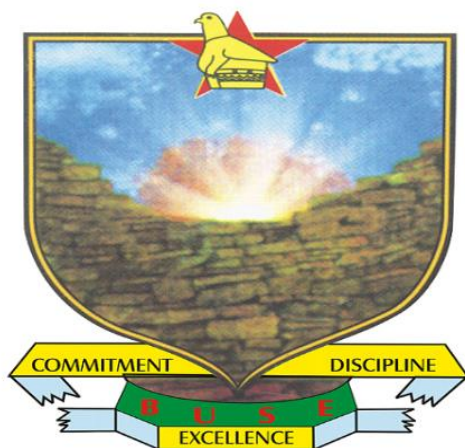


BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF PEACE AND GOVERNANCE



**The Effects of Social Media on Academic Performance: The Case of Bindura University
of Science Education**

By

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**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Peace and Governance in partial
fulfilment for**

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to assess the effects of social media on the academic development of university students at Bindura University of Science Education. Utilizing a qualitative research methodology, the study employed a case study design that involved purposive sampling of 10 lecturers and 20 students. Data collection methods included semi-structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews, allowing for rich insights into participants' experiences. Key findings revealed that a significant majority of students engaged with social media daily for various academic purposes, including research, feedback, and collaborative learning. Platforms like WhatsApp and YouTube were frequently utilized, enhancing resource sharing and peer support. However, the study also identified challenges such as decreased focus, mental health issues, and exposure to unreliable information, which negatively affected academic performance. The conclusions underscored the dual nature of social media as both a valuable educational tool and a potential source of distraction. To maximize the benefits while mitigating drawbacks, the study recommended that university administrators implement structured guidelines for social media use in academic settings. Additionally, incorporating digital literacy workshops would equip students with critical evaluation skills for online content. Establishing clear policies and fostering positive online communities were also recommended to enhance responsible engagement and support students' academic success.

DECLARATION FORM

I, Alfa T Makuyana, hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own research and study, except to the extent indicated in the acknowledgments and references included in the body of the paper, and that it has not been submitted in part or in full for any other degree to any other university.

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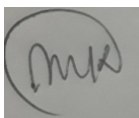
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Chairperson's Signature :



Date : 30/08/2025

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents Rhoda Sigauke Makuyana and Davison Makuyana .
And my siblings Tawanda Makuyana, Takunda Makuyana and Takura Makuyana who helped
me during my studies.

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I humbly thank God for providing enough graces to overcome all the barriers and come out with this project. I am thankful to everyone who contributed to this project in one way or the other. I would like to thank my friends Nyasha Machiwana, Lyn Hukuimwe, Give more Samunda and Wisdom Mutedza for their support during my studies. Their support has been timely and much needed. And I would also like to thank my supervisor Ma'am Supu for her mentorship and support during my studies.

ABBREVIATIONS

BUSE - Bindura University Of Science Education

COVID -19 - Corona Virus

ICT - Information Communication and Technology

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Social media has revolutionized education globally. It fosters interactive and accessible learning environments. As highlighted by Kawachi (2019) platforms like YouTube, WhatsApp, and Facebook have become integral tools for resource sharing, peer collaboration, and academic discussions. According to Bashir (2021) social media transcends geographical boundaries and it enables students to access diverse perspectives and educational materials. This global shift reflects the broader societal embrace of digitalization. This has occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic because it accelerated the adoption of online learning models (Sengupta & Vaish, 2023). In the United States, YouTube has been widely used for hosting educational content, such as tutorials and lectures (Lampropoulos et al., 2022). Similarly, in Canada, platforms like Facebook groups have facilitated collaborative learning (Lampropoulos et al., 2022). These examples highlight the pivotal role of social media in reshaping education across different regions, promoting inclusivity and innovation in learning practices.

In Africa, social media has become an essential tool for education, with platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube playing pivotal roles in facilitating learning. In South Africa, for instance, WhatsApp is widely used for group discussions and sharing educational materials, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when online learning became a necessity (Nkambule, 2023). Similarly, in Kenya, WhatsApp has been adopted by graduate students for collaborative learning, enabling real-time communication and resource sharing (Evans, 2023). These platforms have proven effective in bridging communication gaps and fostering peer-to-peer learning. However, technological and data barriers remain significant challenges across the continent. High data costs and unreliable internet connectivity hinder

equitable access to social media for educational purposes, particularly in rural areas (Ezumah, 2020). Additionally, limited access to digital devices exacerbates the digital divide, leaving many students unable to fully benefit from these tools

In Zimbabwe, social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook have become integral to academic activities, particularly in higher education. According to Zanamwe et al. (2016), WhatsApp is widely used by university students for group discussions, sharing notes, and coordinating academic projects (Mashoko, 2021). This platform's affordability and ease of use make it a preferred choice for collaborative learning. Similarly, Facebook groups are utilized for exchanging educational resources and engaging in academic debates. However, challenges such as high data costs and unreliable internet connectivity significantly hinder the effective use of social media for education in Zimbabwe. Mashoko (2021) highlights that these barriers disproportionately affect students in rural areas, limiting their access to online learning opportunities

1.2 Purpose of the Study

To assess the effects of social media on University students academic performance at Bindura University.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Meishar-Tal and Pieterse (2017) observe that the internet has become a dominant source of information and knowledge. This contributes to the widespread use of social media among students during their academic pursuits. Over the past decade, however, concerns have emerged about students spending more time on social media than on their studies, which may negatively affect their academic achievement. Maya (2015) highlights a link between excessive social media use and lower academic performance, decreased self-esteem, and waning interest in both academic and professional aspirations. Further research suggests that social media

usage can impair students' competence across various subjects. Although social media enables the exchange and generation of ideas, it is also regarded by some as a source of distraction during academic activities (Dontre, 2021). This study therefore seeks to examine the impact of social media on the academic development of students at Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE) in Zimbabwe.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1. To conduct an analysis of the frequency and nature of social media usage among students at Bindura University of Science Education
2. To explore the specific academic purposes for which BUSE students utilize social media
3. To evaluate the perceived benefits and challenges of social media usage on academic performance
4. To propose actionable recommendations for university policies and digital literacy programs that promote responsible social media use among students

1.5 Research Questions

1. What is the frequency and nature of social media usage among students at Bindura University of Science Education?
2. For what specific academic purposes do BUSE students utilize social media?
3. What are the perceived benefits and challenges of social media usage on academic performance among students?
4. What actionable recommendations can be proposed for university policies and digital literacy programs to promote responsible social media use among students?

1.6 Assumptions of the Study

- It is posited that social media usage has a causal influence on academic performance.
- It is also assumed that students at Bindura University of Science Education have a basic understanding of social media platforms and their functionalities.

1.7 Significance of the Study

1.7.1 Universities

For universities, this study will highlight the possible academic advantages of social media. This will offer lecturers opportunities to harness these platforms for promoting collaborative learning. It will also help to enhance critical thinking and facilitate knowledge exchange among students. It will also shed light on the obstacles social media may present to academic achievement. This can equip lecturers with the awareness needed to address such challenges through informed teaching strategies and mentorship. By gaining a deeper understanding of how social media influences students' academic engagement, lecturers can improve communication and cultivate a more supportive educational environment.

1.7.2 To students

The study will encourage students to reflect on their study habits and the potential distractions posed by social media, fostering better time management and focus on their academic work. Researching about social media will empower students to utilize these platforms as tools for academic inquiry and exploration. The study will also help students make informed choices about their online activities, promoting a healthier academic lifestyle.

1.8 Delimitations of the Study

The study was limited to students at Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE) in Zimbabwe, and findings may not be generalizable to other institutions or contexts. The study focused on specific social media platforms commonly used by students, rather than exploring

all available social media technologies. The research only considered undergraduate and postgraduate students, excluding other educational levels such as high school or adult education programs.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

Some participants hesitated to provide detailed responses. The researcher mitigated this by emphasizing confidentiality and explaining the importance of their input to the research. Participants, particularly lecturers, often had conflicting schedules, which made coordinating interviews and data collection sessions challenging. This issue was mitigated by offering flexible time slots and conducting interviews during off-peak hours, such as early mornings or weekends.

1.10 Definition of Key Terms

Social media: According to Kawachi (2019), social media refers to digital platforms that allow individuals to generate and share content or information within online communities. These platforms include a diverse array of tools and technologies designed to support social engagement and foster the development of virtual networks.

Academic Performance: Barrot (2022) defines academic performance as the attainment of learning objectives within an educational context. It is typically evaluated through examinations, coursework results, and general academic achievements. Academic performance serves as an indicator of a student's capacity to utilize acquired knowledge and competencies throughout their studies.

Digital Literacy: Digital literacy is one's capability to effectively navigate and evaluate information using digital technologies (Kawachi, 2019). Digital literacy encompasses a variety

of skills, including technical, information, and communication skills necessary to function in a digital environment.

Collaborative Learning: Barrot (2022) describes collaborative learning as a pedagogical method where students work together to accomplish shared academic objectives. This approach encourages peer interaction, collective support, and joint knowledge development, thereby enriching the overall educational experience.

1.11 Chapter Outline

Chapter One established the foundational framework for the study by introducing the research background. It articulated the problem statement, emphasising concerns surrounding the use of social media within academic environments. The chapter also defined the study's objectives and research questions, which serve as the guiding pillars of the investigation. Furthermore, it addressed the study's significance, outlining its importance for both students and educators, and clarified the scope through a discussion of its delimitations.

Chapter Two explored existing scholarly work on the relationship between social media and academic performance. It reviewed major theoretical models and conceptual frameworks relevant to the topic, offering a critical evaluation of prior research. This chapter identified gaps in the literature that the current study seeks to address, thereby establishing the theoretical foundation and justification for the research.

Chapter Three described the methodological approach adopted for the study. It detailed the research design, including the specific strategies employed for data collection and analysis. The chapter also explained the sampling procedures, criteria for participant selection, and the instruments used to gather data, ensuring methodological rigor and coherence throughout the research process.

Chapter Four presented the study's findings in a structured and accessible format. It analysed and interpreted the data obtained from participants, revealing significant patterns and insights regarding the influence of social media on academic outcomes. The chapter incorporated visual aids such as tables and figures, along with qualitative narratives, to support the interpretation and provide a holistic view of the results.

Chapter Five, the concluding chapter, synthesized the main findings and drew evidence-based conclusions. It offered practical recommendations for students, educators, and policymakers on leveraging social media to support academic growth. The chapter also proposed directions for future research, highlighting areas that warrant further exploration to expand on the current study's contributions and address remaining questions in the field.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the body of literature relevant to understanding how social media impacts the academic development of university students. It presents an in-depth review of key theoretical frameworks, such as the Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Social Presence Theory, which shed light on students' motivations for engaging with social media and the ways these platforms shape their academic interactions. In addition, the chapter examines the diverse academic functions that social media serves for students.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory

The uses and gratifications theory will be used in the study. As stated by Meishar-Tal and Pieterse (2017) this theory suggests that individuals actively choose media depending on their needs and desires. These which can include the need to communicate or entertainment. In the context of academic purposes, Meishar-Tal and Pieterse (2017) note that students often use social media to connect with peers, access educational resources, and stay updated on relevant topics. By analyzing how students utilize social media for learning, educators can identify patterns that influence academic performance. For instance, students may seek out study groups on platforms like Facebook or follow educational influencers on Instagram for tips and motivation (Gruzd et al., 2018). However, the theory also highlights potential pitfalls, such as the tendency to become distracted by non-educational content or engage in passive consumption rather than active learning (Meishar-Tal & Pieterse, 2017). Understanding these

dynamics enables educators to guide students in optimizing their social media use for academic success. Encouraging students to focus on content that aligns with their educational goals can enhance their learning experience while minimizing the negative impacts of distraction or misinformation (Meishar-Tal & Pieterse, 2017). Ultimately, applying uses and gratifications theory allows for a nuanced exploration of students' online behaviours and their implications for academic achievement.

2.2.2 Social Presence Theory

This study incorporates social presence theory as a key framework for examining the influence of social media on students' academic engagement. Within educational contexts, the theory is instrumental in assessing how social media affects students' sense of belonging and their participation in learning activities (Al-dheleeai et al., 2020). The degree of social presence experienced by students can vary depending on the communication medium—platforms that support video conferencing or real-time chat often promote stronger interpersonal connections than those relying solely on text-based formats such as discussion boards or posts (Al-dheleeai et al., 2020). Understanding these variations enables educators to evaluate how different modes of interaction shape students' involvement and sense of community in academic settings. Kawachi (2019) emphasizes that heightened social presence can foster collaboration and motivation, prompting students to engage more actively in group work and academic discourse. In contrast, limited social presence may contribute to feelings of detachment or reduced participation, especially in virtual learning environments (Kawachi, 2019). Applying social presence theory allows educators to design interventions that strengthen student connectivity, for instance, by integrating interactive features into online courses or promoting the use of multimedia tools. Enhancing social presence in academic contexts can ultimately lead to greater student satisfaction and improved academic performance.

2.3 Evolution of Social Media in Education

The integration of social media into education has been influenced by both historical developments and technological progress. The COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a significant catalyst for its integration into academic settings. Historically, the rise of Web 2.0 technologies in the early 2000s enabled interactive platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to emerge, fostering collaborative learning environments (Perez et al., 2023). These platforms allowed students and educators to share resources, engage in discussions, and access diverse perspectives, marking a shift from traditional, passive learning methods to more dynamic, participatory approaches. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this digital transformation, as lockdowns and social distancing measures forced educational institutions to adopt online learning models. Sengupta and Vaish (2023) highlight that social media became indispensable during this period, facilitating virtual classrooms, peer collaboration, and access to educational content. Platforms like WhatsApp and Zoom bridged communication gaps, while YouTube and LinkedIn Learning provided supplementary resources to enhance understanding. Moreover, the pandemic underscored the importance of digital literacy and equitable access to technology. Scholars like Yun et al. (2023) emphasize that while social media democratized education by making resources widely available, challenges such as digital divides and misinformation also emerged.

2.4 The Role of Social Media in Modern Education

Social media has transformed modern education by creating interactive and accessible learning environments. Platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube enable students and educators to engage in collaborative learning, resource sharing, and interactive discussions. Barrot (2022) highlights how these platforms facilitate peer-to-peer learning and foster critical

thinking. Additionally, social media serves as a vital tool for building professional networks, with students leveraging platforms like LinkedIn to connect with alumni and industry experts (Islam, Sarker, & Islam, 2022). Additionally, it has enhanced accessibility to educational materials, with videos, research articles, and tutorials readily available to supplement traditional classroom learning (Bashir, 2021). However, while these advancements foster academic growth, educators must address challenges such as distractions and misinformation that can negatively impact students' focus and comprehension (Dontre, 2021). By integrating social media responsibly, institutions can create dynamic, inclusive educational ecosystems that prepare students for the digital age.

2.4.1 Social Media and Academic Performance

Social media impacts academic performance in both positive and negative ways. According to Barrot (2022), platforms such as YouTube and WhatsApp improve academic outcomes by enabling resource sharing, peer collaboration, and interactive learning environments. Lee et al. (2021) emphasize that these platforms offer opportunities for students to engage deeply with coursework through real-time feedback and discussions. As highlighted by Islam, Sarker, and Islam (2022), social media fosters interdisciplinary networking and promotes access to diverse perspectives, enhancing academic growth. On the other hand, social media poses challenges that can hinder academic performance. As stated by Dontre (2021), the addictive nature of these platforms and constant notifications often lead to distractions, procrastination, and reduced focus on academic tasks. Branje and Morris (2021) further underscore the mental health concerns associated with excessive usage, such as anxiety and stress, which negatively affect learning.

Empirical studies on social media's impact on the association between social media educational performance reveal contrasting findings. According to Paul (2024), social media

engagement positively influences academic outcomes by fostering collaborative learning and access to diverse resources. As highlighted by Halloli (2023), other studies suggest that social media usage does not significantly impact academic progress, citing distractions and time management issues as key barriers. Similarly, Junco (2021) noted the negative relationship between social media use and educational performance, with procrastination and reduced focus playing significant roles. These findings highlight how social media acts as a facilitator of academic growth and also a potential source of hindrance.

2.5 Digital Communication and Student Engagement

Digital communication is fundamental in enhancing student engagement within contemporary education systems. According to Barrot (2022), tools like WhatsApp, Slack, and Google Classroom create platforms for real-time collaboration and seamless academic interactions. As highlighted by Al-Rahmi et al. (2021), digital mediums not only foster connectivity but also encourage active participation in discussions, which are pivotal in developing critical thinking skills. Lee et al. (2021) further emphasizes that virtual learning environments enrich academic inclusivity, particularly in hybrid and online models. However, challenges like distractions and information overload, as stated by Dontre (2021), must be addressed to maximize its effectiveness. By responsibly integrating digital communication tools, education systems can cultivate more dynamic and engaging learning experiences that prepare students for interconnected futures.

2.6 Social Media Tools

2.6.1 YouTube

Social Media as Learning Tools YouTube serves as a powerful learning tool, offering university students access to a wide array of educational content. According to Bashir (2021),

it provides students with instructional videos, tutorials, and lectures that simplify complex concepts through visual and auditory explanations. As emphasized by Jeng et al. (2017), YouTube channels hosted by educators, researchers, and industry professionals allow students to delve into specialized topics and gain a deeper understanding of their coursework. For instance, students can watch demonstrations of scientific experiments or explanations of mathematical theories that are difficult to grasp in traditional classrooms (Lee et al., 2021). Additionally, interactive functions such as comments and live Q&A sessions foster engagement and collaborative learning, enabling students to clarify doubts and exchange ideas with peers and experts.

2.6.2 WhatsApp

WhatsApp has emerged as an essential learning tool for university students, particularly in facilitating real-time academic communication. According to Lee et al. (2021), WhatsApp provides students with a convenient platform to exchange ideas, share learning materials, and collaborate on projects in a more informal and approachable environment. As highlighted by Barrot (2022), its features—such as group chats, multimedia sharing, and voice notes—enable dynamic interactions that foster collaborative learning and peer support. WhatsApp also allows for timely feedback from instructors and peers, enhancing the quality of academic work through constructive suggestions (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). Furthermore, students use WhatsApp to form study groups, providing spaces for discussing challenging concepts and solving problems collectively. However, as stated by Dontre (2021), it is important to establish boundaries to minimize distractions while maintaining a balance between academic tasks and social interactions. WhatsApp's versatility makes it a valuable asset in modern education.

2.6.3 Twitter (X)

Twitter functions as a dynamic educational resource for university students, offering immediate access to updates, learning materials, and scholarly conversations. As highlighted by Kawachi (2019), Twitter's ability to facilitate concise communication makes it ideal for quick sharing of research findings, articles, and expert opinions. Students actively follow thought leaders, academic institutions, and professional organizations to stay updated on subject-specific trends. According to Barrot (2022), engaging in Twitter threads allows students to participate in academic debates and discussions, sharpening their critical thinking and argumentative skills. The platform's hashtag feature further organizes content, enabling students to explore topics systematically, such as #AcademicTwitter and #ScienceResearch. Furthermore, live Twitter chats hosted by educators and experts foster collaborative learning and allow students to clarify doubts in an informal yet impactful setting (Barrot, 2022).

2.6.4 Facebook

Facebook groups are widely regarded as collaborative hubs for university students seeking academic support and engagement. As emphasized by Lee et al. (2021), these groups foster peer-to-peer learning by creating spaces where students can share notes, resources, and ideas. Whether forming study groups or joining subject-specific communities, Facebook groups allow students to discuss challenging topics and receive guidance from their peers. According to Islam, Sarker, and Islam (2022), educators frequently use these groups to post updates, assignments, and supplementary learning materials, promoting active participation. Barrot (2022) highlights how the platform supports inclusivity, as students hesitant to contribute in classrooms can actively engage in discussions within these online forums. Moreover, groups dedicated to academic research provide opportunities for students to network with professionals and access valuable insights.

2.7 Psychological effects of Social Media

Social media has a significant impact on students' psychological health. It influences both beneficial and detrimental aspects of their mental well-being. Dontre (2021) notes that excessive engagement with social media platforms can contribute to heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and stress. These effects often arise from social comparison, where students feel compelled to measure themselves against peers or uphold an idealized digital persona, ultimately undermining their self-esteem. Moreover, the compulsive nature of social media use leads many students to spend extended periods scrolling, which disrupts sleep routines and limits physical activity, factors that further intensify mental health concerns (Smith et al., 2021). On the other hand, social media can serve as a source of emotional support and foster a sense of belonging. It allows students to connect with others, share personal experiences, and receive encouragement during academically demanding times (Barrot, 2022). Nonetheless, Branje and Morris (2021) stress the importance of cultivating digital literacy and encouraging balanced usage to minimize the negative consequences while maximizing the psychological benefits of social media for students.

2.8 Social Media Usage in Developing Countries

Social media usage in developing countries, including Zimbabwe, faces significant barriers such as expensive data costs, limited infrastructure, and socio-economic challenges. As highlighted by Chiparausha et al. (2022), the high cost of internet access in Zimbabwe restricts students' ability to use social media for academic purposes, creating a digital divide that impacts equitable access to educational resources. Similarly, Chiridza et al. (2016) emphasize that while platforms like WhatsApp are popular due to their affordability and ease of use, the weak internet infrastructure often limits their functionality, particularly for accessing

multimedia content. In the broader African context, Bhanye et al. (2023) note that social media has revolutionized communication and learning but remains a double-edged sword. While it facilitates online learning and professional networking, challenges such as unreliable electricity supply and limited smartphone penetration hinder its full potential. Additionally, Camara et al. (2023) argue that misinformation and the lack of digital literacy exacerbate these barriers, making it difficult for students to discern credible sources and use social media effectively for academic growth.

2.9 Social Media and Ethical Considerations

Social media poses several ethical challenges within academic contexts, particularly regarding plagiarism, cyberbullying, and intellectual property rights. As highlighted by Dontre (2021), the ease of sharing information on platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook often leads to instances of plagiarism, where students copy content without proper attribution. This compromises academic integrity and the originality of work. According to Chiridza et al. (2016), cyberbullying remains another critical issue, with students subjected to harassment that impacts their psychological well-being and academic focus. The informal nature of social media fosters environments where harmful comments may thrive, necessitating robust policies to address such behaviors. Furthermore, as stated by Chiparausha et al. (2022), respect for intellectual property is often overlooked, with copyrighted materials frequently shared without authorization.

2.10 Summary

In summary, the integration of social media into academic environments reflects a nuanced balance between its potential benefits and inherent challenges. This chapter has examined its evolving role in education, highlighting its capacity to promote collaboration, facilitate access to resources, and raise important psychological and ethical considerations.

Theoretical models such as social presence theory and uses and gratifications theory provide meaningful perspectives on student engagement with these platforms and their influence on academic outcomes. Although empirical evidence presents mixed results, it can be inferred that when used responsibly, social media has the potential to enhance learning and support academic growth. Nonetheless, obstacles such as high data costs, the spread of misinformation, and ethical dilemmas underscore the importance of implementing strategic measures to address these issues.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of the methodology used in the study. It details the research philosophy guiding the inquiry, emphasizing the interpretive paradigm that prioritizes participants' subjective experiences. The chapter also describes the qualitative research methods utilized, including case study design and purposive sampling, to ensure a rich understanding of the phenomena. Furthermore, it discusses the data collection techniques, such as semi-structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews that facilitate meaningful insights.

3.2 Research Philosophy

The research paradigm is important for informing the main assumptions in the study. Creswell and Poth (2018) define research philosophy as the underlying belief system that influences the research design and methodology. Creswell and Poth (2018) identifies three primary philosophies which are positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism. The interpretive paradigm will be used in the study. According to Mertens (2019) interpretivism views reality as a subjective experience. Interpretivism emphasises qualitative research methodologies that focus on people's viewpoints and motives. This paradigm extends beyond quantitative data. The research investigated about the subjective experiences faced by students regarding social media. The advantage of using the interpretive paradigm is that it allows researchers to explore complex social phenomena and gain a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences (Mertens, 2019). The other advantage is that the interpretive paradigm emphasizes the importance of context, helping researchers understand how social, cultural, and historical factors influence individual behaviors and meanings (Mertens, 2019).

3.3 Research Methodology

Research methodology encompasses the overarching strategy a researcher adopts to integrate different components of a study into a coherent framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study utilized qualitative methods, which, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), involve interpretive approaches rooted in established traditions of inquiry aimed at deepening understanding. As stated by Denzin and Lincoln (2018) qualitative research methods emphasize the importance of context, participant perspectives and the interpretive nature of the research. The advantage of this methodology is that it emphasizes the importance of context and the interaction between researcher and participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It enabled a deeper understanding of social realities through participants' perspectives, fostering a more nuanced interpretation of findings. Furthermore, the flexibility of qualitative research allows for the adaptation of methods during the study, accommodating emerging themes and insights (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is why qualitative research methods were utilised in the study.

3.4 Research Design

A well-structured research design is essential for identifying appropriate instruments and guiding the overall inquiry process. Stake (2018) describes research design as a blueprint that directs both data collection and analysis, enabling researchers to systematically explore their research questions and hypotheses. This study adopted a case study design, which Yin (2017) defines as an approach focused on examining a specific instance of a phenomenon to generate broader insights. He emphasizes the need for precise case selection and definition to ensure the relevance and depth of findings. In this study, the selected case centres on the academic use of social media. Case study methodology is particularly valuable for unpacking complex phenomena within their authentic settings (Stake, 2018). They allow researchers to explore phenomena in depth, facilitating the investigation of intricate relationships that may not be captured through other methods. Furthermore, this approach enables researchers to gain

rich, qualitative insights from participants' experiences and perspectives (Stake, 2018). Case studies can highlight the uniqueness of a case, making it possible to draw nuanced conclusions that inform theory and practice. This is why the research design will be used.

3.5 Population and Sample

3.5.1 Population

Patton (2019) explains that a research population consists of individuals or entities possessing particular characteristics relevant to the study. This defined group serves as the basis from which the researcher seeks to derive insights or make informed generalizations grounded in the study's results. In the context of the study, the population comprised of lecturers and students at Bindura University of Science Education.

3.5.2 Sample

The sample was selected from the population. Babbie (2021) describes a sample as a smaller segment of a larger population that is used to draw conclusions. He highlights the importance of using appropriate sampling techniques to ensure that the sample accurately reflects the population. The sample comprised of 10 lecturers and 20 students from the university.

3.6 Sampling Method

It is also imperative to outline the sampling methods. Patton (2019) emphasizes that purposive sampling is used when researchers want to identify specific types of cases that will provide the most insight into the phenomenon being studied. It allows for a deeper understanding of complex issues by focusing on particular individuals or groups. Purposive sampling helps the researcher to identify respondents who will give relevant information (Babbie, 2021). The lecturers were selected because they are knowledgeable about how students use social media in their academic endeavours. Students were selected because of their

first-hand experience regarding the use of social media. Patton (2019) asserts that this targeted approach enhances the relevance of the data collected. Researchers can adapt their selection criteria as the study progresses, allowing for adjustments based on emerging insights. This flexibility can lead to more meaningful findings.

3.7 Data Collection Methods

3.7.1 Questionnaires

Semi structured questionnaires were utilised. Flick (2020) views semi-structured questionnaires as a hybrid approach that combines the rigor of structured questions with the openness of qualitative inquiry. This format encourages respondents to share their insights more fully, leading to a more nuanced understanding of the research topic. The combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions allows researchers to quantify certain responses while also capturing detailed insights (Flick, 2020). This dual approach enhances the overall quality of the data. Babbie (2021) points out that semi-structured questionnaires encourage participants to express their thoughts and feelings freely, leading to a deeper understanding of complex issues. This openness can uncover insights that may not emerge from strictly structured questionnaires.

3.7.2 In-depth Interviews

Lecturers responded to in-depth interviews. Creswell and Poth (2018) define in-depth interviews as a qualitative research technique that involves one-on-one interactions between the researcher and the participant. These interviews are designed to elicit deep insights into participants' perspectives. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how students engage with social media as part of their academic activities. Kvale and Brinkmann (2020) emphasizes that in-depth interviews foster a conversational atmosphere, allowing participants to express themselves freely. This openness can lead to the discovery of

unexpected insights and a deeper understanding of the respondents' experiences. Kvale and Brinkmann (2020) points out that the flexibility of in-depth interviews allows researchers to explore topics in greater detail and adjust their questions based on participants' responses. This adaptability can lead to more nuanced findings and richer data. This is why in-depth interviews will be used in the study.

3.7.3 Secondary Data

Various sources of secondary data were used in the study. Flick (2020) describes secondary data as data that is not collected directly by the researcher but is obtained from existing sources, such as government reports, academic articles, or databases. This method can save time and resources while providing valuable insights. In the study, a variety of sources will be utilized to ensure various aspects of the research topic are covered. Scholarly and popular articles that offer insights and analyses relevant to the study, including peer-reviewed publications and feature articles from credible media. In the study, other documented information will play a crucial role in enriching the research findings. This category includes a diverse range of materials such as books, theses, and conference proceedings, all of which provide valuable insights and perspectives on the topic at hand (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2020). These various data sources will be used in the study.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

Silverman (2020) defines validity in research as the extent to which the results of a study represent the phenomenon being investigated. Silverman (2020) emphasizes the importance of ensuring that research instruments effectively capture the intended constructs. Validity was ensured in the research by making sure research instruments effectively capture the intended constructs. Patton (2019) defines reliability as the degree to which qualitative

research findings can be replicated. In order to ensure reliability, the researcher maintained a consistent approach to data collection and analysis.

3.9 Data Presentation and Analysis

The study utilized thematic analysis to interpret and present the qualitative data. This approach simplifies the presentation and enhances the clarity of findings, allowing for more insightful conclusions. The outcomes of the data analysis were explained, leading to well-founded conclusions and actionable recommendations aimed at improving both academic performance and responsible use of social media among students. According to Flick (2020), data presentation involves the systematic classification and organization of data, ensuring that it is easily readable and comprehensible, thereby transforming it into meaningful information. This structured approach facilitates the integration of findings into practical applications for educational improvement (Flick, 2020).

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The study placed a strong emphasis on ethical considerations to protect the rights of all participants. The researcher secured a formal permission letter from the university prior to commencing the study. Informed consent was obtained from each individual involved, ensuring they receive detailed information regarding the study's aims and methodologies. Respondents were informed of their ability to withdraw their consent from the study at any time. Additionally, safeguarding confidentiality and anonymity was paramount throughout the research process.

3.11 Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter outlined the research design and methodological framework adopted for the study. Guided by an interpretive paradigm and qualitative approach, the research sought to uncover participants' subjective experiences, offering rich insights into their

perspectives and the complex social interactions involved. The case study design, supported by purposive sampling and multiple data collection techniques, including semi-structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and analysis of secondary sources, provided a robust foundation for comprehensive inquiry. A strong emphasis on ethical protocols throughout the process reflects a clear commitment to safeguarding participants' rights and well-being.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study's key findings, offering valuable insights into the multifaceted role of social media in academic contexts. The data highlight its utility as a platform for research, peer feedback, and collaborative learning. At the same time, the findings also point to notable challenges, including diminished concentration and emerging mental health concerns. The sections that follow will explore these dimensions in greater detail, outlining both the advantages and limitations associated with social media use in educational settings.

4.2 Respondent Information

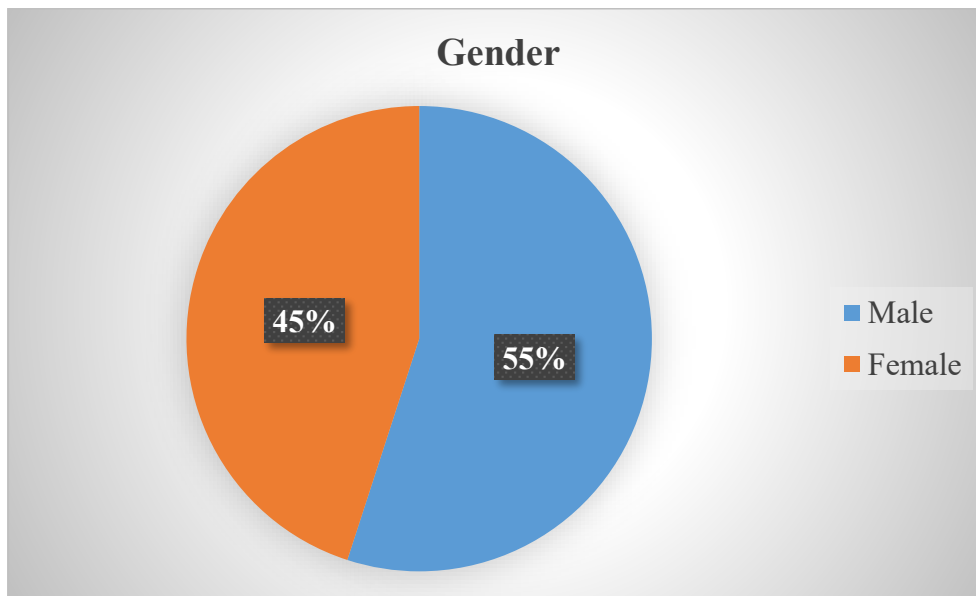
4.2.1 Response Rate

Table 4.1: Response Rate

	Expected	Responded	Response Rate
Lecturers	10	10	100%
Students	20	20	100%
Total	30	30	100%

4.2.2 Gender of Participants

Figure 4.1: Gender of Participants

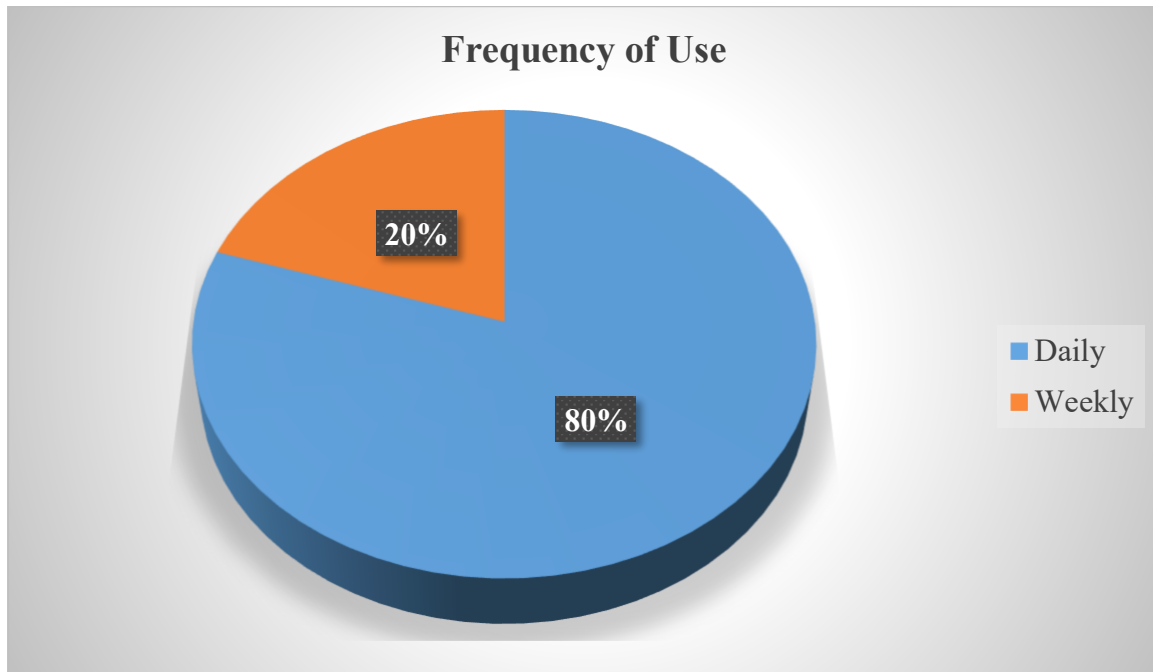


Approximately 55% of respondents were male and about 45% were female. This is because a larger number of university lecturers are male.

4.3 Frequency and Nature of Social Media use

4.3.1 Frequency of use

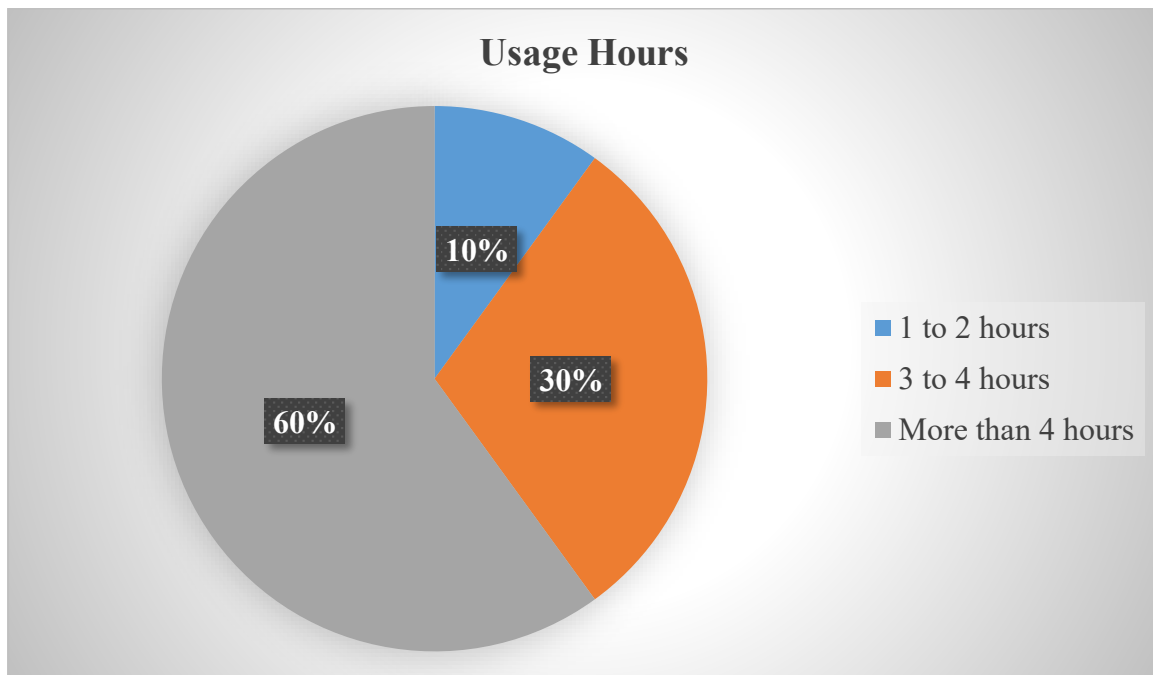
Figure 4.2: Frequency of Use



About 80% of students indicated that they use social media on a daily basis. Another approximately 20% cited that they use social media less frequently. This shows that there is generally a high usage of social media among students.

4.3.2 Usage Hours

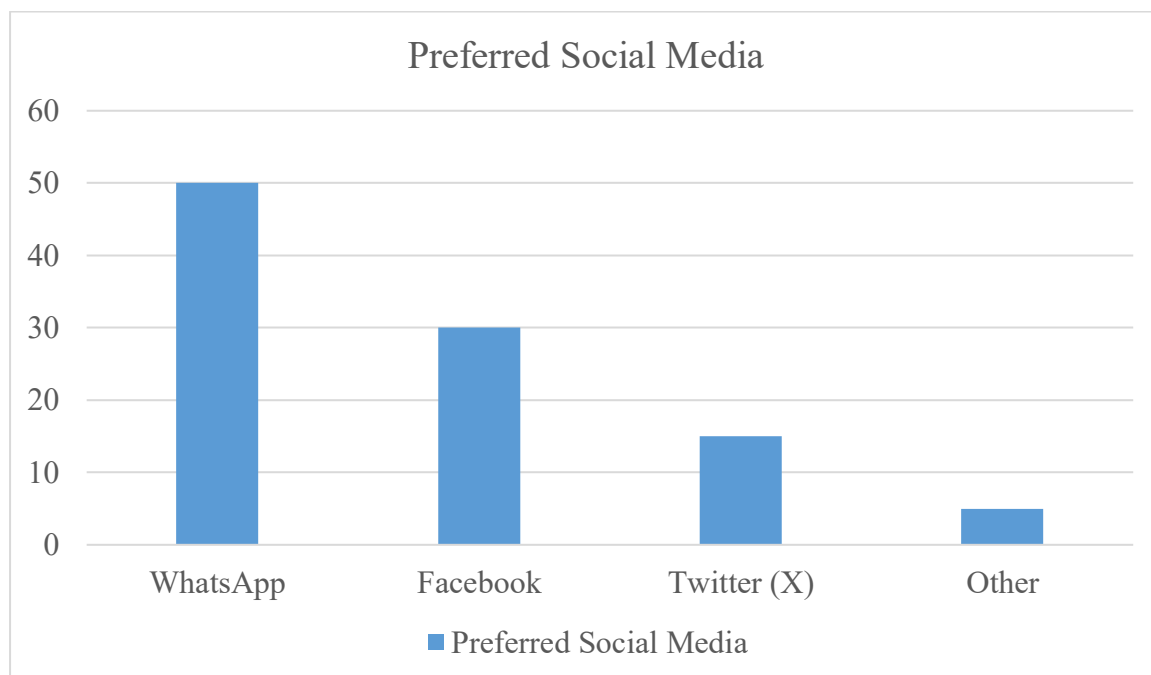
Figure 4.3 Usage Hours



About 10% of students indicated that they spend about 1 to 2 hours on social media on a daily basis. Another 30% of students cited that they spend 3 to 4 hours daily. Lastly, close 60% of students indicated that they use social media more than 4 hours a day. This trend shows that most use social media more frequently on a day to day basis.

4.3.3 Preferred Social Media Platforms

Figure 4.4 Preferred Social Media Platforms



About 50% of students indicated that they prefer using WhatsApp more frequently. Another approximately 30% indicated that they prefer using Facebook mostly. Another about 15% indicated that they like using X which is formerly known as Twitter. Another about 5% shared that they like using other platforms such as Telegram and Snapchat. These trends show that WhatsApp is the most popular social media at the school.

4.4 Specific Academic Purposes for Social media

4.4.1 Research and Information Gathering

The findings indicate that students actively utilize social media platforms for research and information gathering in order to enhance their academic development. One student shared,

"I often use YouTube and WhatsApp to find research materials and academic resources.

It's much easier to access information that helps with my assignments."

Another student commented,

"Using AI tools like Meta has transformed how I conduct research. I can find relevant information quickly, which saves me a lot of time."

A lecturer noted,

"Social media has emerged as a vital resource for students, enabling them to connect with peers and exchange academic materials that support their learning."

Barrot (2022) observes that students increasingly rely on social media as a primary channel for accessing educational content, thereby broadening their exposure to academic resources. This trend underscores the growing significance of digital platforms in academic engagement. Students in the study reported using tools such as YouTube and WhatsApp to obtain study materials (Bashir, 2021). These findings align with Jeng et al. (2017), who emphasize that social media enhances peer-to-peer learning and provides instant access to relevant information, contributing to a culture of ongoing academic development.

4.4.2 Feedback and Support

Respondents emphasised that social media functions as a crucial platform through which students receive academic feedback and support on their academic work, fostering a collaborative learning environment. One student shared,

"I often send drafts of my assignments via WhatsApp. It's much easier to get timely feedback this way."

Another student commented,

"Social media allows me to discuss my dissertation with peers and get their insights. It feels more relaxed than formal meetings. I can also get information from my supervisor"

A lecturer noted,

"Using platforms like WhatsApp for feedback has improved communication. Students feel more comfortable reaching out for help."

Lee et al. (2021) concurs that social media facilitates a collaborative environment, allowing students to share their work and receive constructive feedback, which enhances the quality of their academic output. The collaborative feedback loop facilitated by social media also resonates with social presence theory, which emphasizes the importance of feeling connected in virtual environments (Al-dheleeai et al., 2020). Students' ability to seek timely feedback on their assignments through social media enhances their sense of community and engagement, ultimately contributing to their academic development. Barrot (2022) supports this by highlighting how social media fosters a supportive academic environment.

4.4.3 Collaborative Learning

The participants indicated that social media significantly enhances collaborative learning among students by enabling them to form study groups and share resources efficiently.

One student shared,

"We use WhatsApp to create study groups where we can share notes and discuss assignments. It makes studying more interactive and fun."

Another student commented,

"Collaborating on projects through social media is so much easier. We can share documents and brainstorm ideas in real time."

A lecturer noted,

"Social media facilitates group work among students, allowing for peer-to-peer support that enhances their understanding of complex topics."

Barrot (2022) states that social media platforms gives dynamic spaces for discussions and collaboration, significantly contributing to students' academic development by creating a sense of community and shared learning.

4.4.4 Class Discussions and Engagement

The respondents indicated that social media is a crucial tool in class discussions. It enhances student engagement with course content beyond traditional classroom environments. One student shared,

"I appreciate how we can discuss course topics on social media. It gives me a chance to reflect on what we've learned and see different perspectives."

Another student commented,

"Using online groups for class discussions helps me stay engaged with the material. I feel more involved and connected to my classmates."

A lecturer noted,

"Social media gives an informal medium for students to ask questions and share insights about the course, which encourages deeper engagement with the content."

Supporting this view, Al-Rahmi et al. (2021) stated that social media enhances communication and engagement, allowing students to participate in academic discussions and fostering a more interactive learning environment.

4.5 Benefits of Social Media on Academic Performance

4.5.1 Resource Sharing

The findings indicate that social media facilitates resource sharing among students, enabling them to access and exchange educational content that enhances their learning experience. One student shared,

"I often find useful academic articles and videos shared by tutors on YouTube. It's a great way to discover new resources I wouldn't have found otherwise."

Another student commented,

"We have a group chat where we share links to educational videos and articles. It really helps to have multiple perspectives on the topics we study."

A lecturer noted,

"Social media encourages students to curate and share educational content, which fosters a collaborative learning environment and broadens their access to diverse materials."

Islam, Sarker and Islam (2022) emphasize that resource sharing through social media platforms significantly enriches students' academic resources, ultimately contributing to improved understanding and performance in their studies. Students benefit from the vast array of educational materials available on social media, which enriches their learning experiences (Bashir, 2021). The immediacy of these platforms allows for real-time discussions, promoting a collaborative learning environment that aligns with the principles of active learning.

4.5.2 Formation of Study Groups

It was cited that the formation of online study groups via social media significantly enhances collaborative learning by allowing students to share notes and learning materials. One student shared,

"Creating a study group on WhatsApp has been a game changer. We can easily share notes and help each other understand difficult concepts."

Another student commented,

"Being part of an online study group means I always have access to different perspectives and resources, which really improves my understanding of the material."

A lecturer noted,

"Online study groups facilitate peer-to-peer learning. This allows students to engage with content actively and support each other academically."

Jeng et al (2017) states that online collaborative groups foster deeper engagement and knowledge retention, enhancing overall academic performance by leveraging the collective knowledge of the group.

4.5.3 Increased Engagement

The study found that social media promotes interactive learning, making the educational experience more engaging through discussions, polls, and various interactive content. One student shared,

"Participating discussions on our class WhatsApp page makes learning feel more dynamic and fun. It keeps me interested in the topics."

Another student commented,

"The interactive quizzes shared on Instagram really help reinforce what we learn in class. They're a great way to test my knowledge in a casual way."

A lecturer noted,

"Using social media for interactive content encourages students to engage more deeply with the material. This fosters a lively classroom atmosphere even outside of traditional settings."

Dontra (2021) highlights that interactive learning facilitated by social media enhances student motivation and participation, ultimately leading to a more effective learning experience. Social media's role in enhancing student engagement can be explained through the lens of social presence theory. The dynamic nature of social media allows students to interact meaningfully with course content and peers (Kawachi, 2019). This increased engagement is crucial for deeper learning and retention of information, as noted by Dontra (2021).

4.5.4 Accessibility

The findings highlight that social media provides ease of access and convenience for students, making learning materials readily available across various devices and enhancing their access to beneficial resources. One student shared,

"I appreciate how I can access study materials and articles on my phone anytime, anywhere. It makes it so much easier to study on the go."

Another student commented,

"Having some materials available on social media means I can quickly find helpful resources without digging through multiple websites."

A lecturer noted,

"The convenience of social media allows students to engage with learning materials outside of class hours, which can greatly enhance their understanding and retention of information."

Smith et al. (2021) emphasises that the accessibility of educational content through social media significantly improves students' ability to acquire knowledge and engage with their studies effectively.

4.6 Challenges Associated with Social Media

4.6.1 Decreased Focus

Respondents note that there are various challenges associated with social media. It can lead to decreased focus, as constant notifications and social interactions often divert attention from academic tasks. One student shared,

"I find it hard to concentrate on my studies because I'm constantly getting notifications from social media. It's a real distraction."

Another student commented,

"Even when I try to study, I end up scrolling through my feed instead of focusing on my assignments. It's tough to stay disciplined."

A lecturer noted,

"The potential for distraction from social media is significant, and students need to develop strategies to manage their time effectively while studying."

Latipah et al. (2021) affirm that frequent disruptions from social media can adversely affect students' academic outcomes. This underscores the importance of fostering awareness and

promoting self-regulation in how these platforms are used. The highly engaging nature of social media often contributes to procrastination, as students may prioritize entertainment over academic tasks (Latipah et al., 2021). Additionally, constant alerts and updates can fragment students' attention, impeding their ability to engage in deep learning and fully grasp academic content (Dontre, 2021). Such challenges are particularly pressing in the context of today's digitally saturated environment.

4.6.2 Mental Health Challenges

It has also been noted that exposure to negative content and experiences of cyberbullying on social media can significantly impact students' mental health, leading to increased anxiety and stress, which in turn affects their academic performance. One student shared,

"Seeing negative comments on social media really stresses me out. It can be overwhelming and makes it hard to focus on my studies."

Another student commented,

"I've experienced cyberbullying, and it definitely takes a toll on my mental health. It's hard to concentrate on my assignments when I'm feeling anxious."

A lecturer noted,

"The psychological effects of social media, including anxiety and stress from negative interactions, can hinder students' academic success and overall well-being."

Dontre (2021) highlighted that exposure to negative online interactions can lead to significant mental health challenges for students, ultimately resulting in decreased academic performance and engagement. Furthermore, excessive social media use can lead to anxiety, depression, and

stress, significantly affecting academic performance (Dontre, 2021). The phenomenon of social comparison can foster feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. This is particularly concerning in academic environments, where pressure to succeed is high.

4.6.3 Unreliable Information

The findings indicate that the prevalence of unreliable sources on social media can lead to confusion and misinformed academic choices, particularly when students rely on AI tools like Meta that may provide inaccurate information. One student shared,

"I've come across articles on social media that turned out to be completely wrong. It's frustrating when I think I'm getting reliable information for my assignments."

Another student commented,

"Using AI tools can be hit or miss. Sometimes they give me outdated or incorrect info, which makes it hard to trust what I'm finding."

A lecturer noted,

"The challenge of differentiating between reliable and unreliable sources on social media is apparent. Students must be taught critical evaluation skills so that they can use these platforms effectively."

Supporting this perspective, Branje and Morris (2021) emphasise that the spread of misinformation online can have detrimental effects on students' academic decisions. It is critical for students to utilise the right information.

4.6.4 Time Management Concerns

The findings indicate that time management issues arise as students struggle with procrastination due to the time spent on social media, negatively impacting their study habits.

One student shared,

"I often plan to study, but I end up scrolling through Instagram for hours instead. It really messes up my schedule."

Another student commented,

"Procrastination is a big problem for me. I get so caught up in social media that I push my assignments to the last minute."

A lecturer noted,

"Social media distractions can undermine students' ability to manage their time effectively, thereby hindering the development of consistent and productive study routines."

Meishar-Tal and Pieterse (2017) posit that excessive social media use is correlated with increased procrastination among students, highlighting the need for strategies to manage time effectively and prioritize academic responsibilities. The captivating appeal of social media often encourages procrastination, diverting students' focus away from their academic obligations (Latipah et al., 2021). This aligns with the observations made in literature, where it was noted that the captivating content available on social media often takes precedence over critical academic tasks. This results in delays in completing assignments and preparing for exams.

4.7 Proposed Solutions to challenges

4.7.1 Social Media Literacy

The findings indicate that promoting social media literacy through organized workshops can help students use social media responsibly, emphasizing critical thinking and the evaluation of information sources. One student shared,

"I attended a workshop on social media literacy, and it really opened my eyes to how to critically assess the information I find online."

Another student commented,

"Learning how to evaluate sources has made me more cautious about what I share and believe on social media. It's a skill that I really needed."

A lecturer noted,

"Workshops focused on social media literacy can equip students with the tools they need to navigate online information effectively and responsibly."

Meishar-Tal and Pieterse (2017) stress that fostering media literacy is essential for students to develop critical thinking skills, enabling them to discern credible information and make informed academic choices. Promoting digital literacy is vital for helping students discern credible information from unreliable sources and develop critical thinking skills (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). The pervasive nature of misinformation on social media platforms can significantly hinder students' academic performance, making it imperative to equip them with the skills necessary to evaluate the reliability of online content.

4.7.2 Creating Positive Online Communities

The findings indicate that creating positive online communities can foster academic support, allowing students to share resources and motivate one another. One student shared,

"Being part of an online study group has really helped me stay focused and motivated. We share tips and resources that enhance our learning."

Another student commented,

"These supportive online platforms make it easier to ask questions and get help from peers. It's like having a virtual study buddy."

A lecturer noted,

"Encouraging the formation of positive online communities can significantly enhance student engagement and provide a sense of belonging, which is important for academic success."

Al-Rahmi et al. (2021) highlights that online communities focused on academic support can improve collaborative learning and foster a positive learning environment, ultimately leading to better academic outcomes.

4.7.3 Incorporating Social Media

The findings indicate that incorporating social media into the curriculum can encourage responsible usage by requiring students to engage with these platforms for academic purposes.

One student shared,

"When our professor assigned a project that involved using WhatsApp for research, it made me see social media in a whole new light. I learned to use it for educational purposes."

Another student commented,

"Integrating social media into assignments has helped me understand how to use these tools responsibly while still having fun with my studies."

A lecturer noted,

"Promoting the use of social media for academic purposes can foster students' critical thinking and enhance their capacity for responsible interaction with digital content."

Supporting this perspective, Al-Rahmi et al. (2021) emphasises that integrating social media into educational practices can enhance students' learning experiences and promote responsible usage, preparing them for the digital landscape in a more meaningful way. Incorporating social media literacy programs into the curriculum aligns with the uses and gratification theory. This theory emphasizes the active role students play in selecting media based on their needs (Meishar-Tal & Pieterse, 2017). By focusing on media literacy, educators can guide students to make informed choices about the content they engage with, thereby enhancing their academic experiences and minimizing the risks associated with misinformation.

4.7.4 Establishing Clear Guidelines

The findings indicate that establishing clear policies on acceptable social media use within academic contexts can provide students with guidelines for best practices in engagement and collaboration. One student shared,

"Having clear guidelines on how to use social media for class projects has helped me feel more confident in participating online."

Another student commented,

"The best practices outlined by our school have made it easier to know what's appropriate and how to collaborate effectively with my peers."

A lecturer noted,

"Developing and disseminating clear policies regarding social media use can help create a positive and respectful online environment for students."

Latipah et al. (2021) concurs that well-defined guidelines are essential for fostering responsible social media interaction in academic settings, ultimately enhancing the educational experience and promoting positive online behaviour. As students navigate the complexities of social media, having well-defined policies can significantly enhance their engagement and collaboration while minimizing potential risks. The challenges faced by students, including distraction, misinformation, and mental health issues, underscore the need for structured frameworks that guide their online interactions. Establishing clear guidelines aligns with the principles of social presence theory (Al-dheleeai et al., 2020). This theory highlights the significance of cultivating a sense of community and interpersonal connection within digital learning environments.

4.8 Summary

In conclusion, this chapter has highlighted the complex influence of social media on students' academic development. The evidence indicates that, although these platforms offer substantial benefits, such as facilitating resource exchange, peer feedback, and collaborative learning, they also introduce notable challenges, including increased distractions and potential impacts on mental well-being. The data highlights a predominant usage among students, emphasizing the need for effective strategies to harness the benefits while mitigating the drawbacks. As social media continues to evolve, it is essential for academic institutions to foster a culture of responsible use, integrating social media into educational practices and

promoting digital literacy. By establishing clear guidelines and creating supportive online communities, universities can enhance the academic experiences of their students, ensuring that social media serves as a valuable ally in their educational journeys. The insights from this study underscore the importance of balancing innovation with responsibility in the digital age.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the study by presenting its key findings and conclusions, with a focus on the dual impact of social media on academic performance. It offers targeted recommendations for stakeholders, such as university administrators and educators, to promote responsible engagement with social media. The chapter also highlights directions for future research to deepen understanding of this evolving digital landscape.

5.2 Summary

Chapter One introduced the investigation into how social media influences academic development among university students. It emphasized the increasing integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in educational settings and the prominent role social media plays in students' academic engagement. The chapter articulated the study's objectives, focusing on analysing usage patterns and their implications for academic performance. It also formulated research questions aimed at examining the frequency, nature, advantages, and drawbacks of social media use among students. The chapter underscored the relevance of the study, noting its potential to inform both educators and learners about the dual effects of social media. Furthermore, it outlined the study's guiding assumptions, scope, and limitations.

Chapter Two provided a comprehensive review of scholarly literature and theoretical models related to the academic impact of social media on university students. It explored foundational theories such as the Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Social Presence Theory, which offer frameworks for understanding students' digital engagement and its

academic implications. The chapter examined how social media has reshaped information dissemination, enabled virtual discussions, and fostered collaborative learning, thereby contributing to academic growth. At the same time, it addressed the negative aspects, including distraction, mental health concerns, and misinformation. The literature review revealed varied findings across studies, highlighting the need for continued inquiry, particularly in diverse socio-economic environments.

Chapter Three described the research methodology used to examine social media's influence on academic development. The study adopted an interpretive approach, employing qualitative methods to gain nuanced understanding of participants' experiences. A case study design was selected to explore the specific context of academic social media use. The chapter detailed the target population and sampling strategy, which included 20 lecturers and 20 students chosen through purposive sampling to ensure relevance. Data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews, facilitating a thorough exploration of individual perspectives.

Chapter Four presented the findings of the study. It then explored the frequency and nature of social media use, revealing that a significant majority of students engaged with these platforms daily, often for several hours. Key academic purposes identified included research and information gathering, feedback and support, collaborative learning, and enhancing class discussions and engagement. The findings highlighted both benefits and challenges associated with social media use. Positive outcomes included increased resource sharing, formation of study groups, and improved accessibility to educational materials. Conversely, challenges such as decreased focus, mental health issues, and exposure to unreliable information were also noted. The chapter concluded by emphasizing the need for solutions to enhance the benefits of social media while dealing with its drawbacks in academic contexts.

Chapter Five provided an overview of the study. The chapter discussed key findings, revealing that a significant majority of students engaged with social media daily for purposes such as research, collaboration, and resource sharing, while also confronting challenges like distractions and mental health issues. The conclusions underscored the value of social media as a significant instrument for academic engagement, while also acknowledging its associated risks. The study put forward recommendations aimed at university administrators, educators, and student support services, advocating for the promotion of responsible usage and the strengthening of digital literacy initiatives. It also identified avenues for future research, such as longitudinal studies and comparative analyses across varied educational settings.

5.3 Conclusions

The research concludes that a significant majority of students engaged with social media daily, often spending several hours on these platforms. This high frequency indicates that social media has become a central aspect of students' academic lives, serving not only as a communication tool but also as a resource for academic support and collaboration. The nature of usage varied, with platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook being preferred for group discussions and resource sharing. These insights conclude that social media plays a crucial role in shaping students' academic experiences, facilitating interaction and engagement.

The study concludes that students predominantly utilized social media for research and information access, allowing for swift and efficient retrieval of academic resources. Platforms such as YouTube and WhatsApp emerged as key tools for distributing educational content and facilitating peer discussions. Social media also functioned as a channel for obtaining feedback and assignment support, thereby encouraging collaborative learning among students. These findings underscore the dual role of social media in expanding access to academic materials

and fostering interactive learning environments. When leveraged intentionally, social media demonstrates considerable potential to enhance students' academic growth and overall success.

The study concluded that social media has significant benefits, including enhanced resource sharing, collaborative learning, and increased engagement in academic discussions. Students reported that social media facilitated the exchange of educational materials and ideas, contributing positively to their understanding of course content. However, the study also identified notable challenges, particularly related to distractions and mental health issues. Many students reported challenges in maintaining concentration on their academic work, often disrupted by frequent notifications and the captivating nature of social media content. Moreover, issues related to anxiety and stress stemming from online interactions were commonly noted. These findings highlight the dual role of social media, as a beneficial resource for academic engagement, yet also a significant source of distraction and emotional strain.

The study concluded that there is a need for universities to implement structured guidelines and workshops focused on digital literacy. Students expressed a desire for training on how to critically evaluate information sources and manage their social media usage effectively. Recommendations included developing workshops that teach students about the risks of misinformation and the importance of maintaining a healthy online presence. Additionally, establishing clear policies regarding acceptable social media use in academic contexts could foster a more supportive and respectful online environment.

5.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made in light of the study:

Lecturers may integrate social media into the curriculum as a means of promoting collaborative learning and facilitating the exchange of academic resources. By designing

assignments that require students to engage with social media platforms for educational purposes, instructors can cultivate critical thinking and encourage meaningful interaction with academic content.

It would be helpful for the university to develop workshops focused on digital literacy that teach students how to critically evaluate information sources and manage their social media usage effectively. It can also equip students with the skills to discern credible information, enhancing their academic performance and reducing the risks associated with misinformation.

The university student affairs department can establish support systems that address mental health challenges related to social media use. They can provide resources and counselling for students experiencing anxiety or stress due to online interactions. This can help promote a healthy balance between social media engagement and academic responsibilities.

5.5 Areas for Further Study

To assess the long-term effects of social media usage on academic performance and mental health among university students over time.

To explore comparative research across different universities and disciplines to understand how social media usage patterns and their impacts vary among diverse student populations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Research Permission Letter

Appendix B: Interview Guide for Lecturers

Preamble

My name is Alfa T Makuyana, I am a student of Peace and Governance Studies at Bindura University of Education (BUSE). I am studying for a bachelor's degree program in the field. I'm writing a research paper on the use of social media by students. The title of my paper is 'The Effects of Social Media on University Students Academic Development: The Case of Bindura University of Science Education'. The information obtained during this interview will be used only for academic purposes. Anonymity will also be ensured.

1. What types of social media platforms do you think are most popular among your students for academic purposes?
2. In your experience, what specific academic purposes do students use social media for?
3. What benefits do you believe social media offers to students in terms of academic performance?
4. What challenges or negative impacts have you observed regarding students' use of social media on their academic performance?

Appendix C: Questionnaire Guide for Students

Preamble

My name is Alfa T Makuyana, I am a student of Peace and Governance Studies at Bindura University of Education (BUSE). I am studying for a bachelor's degree program in the field. I'm writing a research paper on the use of social media by students. The title of my paper is 'The Effects of Social Media on University Students Academic Development: The Case of Bindura University of Science Education'. The information obtained during this interview will be used only for academic purposes. Anonymity will also be ensured.

(Tick your Response)

Section 1: General Information

Age: _____

Gender:

Male _____

Female _____

Year of Study:

First Year _____

Second Year _____

Third Year _____

Fourth Year _____

Other: _____

Section 2: Social Media Usage

1. How often do you use social media?

Less than 1 hour per day _____

1-2 hours per day _____

3-4 hours per day _____

5 or more hours per day _____

2. Which social media platforms do you use most frequently for academic purposes?

(Select all that apply)

Facebook _____

Twitter _____

Instagram _____

LinkedIn _____

WhatsApp _____

Other: _____

Section 3: Academic Purposes of Social Media

3. For what specific academic purposes do you use social media? (Select all that apply)

Information sharing _____

Group discussions _____

Accessing educational resources _____

Networking with peers and professionals _____

Seeking feedback on assignments _____

Other: _____

Section 4: Perceived Benefits

4. What benefits do you perceive from using social media for your academic work? (Select all that apply)

Improved access to resources _____

Enhanced collaboration with peers _____

Increased engagement in learning _____

Timely feedback from peers/instructors _____

Networking opportunities _____

Other: _____

Section 5: Challenges

5. What challenges or negative impacts have you experienced from using social media for academic purposes? (Select all that apply)

Distractions from studying _____

Procrastination _____

Information overload _____

Mental health issues (e.g., anxiety, stress) _____

Encountering inaccurate information

Other: _____

6. What recommendations do you have for improving the responsible use of social media among students?

Alfa Makuyana Fourth Draft00000.docx

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