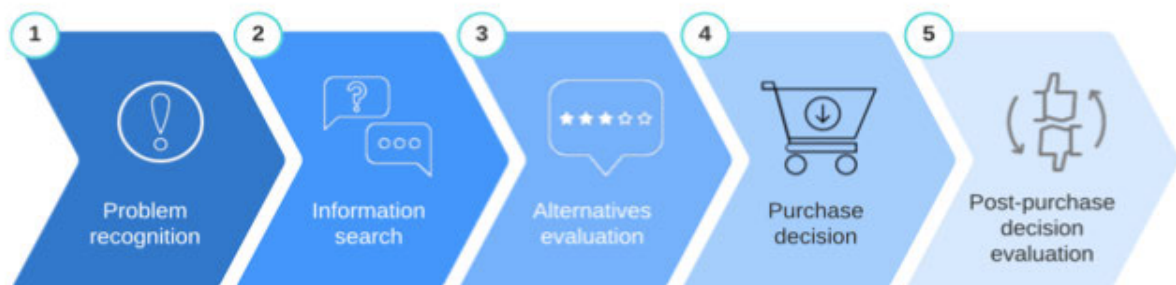


Figure 1: The five-stage consumer decision-making model

Stage 1 - Problem/Need recognition

The very first stage of the model is the need or problem recognition stage, when consumers realize they are void of something. Interestingly, marketers try to intentionally create an imbalance between consumer's present status and their preferred status as Stankevich (2017) suggests. This imbalance will create a need and make consumers want to buy a product or service. Stankevich (2017) further suggests that a need can occur immediately and can be very impulsive. This is called an internal stimulus. An external stimulus on the other hand is when an individual is affected by outside influences. Marketers create a need by using advertising, and sales promotions. When consumers become aware of an unfulfilled need that a product or service can cater to, marketers have created a need (Stankevich, 2017).

For marketers, it is important to determine when their target consumers develop these needs or wants to timely advertise to them (Stankevich, 2017). Marketers may also

strive to recognize the circumstances that trigger the need or want. In so doing, marketers may create the circumstances needed to make consumers feel insecure without having this product or service they are able to offer (Stankevich, 2017).

The use of social media by higher education institutions to market themselves to potential students is relatively a new phenomenon. As a result, not much academic literature exists on the issue (Bado & Nyangau, 2012). However, certain studies are notated to conduct such research. One of the most comprehensive and recent studies in the field was conducted by Barnes and Mattson (2009), who compared social media use by admission officers at American colleges from 2007 to 2008 (Bado & Nyangau, 2012). Tertiary institutions in Pretoria are no different. Video-sharing sites like YouTube provide tertiary institutions with visual representations of their facilities while Facebook helps these institutions present information on the various programs offered at each private tertiary institution. Presence in platforms like these helps these institutions create, catalyse, and/or promote a need for their services to potential students.

Stage 2 - Search for information

Once the consumer has developed a need or want, he or she starts an information search about the different alternatives that he or she can purchase to satisfy their need/want (Dhyani, 2017). Both internal and external information searches will be conducted by the consumers to help make the purchasing decision. Stankevich (2017) explains that an internal information search is made up of utilizing information from memory, such as past experiences with the product or service. An external information search consists of examples like asking friends and family about their experiences with acquiring a new product. Or, researching public sources such as blogs, reviews, or reading other people's comments on social media platforms (Stankevich, 2017). More traditional forms of external information sources would be marketing-controlled sources, such as television ads, banners, brochures, and more (Stankevich, 2017).

The amount of time given to this step usually depends on the consumer's past experience with purchasing the product, the risk involved and the consumer's level of interest. Stankevick (2017) highlights that the process of looking for information is very

important to consumers and should be for marketers as well. Marketers have to catch this stage and provide a relevant description of the product, promotion offerings, and more. Recommendations from friends and family, as well as reviews from other consumers, will be taken into account by the consumers as well (Stankevich, 2017).

Potential customers can look through private tertiary institutions' visual advertisements on the Instagram platform and get an idea of what the campus looks like, which may generate desire for campus visits for example (Bado & Nyangau, 2012). This is an example of an external information source. Furthermore, potential customers and students that already go to this type of institution can have two-way communication with one another on the Instagram platform. Exchanging information that is uniquely desired by the individual seeking the information. This information may or may not contribute to the potential customer choosing to enrol at the private higher learning institution.

Stage 3 - Evaluation of alternatives

The third stage of the consumer decision-making process comprises of consumers asking themselves questions that explore the need for the product. Usually, the consumer will choose based on what they consider to be the most important attributes for the product to have, or they will make a final decision using a cut-off method. Evaluating price, quality, brand position/perception, and more as suggested by (Stankevich, 2017).

Stankevich (2017) adds on to state that moments that matter could be emotional connections/experiences with products or services; or consumers' potential for surrendering to advertising/marketing campaigns. In this stage, it is important that the consumer is aware of the marketer's brand, and that the marketer knows the preferred attributes that the consumer bases their purchasing on (Stankevich, 2017). The process at this stage is individual for a consumer they are looking for the best deal. What determines the best deal is based on individual perception of attributes that are most relevant to each consumer. It could be price, quality, brand, product positioning, a place where one can purchase the product (location), consequences of using the product, and many more (Stankevich, 2017).

For the most part, higher learning institutions avoid putting tuition fees (the price of their services) on their social media platforms. That kind of information is generally found on the institution's main website. However, a lot of the other core attributes consumers look for in higher learning institutions can be found on social media platforms. For example, one can compare the branding strategies each institution chooses to implement against one another on social media platforms like Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, or Instagram. Furthermore, the place where the service can be acquired is important for potential private tertiary students. They may compare the location of the service with other institutions to choose the best location for the individual. They may also engage with online private higher learning institution communities to find out more about the quality of the service the institution provides in comparison to other institutions.

Stage 4 - Purchase

Stankevich (2017) presents that once a consumer chooses which product or brand to buy, he or she must still implement the decision and execute the actual purchase. Also, in the beginning, consumers may have the intention of purchasing a certain product, but don't close the deal. Additional decisions may be needed, such as: when to buy, where to buy, and how much money to spend. There is often a time delay between the formation of a purchase decision and the actual purchase, particularly for complex products such as automobiles, personal computers, and other consumer durables (Stankevich, 2017). In contrast, the time between the decision to purchase and the actual purchase may be comparatively short for nondurable products.

The above mentioned lag time may apply to private tertiary students as this potential purchase is a long-term commitment. For example, private HLIs may offer similar services in different ways. For example, a Bachelor program in Management offered in Midrand may be one year-long, while one offered in Pretoria may be one year and a half long. The different locations of the institutions along with the different durations of the same programs offered may result in a delayed actual purchase. Social media may be valuable in offering this kind of information to potential students.

Stage 5 – Post-purchase

The last stage of the EKB decision-making process has to do with the consumer evaluating whether or not they are satisfied with a product or service after purchasing or making use of it. Questions like: was the product right for the consumer? Did their expectation get met? If the customer finds that the product has matched or exceeded their expectations, they will potentially become loyal to the brand (Stankevich, 2017). They may even take it further, becoming a brand ambassador, influencing other potential customers in stage two (search for information) of their customer journey. This improves the chances of the product being purchased again and again (Stankevich, 2017).

The same can be said for negative feedback. A customer's negative feedback about a product can restrain a potential customer's journey towards purchasing a marketer's product (Stankevich, 2017). The moments that matter in the last stage is to catch the point where customers are dissatisfied, to cater to their problems. If the customer is satisfied however, the marketer should then focus on turning the purchaser into a loyal customer. This can be done by follow up activities (Stankevich, 2017). This stage applies to already enrolled private tertiary students in Pretoria for the proposed study.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Research paradigm

The proposed study follows a positivistic approach to seeking answers to the research problem. According to Chilisa and Kuwulich (2010), the term 'positivism was coined by Auguste Comte to reflect a strictly empirical approach in which claims about knowledge are based on direct experience; it emphasizes facts and the causes of behaviour. Comte wanted to distinguish empirical knowledge and knowledge derived from metaphysics or theology. He proposed that scientific knowledge was more representative of the truth than that of speculations from metaphysics.

The proposed study uses a scientific method of studying human behaviour. It seeks to explore how social media marketing impacts the decision-making processes of students at private HLI. Since positivism focuses on objectivity in data collection, the proposed study follows a quantitative research design.

du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.* (2014) defines epistemology as the study of knowledge and the different ways of knowing. The positivistic approach is grounded in the belief that knowledge is the result of empirical observation only; which is fitting for the proposed study as it seeks to use numerical observations to explore the impact social media marketing has on the decision-making process of students that attend private higher learning institutions in Pretoria.

Ontology is essentially the study of reality as du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.* (2014) defines. Positivists believe that this reality can be observed and measured. In the context of this study, the reality is perceived numerically, which means private tertiary institution marketers and recruiters will make use of that kind of information to learn more about their social media marketing strategies and how they might be affecting some of their students.

From an axiological position, du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.* (2014) explains that positivistic researcher value honesty and personal integrity. They look for an accurate reflection or representation of objective reality. The proposed study is no different as

it seeks to acquire numerical representations of how social media marketing impacts the decision-making of students attending private higher learning institutions to improve marketing strategies. Numerical sums of a whole are more valued than individual in-depth personal feelings or opinions. The above-mentioned research positions highlight and support the positivistic nature of the proposed study.

4.2 Research design

The proposed study makes use of the quantitative research approach whereby responses from respondents are to be interpreted numerically. Social media platforms enable marketers like those of private higher learning institutions to reach and engage with a large population of potential students. Therefore a numerical exploration of how social media marketing has impacted their current students' EKB decision making processes will help them improve their social media marketing campaigns and strategies.

Exploratory research:

As social, economic, and technological factors constantly evolve, new areas of research emerge, requiring researchers to explore unknown areas as suggested by du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.* (2014). Some of the purposes exploratory research is based on are to confirm assumptions; and/or to become familiar with unknown situations, conditions, policies, and behaviours. Some of these are fitting to the proposed study as it seeks to explore social media's impact on the decision making processes of consumers who choose to attend private higher learning institutions in Pretoria. This will be done using the EKB model as a framework for decision making.

Deductive theorizing:

The direction of theorizing that will be used to conduct this study will be deductive theorizing. According to du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.* (2014), deductive theorizing involves reasoning from general assumptions to more specific assumptions. This is at times referred to as top-down theorizing. The relevance of this direction of theorizing to this study is centered around exploring the broader body of knowledge about Engel, Kollat & Blackwell's decision-making theory, and applying it to a specific industry; namely the private higher learning industry in Pretoria.

4.3 Population and sampling methods

4.3.1. Population

du Plooy-Cilliers (2014) defines the population as the total group of people or entities (social artifacts) from whom information is required. An important aspect to keep in mind is that all the people or social artifacts in the population should share at least one specific characteristic that relates to the research question. du Plooy-Cilliers (2014) further outlines that the shared characteristic and the number of people or social artifacts in a population are referred to as the population parameters of the study. The population parameters of a study, therefore, refer to nature (people or social artifact), size, and unique characteristics of the population as du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.* (2014) suggests.

Given the above-mentioned definition, the population parameters for the proposed study will be:

- Nature of the population: The nature of the population are people, instead of social artifacts.
- Size of the population: Students above the age of eighteen who attend private higher learning institutions in Pretoria.
- Unique characteristics of the population: Private higher learning institution students that make use of social media marketing platforms.

4.3.2 Target and accessible population

du Plooy-Cilliers (2014) differentiates target and accessible population by stating that the target population is everyone or everything that falls within the population parameters, whereas the accessible population refers to only the section of the population that can be included in the study. In several cases, the population is too large and widespread for the researcher to determine all the members of the population. As a result, only those the researcher can reach form part of the accessible population

The target population of the proposed study is students attending private tertiary institutions in Pretoria that use social media marketing platforms like YouTube Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and more.

The accessible population then becomes already known students to the researcher (fellow classmates) who are already attending private higher learning institutions in Pretoria. These students are to be users of social media marketing platforms like YouTube Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and more. The sample size then becomes twenty students instead of the whole of Pretoria as many students would be inaccessible to the researcher due to limited time, accessibility and other recourse constraints.

4.3.3 Sampling

4.3.4 Probability or non-probability sampling

According to du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.* (2014), probability sampling gives all units in the population an equal chance of being chosen to part of the sample, while non-probability sampling does not.

The non-probability (convenience) sampling method will be used for the proposed study as it will be difficult to gain access to the whole population of private higher learning students in Pretoria. Plenty of students in private HLI in Pretoria may be users of social media marketing platforms, however, not all of them will be able to be drawn at random, and not all of them will be accessible to the researcher. To conduct a study on the entire population would require more time and far more recourses that are unobtainable to the researcher in this instance. This sampling method is also appropriate as the goal is not to generalize results to a broader population but to explore a specific one.

4.3.5 Sampling technique

du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.* (2014) mentions that convenience sampling occurs when the researcher only includes elements that he or she knows or can gain quick and easy access to. This sampling method may be used if it is difficult to gain access to the

entire target population. This sampling method is fitting for the proposed study as the researcher has easy access to fellow private tertiary students in Pretoria.

4.3.6 Data-collection technique

du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.* (2014) defines a survey as a data collection tool that consists of a series of questions designed to gather information about a relatively large group of people. There are various types of survey designs, each proving a unique research focus. Cross-sectional survey design is used to create an overall picture of a phenomenon at one point in time as du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.* (2014) further defines. This survey design is fitting for the proposed study as the researcher will only be collecting data from respondents once with no repeats. Before-and-after survey designs and longitudinal survey designs (used to determine long-term effects of intervention) will not be applied in this study.

E-mailed surveys will be used to collect data for the proposed study. du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.* (2014) explains that in a mail survey, the researcher sends questionnaires to individuals in the sample that can be filled at leisure and returned to the researcher at a given time. Since respondents complete the questionnaire without any intervention from the researcher, it is called a self-administered survey. This survey is relatively inexpensive, quick, and requires very little human recourses (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014).

The proposed study will make use of the Likert scale which requires respondents to indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement with a variety of statements related to an attitude or objects (du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.*, 2014).

The collection process is discussed below:

- A total of twenty students that attend a private higher learning institution in Pretoria will be selected to take part in the proposed study, using non-probability sampling methods.
- E-mail surveys will be sent to these respondents' email addresses.

- The proposed questionnaire will be accompanied by documents that inform the respondent that the relevant approval is granted for the research to take place along with a consent form for their signing.
- The questionnaire will be self-explanatory.
- Once all questions have been answered by respondents, they will send back the data to be interpreted by the researcher.
- Interpreted data will then be used to answer the research questions and address the research problem

4.3.7 Data analysis technique

The Excel data analysis method will be used for the proposed study as it is an excellent software for graphically tabulating numerical Likert scale responses. One could use the SPSS software that gives the researcher significant results with just one click, however, due to the small sample size of this exploration, Excel will be used.

Applying statistical analysis to a set of data removes the guesswork from the interpretation of data. Objective and defensible conclusions can then be drawn from the results of the analysis (du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.*, 2014). Statistics consists of a set of mathematical techniques to analyse a set of data. Researchers do this to ensure those accurate and objective interpretations of the data.

The researcher will gather quantitative information through a Likert scale questionnaire. The Likert scale questions will be informed by the EKB model's various stages of decision making. An individual's answers on this topic will be used to form data sets, which will then be interpreted in an attempt to discover patterns that may exist hidden within the data about the research topic. Responses will offer the researcher answers to the proposed study's research questions.

Chapter 5: Findings and Interpretation of Findings

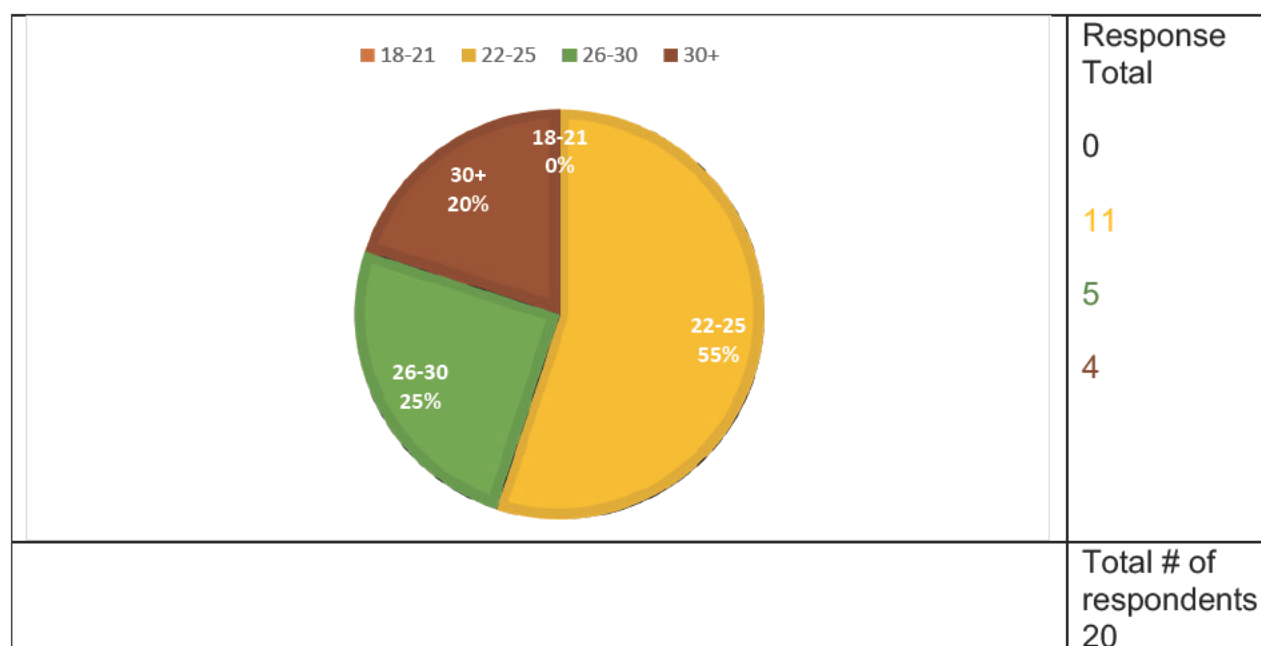
5.1 Introduction

This section of the proposed study presents findings from private HLI student respondents on the impact social media marketing has on their decision-making process when selecting a private tertiary institution to attend. The data was collected using a self-administered E-mailed questionnaire found in Annexure B. The summarized data was for 20 respondents and their feedback was useful in discussing the main study objective. The survey results are presented systematically for each question.

5.2. Responses & Analysis

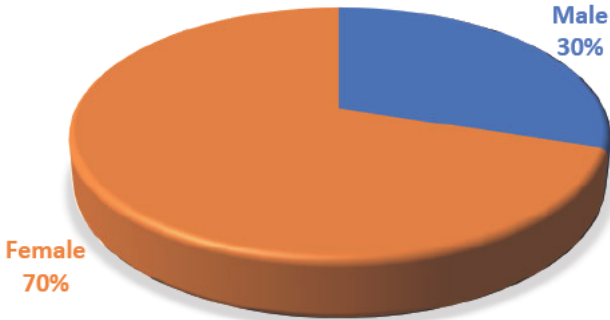
Section A: Demographic Information

1) Please indicate your age.



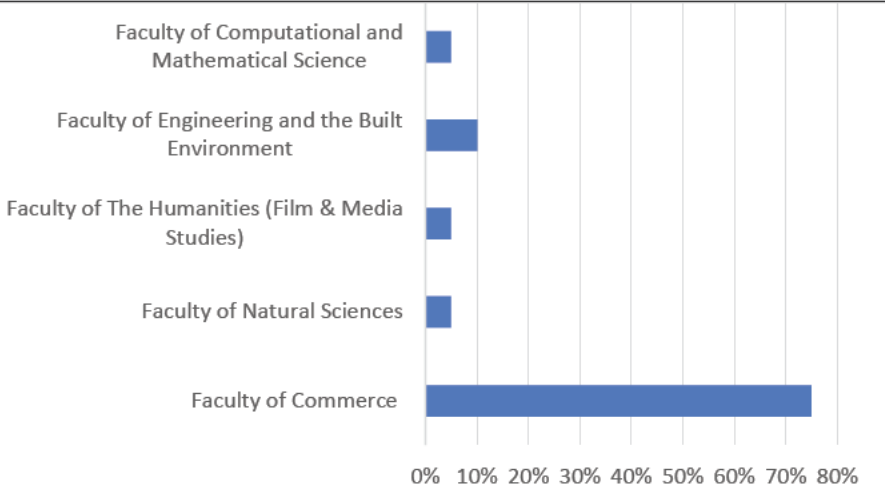
Of the total 20 students, no one was aged between 18 to 21 years old. The majority of the students who responded to this question were aged between 22-25. They constituted 11 students (55%). 5 students were aged between 26-30 years old and 4 were over 30 years old.

2) Please indicate your gender.

<i>Please indicate your gender.</i>	Response Percent	Response Total
 A 3D pie chart showing the gender distribution of respondents. The chart is divided into two segments: a large orange segment representing females at 70%, and a smaller blue segment representing males at 30%.	70% 30%	14 6
		Total # of respondents 20

Of the total 20 students, 70% were female and 30% were male students. No one chose not to answer the question.

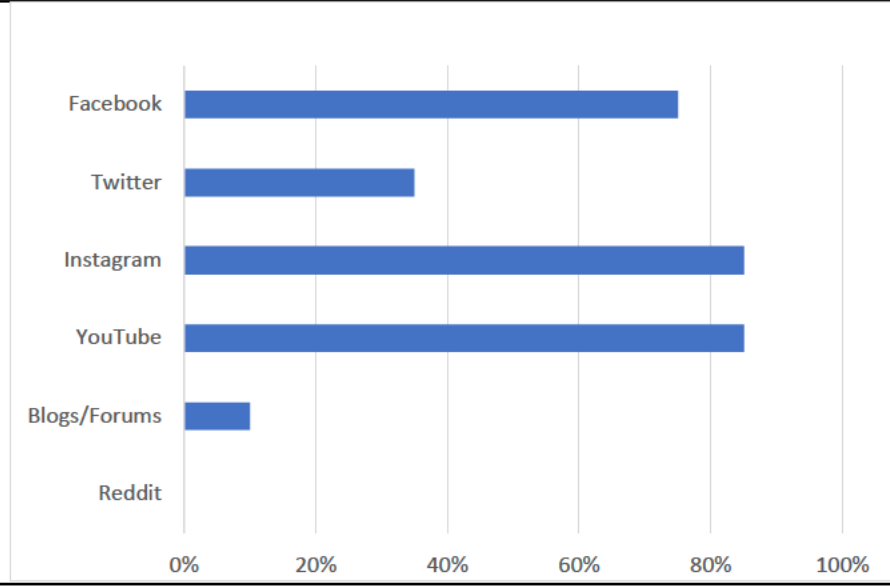
3) Please indicate the faculty to which you belong.

<i>Please indicate the faculty to which you belong.</i>	Response Percent	Response Total
 A horizontal bar chart showing the distribution of respondents by faculty. The x-axis represents the percentage from 0% to 80%. The y-axis lists the faculties. The bars are blue. The Faculty of Commerce has the highest percentage at 75%, followed by the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment at 10%, and the other three faculties (Computational and Mathematical Science, Humanities, and Natural Sciences) each at 5%.	5% 10% 5% 5% 75%	1 2 1 1 15
		Total # of respondents 20

was not very much diversity in the faculty to which the students belonged. 75% of the respondents belonged to the faculty of commerce. This is due to the convenience sampling method used in the study. The researcher also belonged to this faculty and source student respondents that were known. This sampling method was chosen as it would be very difficult to determine who attended a private higher learning institution in Pretoria, that also uses social media given the limited time allocated to the researcher. A few other faculty attendees were acquired by the researcher to fulfil the 20 respondent target.

Section B: Social media use information

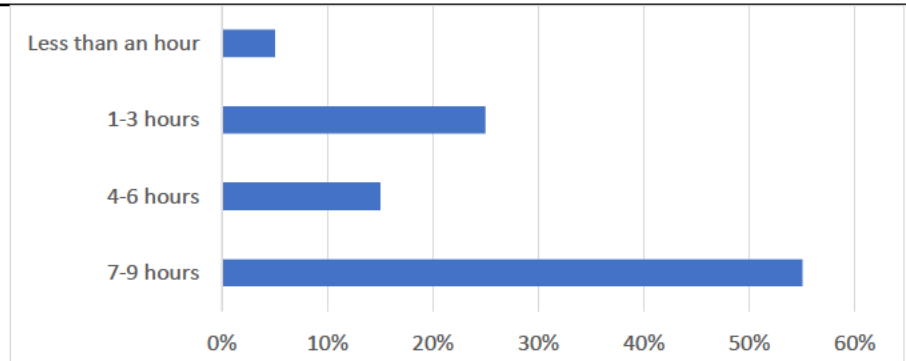
1) Please indicate all the social media platforms you use.

<i>Please indicate all the social media platforms you use.</i>		Response Percent	Response Total
 A horizontal bar chart with a white background and light gray vertical grid lines at 20% intervals. The y-axis lists six social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Blogs/Forums, and Reddit. The x-axis is labeled from 0% to 100%. Blue bars represent the percentage of respondents using each platform: Facebook (75%), Twitter (35%), Instagram (85%), YouTube (85%), Blogs/Forums (10%), and Reddit (0%).		75%	15
		35%	7
		85%	17
		85%	17
		10%	2
		0%	0
			Total # of respondents 20

Several people used multiple social media (SM) platforms. Instagram and YouTube are the most used social media platforms with 85% of respondents using them. Facebook is not far behind with 75% of the respondents using it as well. Twitter is not a SM platform that too many people use with only 35%. Blogs or forums are even used less with only 10% of respondents using them. Reddit wasn't used at all by any of the respondents in the proposed study, this may be a platform more commonly used in countries outside of South Africa.

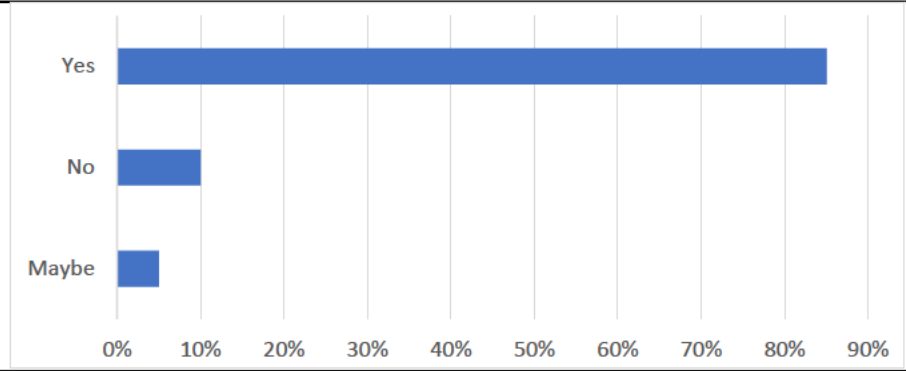
Private HLLs may use this information to direct their social media marketing strategies towards platforms such as Instagram YouTube and Facebook over any others as these proved to be most popular. Blogs, forums and Reddit may yield less lucrative returns.

2) How much time (approximately) do you spend on social media platforms per week?

<i>How much time (approximately) do you spend on social media platforms per week?</i>		Response Percent	Response Total
	Less than an hour	5%	1
	1-3 hours	25%	5
	4-6 hours	15%	3
	7-9 hours	55%	11
		Total # of respondents 20	

55% of students in my study spent 7 to 9 hours using social media platforms per week. Only one person spent less than an hour.

- 3) Are you likely to change your attitude towards a certain brand, product, or service after you have read positive comments/reviews/online articles about it on social media?

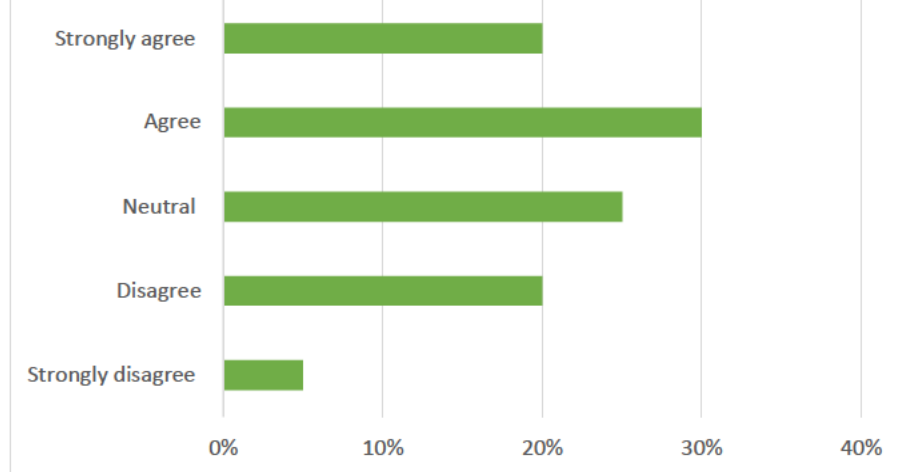
<i>Are you likely to change your attitude towards a certain brand, product, or service after you have read positive comments/reviews/online articles about it on social media?</i>		Response Percent	Response Total
	Yes	85%	17
	No	10%	2
	Maybe	5%	1
		Total # of respondents 20	

85% percent of the students in the proposed study show that social media marketing does play a big role in their perception of products or service. These results fall in line with the literature discussed in the previous chapters that suggest that social media marketing revolves around conversations and interactions within groups of people who act and react based on collective knowledge. Very few people state that their attitudes are not swayed by social media marketing (10% of this study's respondents)

Section C: Decision-making information

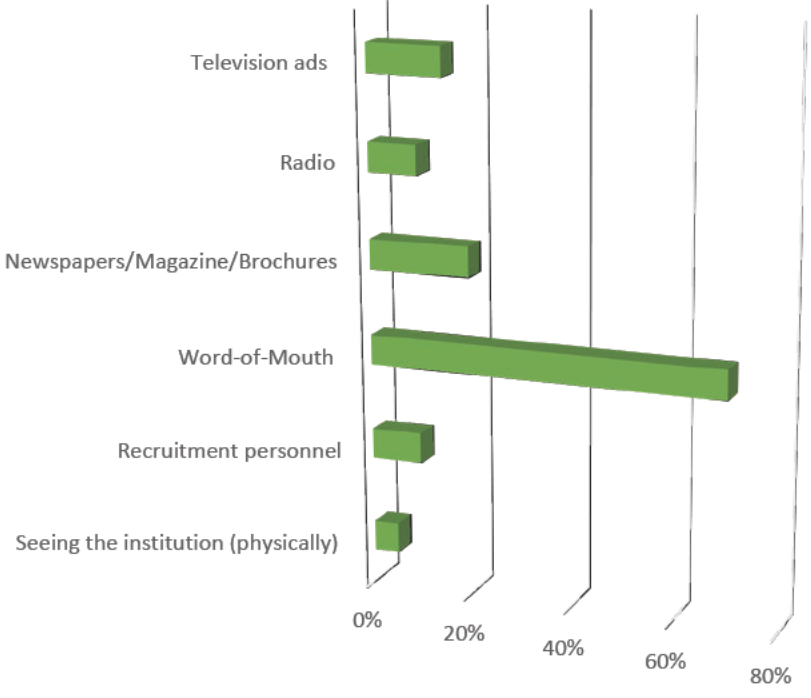
Stage 1: Problem/ Need recognition:

1) My private higher learning institution's social media marketing campaigns played a role in my awareness of the institution being a possible higher learning destination of choice for me.

<i>My private higher learning institution's social media marketing campaigns played a role in my awareness of the institution being a possible higher learning destination of choice for me.</i>		Response Percent	Response Total
Strongly agree		20%	4
Agree		30%	6
Neutral		25%	5
Disagree		20%	4
Strongly disagree		5%	1
			Total # of respondents 20

Four people strongly agreed to this question while 4 moderately agreed. This is because there are other sources that could create the need to want to go to a particular private HLI. Some of those are portrayed in the next question. 25% of the students were not sure whether or not they agree or disagreed, while 4 moderately disagreed and 1 strongly disagreed. This means that 5 students were impacted by other sources besides social media in creating a need to attend a private HLI.

2) If social media was not used in your need recognition stage, what contributed to making you aware of your tertiary institution's services?

<i>If social media was not used in your need recognition stage, what contributed to making you aware of your tertiary institution's services?</i>		Response Percent	Response Total
	Television ads	15%	3
	Radio	10%	2
	Newspapers/Magazine/Brochures	20%	4
	Word-of-Mouth	70%	14
	Recruitment personnel	10%	2
	Seeing the institution (physically)	5%	1
			Tota # of respondents 20

Traditional forms of marketing still play a role in creating a need today, however word-of-mouth clearly plays the biggest role in the proposed study. 70% of private higher education students in my study used word-of-mouth to find out about their tertiary institution. As stipulated in the literature review, there are three types of word-of-mouth: Experiential word-of-mouth, consequential word-of-mouth and intentional word-of-mouth. Each one of the 14 respondents falls into one of these categories. Either they heard about the HLI through someone else telling them because they also attended the institution (Experiential), they were informed by a marketing campaign from their school (consequential), or they were influenced by a prominent endorsed figure of the institution (intentional).

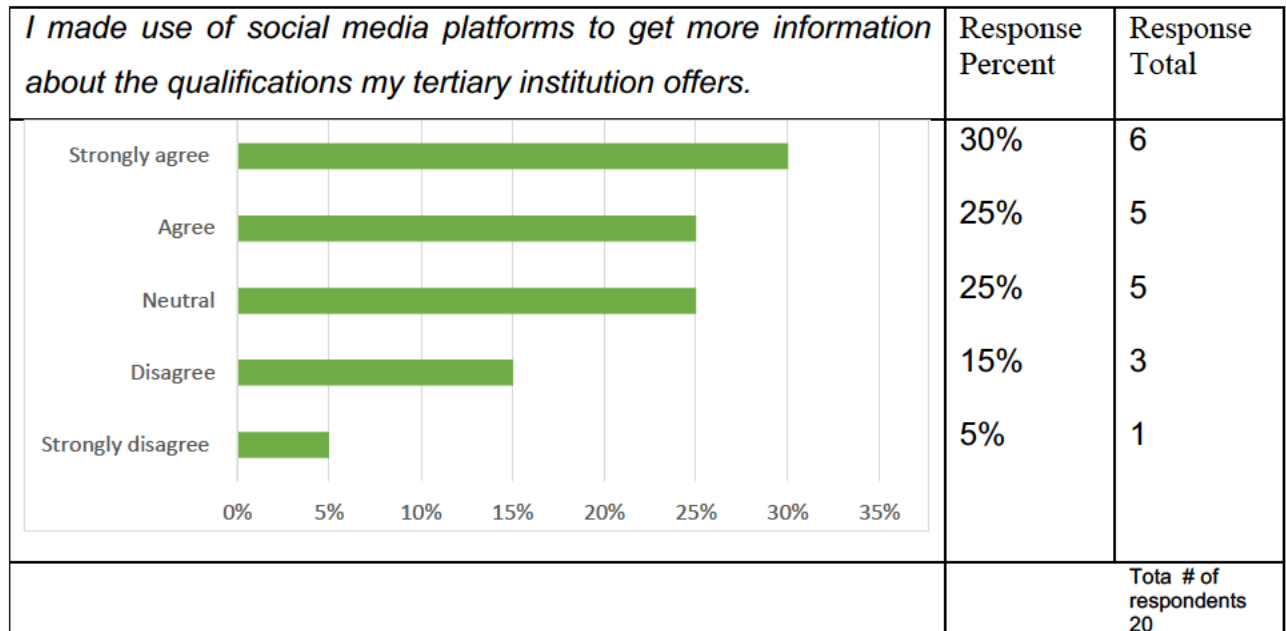
Stage 2: Search for information

- 1) What information sources did you use in selecting to enrol at your higher learning institution?

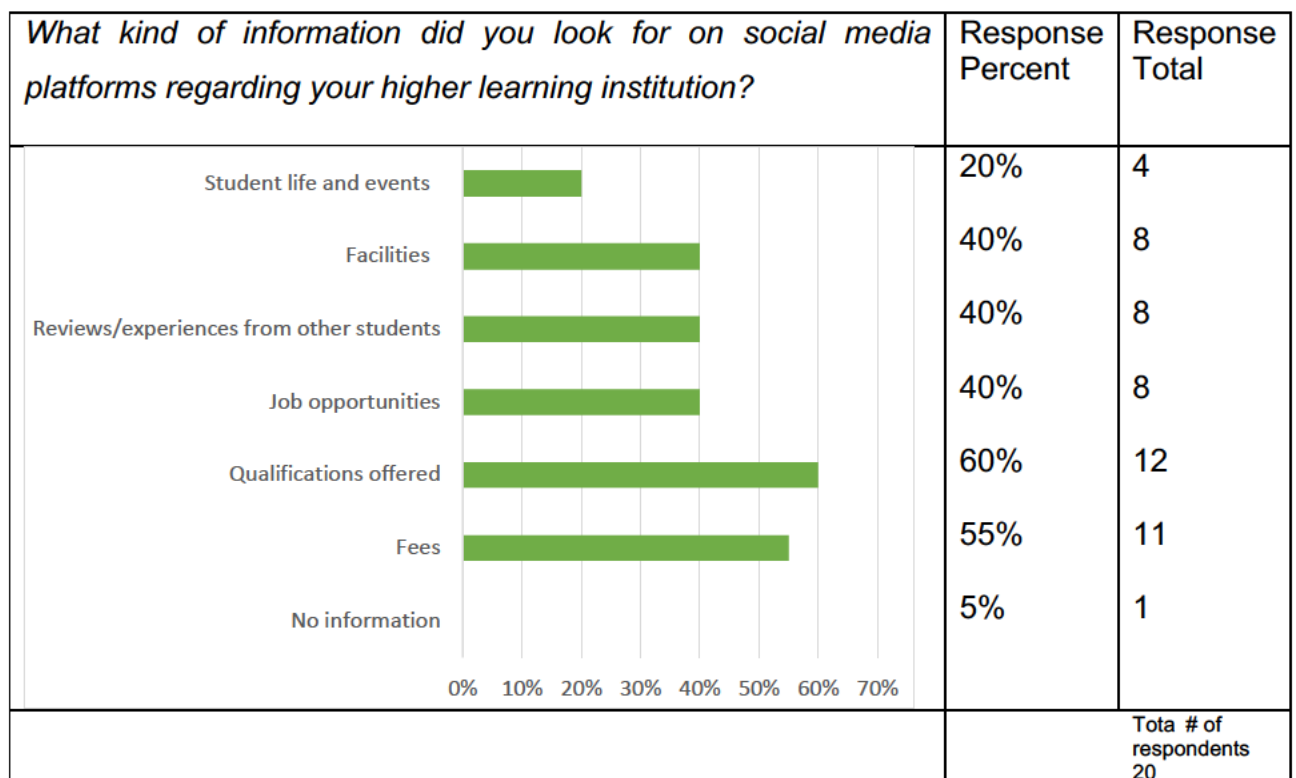
<i>What information sources did you use in selecting to enrol at your higher learning institution?</i>	Response Percent	Response Total																					
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Information Source</th> <th>Response Percent</th> <th>Response Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>High School related sources</td> <td>5%</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Friends and/or acquaintances</td> <td>30%</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Social media campaigns</td> <td>20%</td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Private HLI's brochures</td> <td>25%</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Private HLI's internet site</td> <td>55%</td> <td>11</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Campus visits</td> <td>65%</td> <td>13</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Information Source	Response Percent	Response Total	High School related sources	5%	1	Friends and/or acquaintances	30%	6	Social media campaigns	20%	4	Private HLI's brochures	25%	5	Private HLI's internet site	55%	11	Campus visits	65%	13	5%	1
Information Source	Response Percent	Response Total																					
High School related sources	5%	1																					
Friends and/or acquaintances	30%	6																					
Social media campaigns	20%	4																					
Private HLI's brochures	25%	5																					
Private HLI's internet site	55%	11																					
Campus visits	65%	13																					
	30%	6																					
	20%	4																					
	25%	5																					
	55%	11																					
	65%	13																					
		Total # of respondents 20																					

This table outlines that the majority of students still predominantly prefer to visit the private HLI physically to get the majority of information from (65%). Second highest to that is them using their institution's internet site with 55% of the total number of respondents. Social media marketing campaigns were not used very much to search for information, comprising of only 4 students (20%). This means private HLIs should still primarily focus on investing in their internet sites. They should make them user-friendly and well informed. They should also focus mostly on making campus visits impactful to the potential student as most of them search for information this way.

- 2) I made use of social media platforms to get more information about the qualifications my tertiary institution offers.



- 3) What kind of information did you look for on social media platforms regarding your higher learning institution?



The above-asked questions are linked, as they show a direct correlation. Most students did use social media marketing platforms to get information about the qualifications offered at their HLI (55%). 5 respondents did not want to say they did or didn't and 20% said that they didn't. These results supported by the third table in this section, which portrays that most of the students did indeed primarily focus on acquiring information about the qualifications offered in their respective HLI (60%). Fees information were searched by 55% of the respondents. Eight students were interested in finding out about the private HLI's Facilities, reviews from other students and job opportunities. These are also important to note to marketers trying to figure out what to put on their social media marketing campaigns. Student life and events were least important to the 20 students with only four students interested in them. One student didn't look for any information on social media about their private HLI. They may have solely relied on more traditional forms of searching for information.

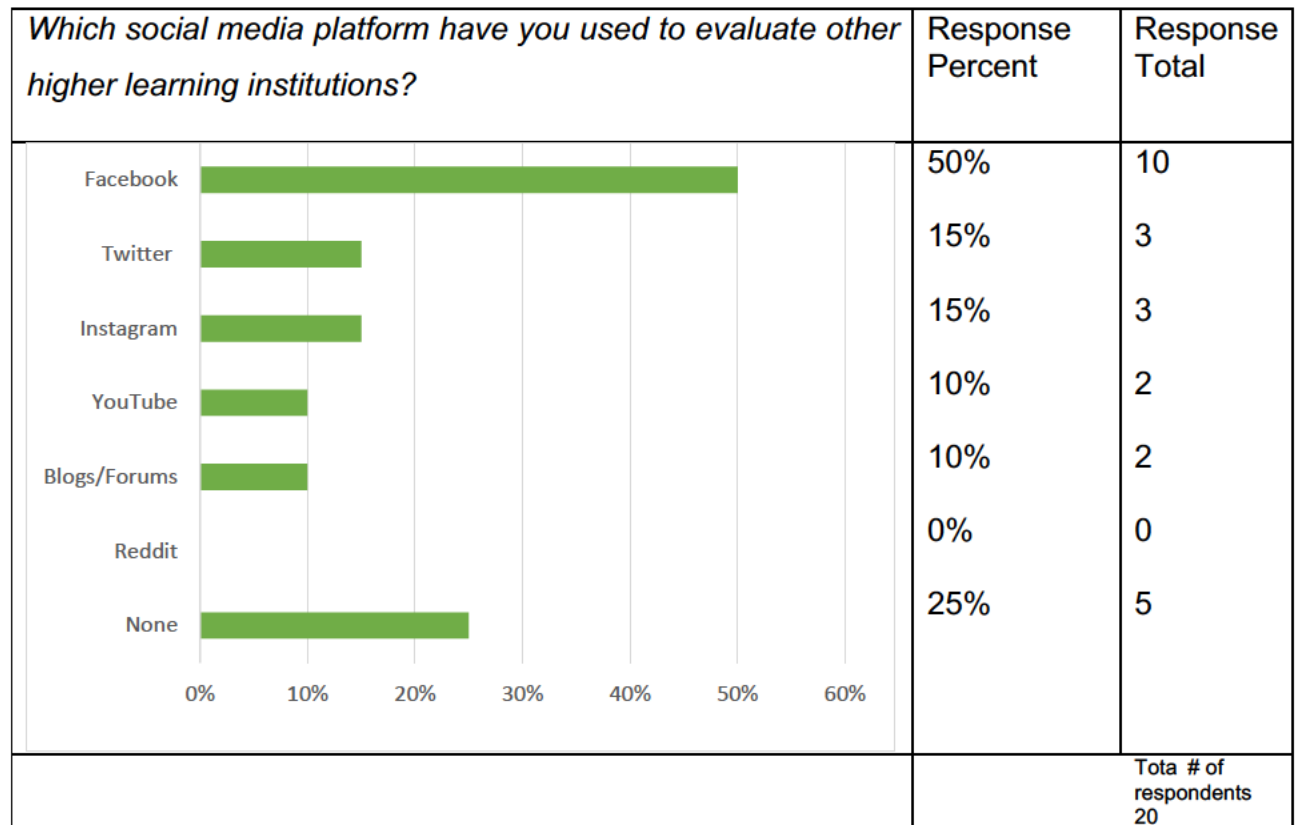
Stage 3: Evaluation of alternatives

- 1) In the decision to select my higher learning institution, I have compared it to other private tertiary institutions using social media platforms.

In the decision to select my higher learning institution, I have compared it to other private tertiary institutions using social media platforms.		Response Percent	Response Total
	Strongly agree	20%	4
	Agree	40%	8
	Neutral	15%	3
	Disagree	15%	3
	Strongly disagree	10%	2
		Total # of respondents 20	

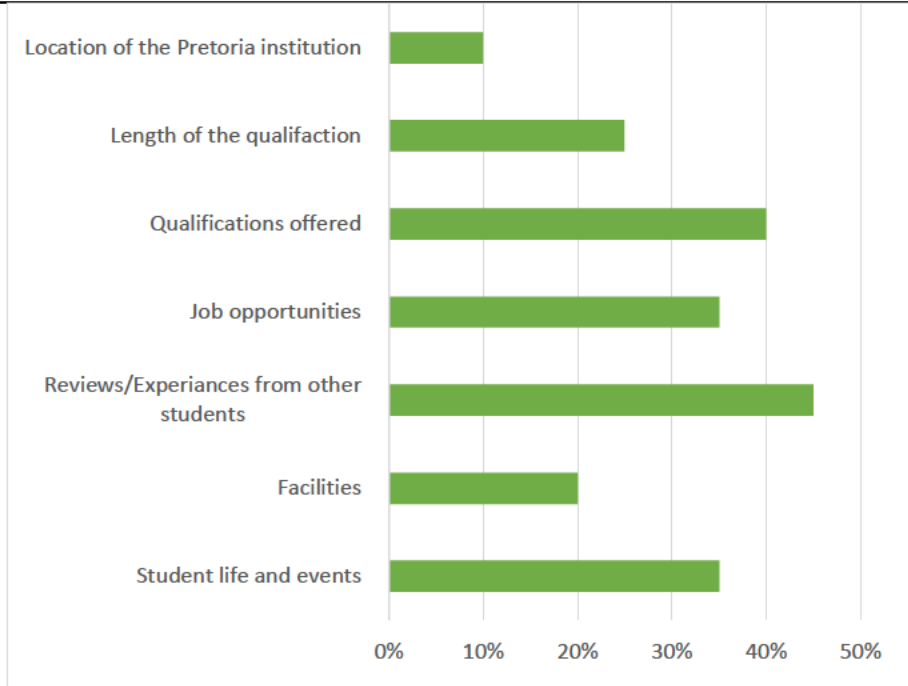
12 students did use social media to compare private HLIs while 5 didn't. 3 students didn't have an opinion on this question.

2) Which social media platform have you used to evaluate other higher learning institutions?



The majority of students used Facebook to evaluate alternative private HLIs 50%. Twitter and Instagram were tied with 15%. While YouTube and blogs/Forums were also tied with 10% of the total number of students using those sources to evaluate alternative options. 5 students claimed that they did not use social media at all to compare private HLIs which aligns with the previous table. Some of the people who were neutral in the previous table now claim to use a social media platform to evaluate alternatives.

3) What information found on you tertiary institution's social media platforms contributed to your decision to join the institution?

What information found on you tertiary institution's social media platforms contributed to your decision to join the institution?		Response Percent	Response Total
Location of the Pretoria institution		10%	2
Length of the qualifaction		25%	5
Qualifications offered		40%	8
Job opportunities		35%	7
Reviews/Experiances from other students		45%	9
Facilities		20%	4
Student life and events		35%	7
			Tota # of respondents 20

When on the searching for information stage of the EKB decision-making process, students primarily prioritise information about the qualifications offered, as shown in stage 2 (question 3). However, when they evaluate alternative private HLIs they mostly prioritise information having to do with the experiences of other students. This makes sense as this is social media's greatest strength, being able to acquire information from various sources at any time, unlike traditional marketing techniques which limit consumers to one message conveyed by the marketer. Noting which information is most relevant to potential students is important for private HE marketers, especially in this stage of the EKB decision-making process. Qualifications offered and job opportunities are noted to be important in both the (3rd stage) and the second stage of the EKB decision-making model.

Stage 4: Purchase						
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
4.1) After evaluating alternative higher learning institutions, social media played a big role in my purchase decision.		10%	30%	45%	15%	0%
4.2) The information provided to me during the enrolment procedure is consistent with the information provided to me on social media marketing platforms?		20%	40%	35%	5%	0%
Stage 5: Post-purchase behaviour						
5.1) After enrolling at my private higher learning institution, I shared my thoughts about the institution on social media platforms.		5%	5%	25%	45%	20%
5.2) I feel encouraged to voice my feedback and impression about my school to other potential students on social media platforms.		20%	30%	30%	10%	10%

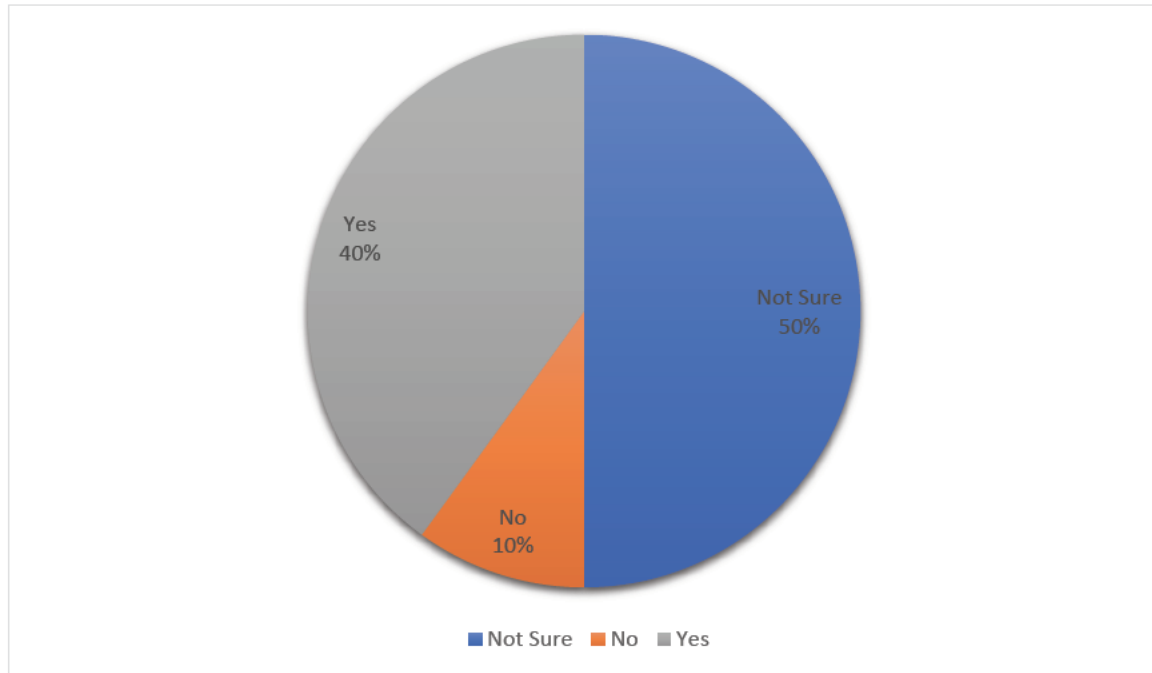
4.1) As show in question 1 of stage 2 (Search for information), students do not primarily rely on social media marketing campaigns to search for information on potential private HLIs. They rely more on campus visits and the institution's internet site. This is why the majority of students on question 4.1 (60%) were either not sure or disagree with the statement that is "social media played a big role in my purchase decision." 30% moderately agree while only 10% strongly agree.

4.2) This question relates to how students felt about the credibility of the information presented to them on social media. 60% of the students felt that the information presented to them on social media marketing campaigns correlated with what they experienced in their enrolment procedure. 35% of the students were not quite sure if this was the case for them. It may have been something not evaluated. Only one student felt like there was a discrepancy in what social media portrayed and what he or she received once they were enrolling at the institution. The use of social media is dependent on its credibility, especially for big decisions such that of deciding what HLI to attend.

5.1) As it pertains to post-purchase behaviour, 65% of the 20 students did not share their thoughts about the institution they were attending on social media. Only 2 students did share their thoughts (20%). 5 students were not sure if they did or didn't (25%).

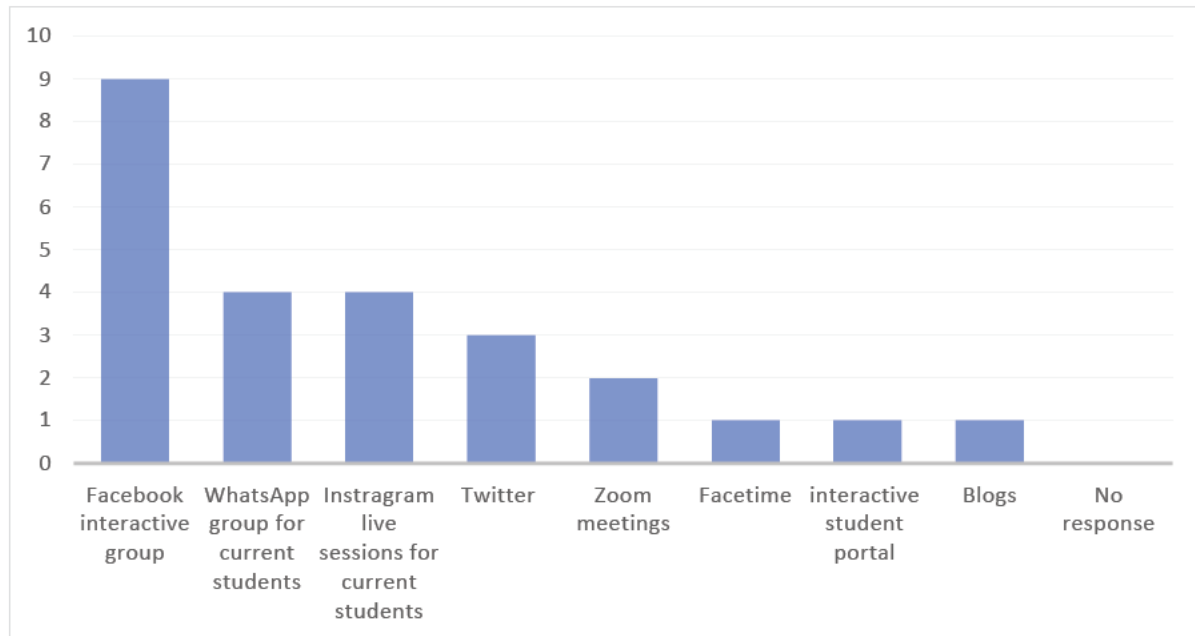
5.2) Not only is information from social media marketing not sourced very much by the 20 respondents in this research, but it is also not given to others very much (as shown in findings 5.1). This is not primarily caused by students not feeling encouraged to share their thoughts on social media with other potential students as findings on question 5.2 suggests. Therefore, what could be hindering it. it would be an interesting study for other researchers to take up: to find out what is stopping current students from voicing out their feedback and impressions about their HLI to other potential students on social media platforms.

1) Do you feel your tertiary institution is interactive enough on its social media platforms?



50% of the student in this study were not sure whether or not there was much interactivity happening on their private HLI's social media platforms. This is most likely due to not many students depending on social media to make purchase decisions. 40% of the respondents thought that there was interactivity. 10% thought that there was none.

- 2) Please recommend the best tool for interaction and communication for current students and potential students who want to engage with one another and your higher learning institution.



Most out of the 20 students felt like a Facebook interactive group would be the best platform to interact for new students trying to communicate with current students or recruitment personnel from the private HLI institution. However, many thought that WhatsApp or an Instagram based group chat would help most for current students. The tools are organised in a hierarchical format from most valuable to least valuable tool for private higher learning institution recruiters in Pretoria to take note.

5.3 Summary of findings/addressing research questions

The need recognition stage of the EKB model is mostly impacted by mouth-of-mouth engagement. Students still predominantly rely on traditional ways of acquiring information about which private HLI to attend. They use one-way communication based university websites to search for the majority of the information they need. Students also mostly prefer to go and visit the campus itself when searching for information, which is also a traditional way of searching for information. A reason for why social media marketing platforms are not used as much as traditional sources of information is because of the nature of the decision being made. Social media was mostly used in the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process.

As previously stated in the literature review, there is often a time delay between the formation of a purchase decision and the actual purchase, particularly for complex products such as automobiles, personal computers, and other consumer durables (Stankevich, 2017). In contrast, the time between the decision to purchase and the actual purchase may be comparatively short for nondurable products. Making decisions on which private HLI to attend is a more serious commitment. Which leads to students not using social media marketing platforms as much, but relying on more formal platforms like HLI's websites or going to the institution in person to make any final decisions. Post-purchase behaviour of attending private HLIs predominantly comprises of not too many students engaging with other students on their experiences on social media. Based on the information tabulated in this chapter, marketers need to do a better job of creating SM platforms where students can interact with one another and share thoughts with students that are not attending their HLI.

To further answer the secondary research questions of this study, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are the most commonly used social media platforms when students evaluate what private higher learning institution they want to attend in Pretoria. YouTube, blogs/forums and Reddit are less commonly used. The type of information they look for most is qualifications offered, fees, facilities, reviews from other students, job opportunities and student life and events, in that order.

5.4 Reliability, validity and trustworthiness

Reliability

Reliability is related to the findings of the research. When assessing if a research method or instrument is reliable, one needs to ask whether the same results would be produced if the research were to be repeated by another researcher using the same method or instruments (du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.*, 2014).

For example, the proposed study seeks to make use of a self-administered survey with close-ended questions to determine the impact social media marketing has on the decision-making process of students attending private higher learning institutions in Pretoria (using Engel, Kollat & Blackwell's model as a framework for decision-making). If another researcher using the same questionnaire repeats the research on

a different set of young adults (from the same target population), he or she should be able to find similar results to the ones found in this study.

du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.* (2014) argues that some sources of error could affect your data collection, thus affecting the reliability of your data. An error in this regard could be anything that affects your data. Sources of errors include misinterpretation of a question in the questionnaire or even interpreting the same questions differently; which are some of the things this research study looks to avoid.

Validity

Validity has to do with determining whether the research measured what it was supposed to measure. A good question to ask to determine validity is: 'Do the findings reflect what is happening in the given situation?'

The findings from the proposed study must indicate the impact social media has on the private tertiary institution students make decisions. The validity of the administered survey will be questionable if the findings deviate too much from the views of other students that were studied on the same topic by other researchers. Quantitative studies seek to make sense of phenomenon using logic and objectivity. The survey responses should make logical sense following this paradigm.

External validity focuses on the ability to generalize findings from a specific sample to a larger population. The proposed study seeks to provide information to private tertiary institution marketing personnel on the impact their social media marketing strategies have on some of its current students. The proposed study is quantitative so findings can be generalized to other potential private higher learning students by recruiters and marketers.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The proposed study was successfully able to answer the research question which was “How has social media marketing impacted the decision-making process of students attending private higher learning institutions in Pretoria?” this study focused on each stage of the decision-making process and used a literature review approach to find out social media marketing’s impact on each stage of Engel, Kollat and Blackwell’s model of consumer behaviour.

The research problem was solved. A lack of academic literature in a South African context for how social media marketing impacts the decision-making process of students attending private HLIs was addressed. Further studies can be conducted using a larger population and a more diverse cluster of students in terms of faculty belonging. Limitations and the heuristic value of this paper will be discussed below.

6.1 Limitations of the study

Limitation can be defined as any potential problems the researcher foresees upon conducting the research study. A multitude of variables can act as limitations to a study. Despite the research being able to offer a certain degree of new insight on the proposed topic, limitations may still exist.

For example, findings in the proposed study cannot be indicative of the majority of students that choose to go to private higher learning institutions in Pretoria. Using a significantly reduced sample population, due to time and resource constraints reduces representation. A lack of representation reduces the generalisability of the research.

Furthermore, convenience sampling was used for the proposed study as limited time was given to the researcher to conduct the study. Convenience sampling can be heavily biased towards the social or professional context of the researcher as du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.* (2014) suggests. Only students already known to the researcher were included in the study, as they were the researcher’s accessible population. This means that not enough faculties were represented among the respondents of this study. The faculty of commerce dominated this research engagement. It is then

important that the researcher avoids any bias when using convenience sampling. Future researchers with more time should use other sampling methods.

The positivistic approach of the proposed study does not account for many social, psychological, historical, or cultural components to social media marketing's impact on consumer behaviour. Positivists are not interested in examining the unobservable internal motivations of an individual's behaviour, which one could argue is not a holistic approach to exploring social media's impact on the decision-making process of private higher learning institution students.

The proposed study makes use of a quantitative research approach; however, it would also be interesting to use a qualitative research approach to gain a deeper understanding of students' decision-making. Qualitative research gives the researcher a deeper understanding of the research area by taking into account the perspective of the study population and the context in which they live (Galan *et al.*, 2015). Using face-to-face, in-depth interviews in exploratory research, for example, enables the researcher to ask open-ended questions along with follow-up questions to get much more detailed responses about social media marketing's impact on students attending private institutions of higher learning.

This research gathers data from students that are already well within their tertiary studies. The sample was not limited to private HLI students during their initial or first year of studies. This may present a situation where students are unable to holistically recall how social media marketing impacted their decision-making process. Future researchers can limit their studies to entry-level students of private HLI to address this.

6.2 Ethical considerations

du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.* (2014) shed light on the following ethical consideration that apply to the proposed study:

Informed consent: Participants should know that they are taking part in a research study and they should give their consent to take part. The researcher must not inflict

any pressure, intimidation, or coercion as it pertains to participants taking part in the study. Respondents should take part in the study willingly.

- This was addressed by using a self-administered questionnaire that was e-mailed with a consent form. E-mailing removes the informal aspect to asking for permission, no coercion was documented in any of the E-mails.

Dealing with confidentiality and anonymity: Letting participants know that anonymity will be granted to them if required; that their responses will be kept confidential and only disclosed to the people they approve of (du Plooy-Cilliers, *et al.*, 2014). Anonymity was granted to all respondents of this research.

Avoiding deception: It is important to disclose to the participant how the questionnaire will be administered. Along with showing that the researcher has permission to conduct the research. Letting respondents know for how long data will be kept and destroyed if required. All of this information was provided to the respondent.

Dealing with sensitive information: The proposed study will not ask any in-depth sensitive questions from the respondents as it focuses on acquiring numerical, quantitative, surface-level data from students.

Avoiding bias: Making sure that information is not falsified or misused for bias or personal reasons (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). To do this, the researcher removed all forms of identification on all questionnaire responses and no statistics were changed.

Distorting result: Quoting numbers out of context and emphasizing certain aspects over other aspects of equal significance counts as distorting results. These practices go against the positivist paradigm and were not administered by the researcher.

Misusing information: Information acquired from this study must not be used for any other purposes besides that of which the respondent is aware and comfortable.

Falsifying information: The aims, findings and questions of the research must not be deceptive or exaggerated. The result should not be altered to meet the bias opinions of the research which is what was practised in this study.

Avoiding harm: No harm should be inflicted on participants. As the e-mail surveys will be used, contact with participants was unnecessary. Therefore, no physical harm was inflicted on to the participants. Emotional, social-context questions were also avoided in this study. Things like making the respondent have to recall painful memories was avoided in this quantitative study.

Using appropriate research methods: It is also important that the research credits all the relevant sources used in the proposed study. Institutional referencing guidelines were followed throughout the proposed study.

Providing incentives: No incentives were given to the respondents of this study as this will distort the credibility of the results.

6.3 Concluding remarks

Constantinides and Stagno (2012) found that future university students do not rank social media high in the list of information channels that could potentially influence their academic decision-making process. This could be due to low engagement of such tools by universities as direct marketing tools (Galan, Lawly & Clements, 2015). The proposed study found results that align with this direction of thinking. The 20 respondents in this study did not rely heavily on social media marketing to make their decisions about what private higher learning institution to attend in Pretoria. They relied on it moderately. Students still primarily rely on traditional forms of marketing to make their decisions on this topic.

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Concept Document Table

PROVISIONAL TITLE: *An exploration of the impact social media marketing has on the consumer decision-making process of students attending private higher learning institutions in Pretoria.*

Research Purpose/ Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/ Sources	Literature Review – Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection Method(s)	Ethics	Anticipated Findings	References
<i>To explore the impact social media marketing plays on the decision-making process of students attending Private tertiary institutions in Pretoria.</i>	<i>How does social media marketing affect the decision-making process of students attending private tertiary institutions in Pretoria (using the EKB model)?</i>	<i>The information acquired from the study will help private higher learning institution's marketing departments revise their marketing strategies.</i>	<i>Gollwitzer (1990) Stankevich (2017) Bamosy and Askegaard(2006)</i>	<u>Theme 1:</u> <i>Social Media marketing</i> <u>Theme 2:</u> <i>Consumer behaviour; Engel, Kollat and Miniard's theory (EKB model)</i> <u>Theme 3:</u> <i>Limitations to the EKB model</i>	Paradigm <i>Positivism</i> Epistemology <i>Knowledge is objective</i> Ontology <i>Reality is viewed through an empirical lens</i> Axiology <i>Measurable consumer behaviour metrics are valued.</i>	Quantitative	<i>A self-administered questionnaire will be the data collection method used in the proposed study. Data will be collected through close-ended questions</i>	<i>Informed consent will be practiced the participants will be made aware of all related implications of the research. Identify will be protected Avoiding harassment Avoiding deception</i>	<i>Social media will not play too much of an impact on the decision-making process of students attending private tertiary institutions in Pretoria as not too many big decisions are made off social media marketing</i>	Du Plooy-Cilliers. Davis. Bezuidenhout, eds. 2014. <i>Research Matters</i> . Cape Town: Juta and company Gros 2012. The Influence of Social Media on consumers during their purchase decision-making process and the implications for marketers [Online]. Available at: https://e-source.dbs.ie/bitstream/handle/10788/925/me_gros_ch_2012.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y [Accessed 13 March 2020] Lee E. 2013. Impact of social media on consumer Behaviour – Decision Making Process [Online]. Available at: file:///C:/Users/16002404/AppData/Local/Packages/Microsoft.MicrosoftEdge_8wekyb3d8bbwe/TempState/Downloads/bbwe/TempState/Downloads/Bachelors_thesis_IMPACTS_OF_SOCIAL_MEDIA%20[1].pdf [Accessed 13 March 2020]
						Population				
						Population <i>The target population are private tertiary students in Pretoria using social media marketing</i>				

[illegible]

Annexure A: CONSENT FORM TEMPLATE

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants To whom it may concern, My name is Zwelibanzi Gininda and I am a student at Varsity College. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Miss Katlego Oliphant about how social media marketing impacts the decision-making process of students' attending private higher learning institutions in Pretoria. The Engel, Kollat and Blackwell model of consumer behaviour will be used as a framework of decision making. I hope that this research adds a south African, private sector context to this topic. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.
What will I be doing if I participate in your study? I would like to invite you to participate in this research because I would like to gain an empirical understanding of social media marketing's impact on the consumer decision-making process. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to inform you that you will be participating in filling in a self-administered questionnaire issued to you by email. You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.
Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study? Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your personal experience or opinion. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.
Do I have to participate in the study?

- Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary;
- If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so;
- Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.

Will my identity be protected?

I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at Varsity College, will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.

What will happen to the information that participants provide?

Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my *Bachelor of Commerce Honours in Management degree*. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.

You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.

My contact details are as follows:
Zwelibanzi Gininda

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:
Katlego

Oliphant

Annexure B: Questionnaire Template

My name is Zwelibanzi Destiny Gininda, a Bachelor of Commerce Honours in Management student at Varsity College (VC) Pretoria. This study seeks to explore the impact social media marketing has on the decision making process of students attending private higher learning institutions. The study seeks to use the responses of current students attending private tertiary institutions in Pretoria to help recruiters acquire an improved understanding of how their marketing campaigns impact their current and potential students. This questionnaire should only take 10-15 minutes.

Section A: Demographic Information

1) Please indicate your age.

		Mark with X below
1.2	18 - 21	
1.3	22 - 25	
1.4	26 - 30	
1.5	30+	

2) Please indicate your gender.

		Mark with X below
2.1	Male	
2.2	Female	
2.3	Non-Binary	

3) Please indicate the faculty to which you belong.

		Mark with X below
3.1	Faculty of Commerce	
3.2	Faculty of Humanities	
3.3	Faculty of Information and Communications Technology	

3.4	Faculty of Social Sciences	
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Section B: Social media use information

1) Please indicate all the social media platforms you use.

		Mark with X below
1.1	Facebook	
1.2	Twitter	
1.3	Instagram	
1.4	YouTube	
1.5	Blogs/Forums	
1.6	Reddit	

2) How much time (approximately) do you spend on social media platforms per week?

		Mark with X below
2.1	Less than an hour	
2.2	1-3 hours	
2.3	4-6 hours	
2.4	7-9hours	

3) Are you likely to change your attitude towards a certain brand, product, or service after you have read positive comments/reviews/online articles about it on social media?

		Mark with X below
3.1	Yes	
3.2	No	
3.3	Not sure	

Section C: Decision-making information

Stage 1: Problem/ Need recognition:

- 4) My private higher learning institution's social media marketing campaigns played a role in my awareness of the institution being a possible higher learning destination of choice for me.

		Mark with X below
1.1	Strongly agree	
1.2	Agree	
1.3	Neutral	
1.4	Disagree	
1.5	Strongly disagree	

- 2) If social media was not used in your need recognition stage, what contributed to making you aware of your tertiary institution's services?

		Mark with X below
2.1	Television ads	
2.2	Radio	
2.3	Newspapers/Magazine/Brochures	
2.4	Word-of-Mouth	
2.5	My higher learning institution's recruitment employees/personnel (face-to-face)	
2.6	Seeing the institution for yourself (physically)	
2.7	Please indicate any other awareness factors applicable to you below:	

Stage 2: Search for information

5) What information sources did you use in selecting to enrol at your higher learning institution?

		Mark with X below
1.1	Campus Visits	
1.2	University internet site	
1.3	University Brochures	
1.4	Social media campaigns	
1.5	Friends and/or acquaintances	
1.6	High School related sources	
1.7	Please indicate any other sources below:	

6) I made use of social media platforms to get more information about the qualifications my tertiary institution offers.

		Mark with X below
2.1	Strongly agree	
2.2	Agree	
2.3	Neutral	
2.4	Disagree	
2.5	Strongly disagree	

7) What kind of information did you look for on social media platforms regarding your higher learning institution?

		Mark with X below
3.1	Student life and events	
3.2	Facilities	
3.3	Reviews/experiences from other students	
3.4	Job opportunities	

3.5	Qualifications offered	
3.6	Fees	
3.7	Please indicate any other reasons below:	

Stage 3: Evaluation of alternatives

- 4) In the decision to select my higher learning institution, I have compared it to other private tertiary institutions using social media platforms.

		Mark with X below
1.1	Strongly agree	
1.2	Agree	
1.3	Neutral	
1.4	Disagree	
1.5	Strongly disagree	

- 5) Which social media platform have you used to evaluate other higher learning institutions?

		Mark with X below
2.1	Facebook	
2.2	Twitter	
2.3	Instagram	
2.4	YouTube	
2.5	Blogs/Forums	
2.6	Reddit	
2.7	None	

6) What information found on you tertiary institution's social media platforms contributed to your decision to join the institution?

		Mark with X below
3.1	Student life and events	
3.2	Facilities	
3.3	Reviews/Experiences from other students	
3.4	Job opportunities	
3.5	Qualifications offered	
3.6	Length of the qualifications	
3.7	Location of the Pretoria Institution	
3.8	Please indicate any other reasons below:	

Stage 4: Purchase

For the following statements, indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
After evaluating alternative higher learning institutions, social media played a big role in my purchase decision.					
The information provided to me during the enrolment procedure is consistent with the information provided to me on social media marketing platforms?					
Stage 5: Post-purchase behaviour					
After enrolling at my private higher learning institution, I shared my thoughts about the institution on social media platforms.					
I feel encouraged to voice my feedback and impression about my school to other potential students on social media platforms.					

1) Do you feel your tertiary institution is interactive enough on its social media platforms?

		Mark with X below
3.1	Yes	
3.2	No	
3.3	Not sure	

2) Please recommend the best tool for interaction and communication for current students and potential students who want to engage with one another and your higher learning institution.

Please answer below:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. For any questions regarding the research, please contact me on the below-indicated details.

Researcher: Zwelibanzi Destiny Gininda

Phone number:

Email:



07 September 2020

Student name: Zwelibanzi Gininda **Student number:** 16002404 **Campus:** IIE Varsity College Pretoria

Re: Approval of BACHELOR OF COMMERCE HONOURS: MANAGEMENT Proposal and Ethics Clearance

HONOURS/PGDIP ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

There are some aspects that you still need to address in your proposal. You will need to address these aspects in consultation with your supervisor before you may proceed (see below):

Please discuss with your supervisor/navigator/lecturer how you will address these issues listed below:

Please note: **Your fieldwork may only proceed once you address the following issues:**

- Your final interview schedule/questionnaire is missing or needs refinement. Your supervisor needs to sign off your final interview schedule or questionnaire. Please synthesise your questions and incorporate some of the questions from your secondary research questions.

In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued.

We wish you all the best with your research!

GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RESEARCH

Permission is granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted.

Please note: The panel has not considered the merits, accuracy or ethical soundness of the research. The only merits examined are the use of The IIE as a sample.

Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The researcher(s) will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/ her sample if the study is not anonymous.
2. The researcher(s) may only use the data collected for research purposes and in no other way.
3. Photographs of human subjects may only be taken if relevant to the research, informed consent was obtained, and even with informed consent, the photographs may not be published on any online platforms.
4. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
5. No names or identifying information of participants may be used within the research and the research must be voluntary.
6. Please make it clear that the information will not be used punitively in any way and participants may in no way be counselled/advised based on this.

Supervisor Katlego Oliphant

Campus Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC):

Janus Snyders

Motivation for high similarity

DATE and TIME: 25 October 2020, 8:00PM

STUDENT NAME AND SURNAME: Zwelibanzi Destiny Gininda

STUDENT NUMBER: 16002404

PROGRAMME and MODULE: BCom Honours in Management (Research Methodology)

ASSIGNMENT NUMBER: 4

ASSIGNMENT DUE DATE: 26 October 2020

I, Zwelibanzi Destiny Gininda (Full Name) hereby declare a high percentage on the similarity report on SafeAssign/Turnitin with a valid reason.

Application for high similarity percentage:

Plagiarism is the use of words, ideas or images of another person, as ones' own without adequately or appropriately acknowledging the source. The Independent Institute of Education (The IIE) view plagiarism as an act of academic dishonesty and will handle it accordingly.

1. I am aware of the approach of The IIE to plagiarism and intellectual integrity.
2. I am aware that the Intellectual Integrity policy and the Student Code of Conduct prescribe the consequences of plagiarizing.
3. I am aware that the quick referencing guide is available on the Student Portal as well as in the Library and Student Support, and following them is a requirement for the successful completion of my assignment.
4. I am aware that should I require support or assistance in using the correct referencing techniques and/or guide to avoid plagiarism, I should approach the lecturers, Librarian or the Student Support team for assistance.

I declare that I have read and understood the 4 points as stated above. I declare that the assignment was written in my own words and there is a valid reason for the high similarity percentage as stated below. (Please motivate the reason in the section provided below.) I also understand that if the reason is not valid and plagiarism is detected that the Intellectual Integrity Policy IIE023 will come into effect.

Motivation for high similarity

Provide a motivation for the high similarity percentage:

My final research report will have a high similarity to previous papers that I submitted on safe assign. Notably my concept document, literature review and research proposal.

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT: _____

DATE: 25 October 2020