

**Gordon Institute  
of Business Science**  
University of Pretoria

**The needs, affordance and consequences of social media as a  
communication channel: A leader's perspective**

Student no: 24113108

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## **Abstract**

The digital age and technological advancements are significantly changing the way business operates, and place significant reliance on virtual environments and virtual contexts, which requires a fundamental transformation of leadership practices. The manner in which leaders lead, engage and influence internal and external stakeholders are significantly influenced by the digital communication tools. Social media is a unique computer mediated communication channel that affords users social interactions through self-expression, information sharing, feedback loops, on a real time basis using word and multimedia options.

As such, this study aimed to understand the social media landscape relating to the virtual work environment from a leader's perspective. Specifically, the study sought to understand why and how leaders in South Africa use social media, considering the possible opportunities and challenges afforded through social media use, and the underlying factors used to create audience engagement on social media sites. The study focused on the needs, affordance and consequences that the use of social media sites provides leaders in a professional context.

The study followed an inductive, qualitative, exploratory research methodology, with data being collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Research participants were divided into two distinct groups: active users, who frequently engage with their audiences on social media, and passive users, who primarily consume content without significant interaction.

The findings of the study pertaining to active users were mostly in support of existing literature. The insights into passive users' personal preferences and experiences with social media are deemed a significant contribution to the field of social media use. This offers academics new areas of research, but also plays a vital role in gaining a more complete picture of audience behaviour. Insights into passive users' preferences can help shape leader's social media strategies to gain more audience interaction, more followers and unbiased opinions. From a practical business perspective, the study will assist active leaders to navigate the social media landscape in the work context by learning from the experiences of fellow leaders.

## **Keywords**

Social media, active and passive social media, social media presence, social media exchange, social network theory, digital leadership

## **Plagiarism declaration**

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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Sunita Geerish Ruder

4 November 2024

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## **Chapter 1 – Introduction to research problem**

### **1.1 Chapter Introduction**

This chapter introduces the research problem, providing the background and explaining the context in which this research problem was studied. The purpose of the research is explained, including the academic and business rationale for the research.

### **1.2 Background to the research problem**

The digital age and technological advancements are significantly changing the way business operates, the nature of work and work collaborations (Nieken, 2023; Larson & DeChurch, 2020; Roman et al., 2019). The work landscape places significant reliance on virtual environments and virtual contexts which fundamentally require a transformation of leadership practices (Banks et al., 2022; Roman et al., 2019). The manner in which leaders lead, engage and influence internal and external stakeholders are significantly influenced by the digital transition, calling for digital leaders (Banks et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2022; Larson & DeChurch, 2020). Digital leadership requires leaders keeping up with technological advancement by being tech savvy and being able to leverage digital tools to effectively communicate in the virtual environment (Banks et al., 2022; Larson & DeChurch, 2020). There is a consensus in academic literature that leadership is a social influence process, where the behaviours, attitudes and characteristics of a leader influences a follower or employee to follow (Banks et al., 2022; Roman et al., 2019). However, technological advancements and use of digital platforms are blurring the lines of formal hierarchical leadership where informal leadership and individuals with no formal authority are proving to be leaders due to their influence and impact over wide audiences on digital communication channels (Banks et al., 2022; Tur et al., 2022). As such, there is a critical requirement for leaders to become more tech savvy, to effectively utilise and leverage digital tools to maintain relationships with stakeholders and be impactful in their leadership capacity (Banks et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2022; Larson & DeChurch, 2020). In the virtual context, digital leaders should exhibit social influence on followers, be it internal and external stakeholders, who are dispersed in various geographical locations, through asynchronous means utilising digital channels to stay relevant and aligned with the advances in leadership practices (Banks et al.,

2022; Larson & DeChurch, 2020). Accordingly, a major part of digital leadership is through effective virtual communication (Liu et al., 2023; Roman et al., 2019).

Leader communication has been a pivotal factor of leadership since the onset of leadership frameworks, however, in this changing virtual work environment, a leader is deemed to be “good” based their virtual interactions (Roman et al., 2019). The surge of internet-based technologies has reformed the way we communicate, allowing a plethora of computer mediated communication (CMC) channels through texts, e-mails, audio, video messages and social media (Nieken, 2023; Nisar et al., 2019). Social media is a unique CMC that affords users the ability to connect with individuals anywhere in the world, facilitate real time instant conversations, provide a platform for self-presentation and self-expression using words and multimedia options (Bayer et al., 2020; Lei et al., 2019; Blankespoor, 2018; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Users can create and share their opinions, personal experiences or interact on current matters, building social networks and creating influence through the wide reach afforded by social media sites (Blankespoor, 2018; Heavy et al., 2020; Huang & Yeo, 2018). This study focuses on social media sites as the communication channel based on the unique opportunities it can afford a leader to lead, engage and influence stakeholders in a digital work environment.

The social media landscape offers a dynamic variety of platforms for various interactions. Social networking sites such as such as Facebook, X (previously branded as Twitter) and LinkedIn, to name a few, allow individuals to build social connections and networks with others (Bayer et al., 2020; Voorveld, 2019; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). WhatsApp is an application used for text messaging, video and voice call. YouTube is predominantly used for video-sharing and Snapchat specialises in multimedia messaging with the feature of the disappearing “snap” (Bayer et al., 2020; Voorveld, 2019; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). LinkedIn and X are reported to be the most frequently used platforms for professional and business use (Davis et al., 2020; Feng & Johansson, 2019; Lei et al., 2019; Blankespoor, 2018; Huang & Yeo, 2018).

### **1.3 Research problem**

Social media is a global phenomenon, impacting individual’s daily lives and playing a vital role in communication for companies and their leaders (Matthews et al., 2022; Heavy et al., 2020; Agboada & Ofori-Birikorang, 2018). As of April 2024, there were approximately five billion social media users globally, which represent 62% of the

world's population (Petrosyan, 2024). Focusing on South Africa, as of January 2024 there were 26 million social media users, representing 43% of the country's population (Cowling, 2024). Social media provides a unique communication channel for social interactions, online conversations, information sharing and feedback loops (Matthews et al., 2022; Lei et al., 2019; Blankespoor, 2018).

Since social media plays an integral part of the virtual context, in the work environment it is critical to understand why and how leaders are leveraging this channel to be effective digital leaders. Despite the widespread adoption of social media, leaders often hesitate to use it actively, driven by both perceived challenges and a limited understanding of its professional advantages. The study by Porter et al. (2015) revealed that instead of fast adoption, there is apprehension amongst leaders to fully realise the potential of social media. Furthermore, Huang and Yeo (2018) stipulate that executive leaders are lagging in adopting social media and engaging with stakeholders. As such, to understand this apprehension and lag by leaders, the study seeks to understand why leaders choose to engage, or refrain from engaging, on social media sites, focusing on their needs, motivation and intentions regarding its use. Nisar et al. (2019) suggest that with the proliferation of social media in the work environment, leaders will experience some opportunities and challenges from social media use which could have a compounded effect on leaders' usage of social media over time, impacting leadership and the organisation. Since the study does not elaborate on these possible opportunities or challenges, this study aims to determine the opportunities or challenges experienced and perceived by leaders from their social media uses.

Based on leaders' use of social media, Huang and Yeo (2018) identified a research gap in understanding how leaders use their social media role to create an online influence. Similarly, the studies by Gilani et al. (2020) and Agboada and Ofori-Birikorang (2018) call for further research in how leaders use their self-brand to inspire and influence their online communities. These authors raise the question of whether leaders are able to create an influence separate from the company's corporate social media account. Moreover, the authors indicate that the existing body of literature on leader use and engagement from social media is limited to western countries (Agboada & Ofori-Birikorang, 2018). Thus, the same research gap is applicable to South Africa.

Although the literature indicates that leadership is significantly impacted by technological advancements and leaders need to transform their behaviours and interactions to be more impactful in the digital era, there are limited studies to understand this concept from the leader's point of view, specifically with regards to the leader's use of social media. The study by Roman et al. (2019) identified six competencies that leaders need to develop to lead well in the digital work environment – communication, social skills, exchange skills, team management skills, tech savvy-ness and online trustworthiness. However, the study highlights the discrepancy amongst the number of leaders who engage in virtual communications, being fewer rather than most. Liu et al. (2023, p. 2) offer a definition of leadership communication as “textual, verbal, and embodied signals that leaders deliver to others, both purposefully and unintentionally, with the power to reveal aspects of leader themselves, predict leadership outcomes, and affect others.” The authors point to a gap in academic literature – leadership studies examine leader behaviours, but do not consider leader self-reported usage of virtual communication (Liu et al., 2023). Matthews et al. (2022) suggest that although a wide range of studies have been conducted in the domain of social media, leaders' usage of social media is an area which is underdeveloped. The study by Zhou et al. (2024) focused on how a leader's participation in social media impacted the social performance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives in the organisation. However, the authors indicated that an understanding of the leaders' needs, motivations and intentions to use social media is scarce in academic literature. This study further revealed that although academic literature shows that it is important for CEOs to connect and influence via social media, literature based on a leader's point of view is sparse (Zhou et al., 2024). The authors suggestion for a needs-affordance-consequence approach to understand the underlying reasons and related factors which influence a leader's use of social media has been used in this study.

Lei et al. (2019) specifically state that a number of studies have been conducted on the corporate social media of companies, but more research is required to understand why and how individual leaders use social media. The majority of studies conducted in the field of social media use, pertain to corporate social media, providing content analysis and experimental studies on the influence of social media on a number of corporate activities, brand communication (Rust et al., 2021; Voorveld, 2019), customer engagement (Macca et al., 2023; Lim & Rasul, 2022; de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020; Carlson et al., 2018), dissemination of corporate

information and related investor reaction (Gómez-Carrasco et al., 2021; Rust et al., 2021; Feng & Johansson, 2019; Lei et al., 2019). Due to the importance of CSR for companies, many studies in the USA, China and Europe relate to social media impact of disclosures and content analysis of CSR on social media platforms (Macca et al., 2023; Gómez-Carrasco et al., 2021; Benitez et al., 2020; Chu et al., 2020). This supports evidence of a research gap related to the use of social media by executives and the use of social media by corporations.

The need for undertaking this research was identified during the attempt to source literature on leaders own perspective of social media use, regarding their own experiences with social media use and how they chose to engage on social media sites. The body of literature on leader engagement and the benefit they derive from the use of social media is limited to western countries (Agboada & Ofori-Birikorang, 2018). Additionally, top rates journals (three and four-star journals) examining leaders uses, experiences opportunities and challenges with social media and the underlying factors which cause leaders to engage on social media are scarce.

This study identified why and how leaders use social media, and considered the possible opportunities and challenges afforded by the use of social media. The study focused on the needs, affordance and consequences that the use of social media sites provided leaders in a professional context as a new age communication channel.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to understand the social media landscape relating to the virtual work environment from a leader's perspective. Specifically, the study sought to understand why leaders do, or alternately, do not choose to engage in social media from a professional or business context, considering their need, motivation and intention behind creating a social media presence. In understanding the leader's need for social media use, the research extended to explore the possible opportunities and challenges experienced or perceived by the leader through the affordances of social media. A further aim of the study was to determine how leaders curated content by examining the underlying factors that leaders make use of, to influence and engage audiences on social media sites. The research aimed to determine which social media platforms active leaders find most effective (achieve consequences) for the type of content they post in a professional context, and which platforms passive users scroll through in their professional and business context.

In order to gain an understanding of these factors, the study made use of the following overarching theoretical frameworks: social presence theory (SPT), active and passive social media use, social network theory (SNT), social exchange theory (SET) and the Heuristic Systematic Model (HSM) of information processing. By using these theoretical frameworks, the study aimed to gain leaders' insights and contribute to the limited literature addressing leader use and engagement of social media.

### **1.5 Context of the study**

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of senior leaders regarding their lived experiences with social media in a professional work environment. The scope was limited to leaders in C-suite positions, executives, and top management who had direct influence over a broad range of stakeholders. Research participants were divided into two distinct groups: active users, who frequently engage with their audiences via social media, and passive users, who primarily consume content without significant interaction with the content and audience. The length of tenure in a senior leadership or executive role was not used as a criterion for inclusion of participants in the study.

For purposes of this study the personal account of the leader was assessed rather than the corporate social media account of the organisation where they were employed.

### **1.6 Significance of research**

#### **1.6.1 South African context**

The popularity of social media has soared over the past decade (Feng & Johansson, 2019), boasting millions of individual users (Brady et al., 2019), including C-suite leaders, other senior leaders, political and religious leaders as well as corporate organisations (Matthews et al., 2022; Heavy, et al., 2018). However, in the South African professional work environment, there is limited literature available relating to leader's social media presence, adoption and usage of social media over the past decade. Some studies have been conducted on social media specifically relating to the government and public sector in South Africa, however, these articles are not rated in terms of the Academic Journal Guide 2024, nor provide evidence of leader influence through social media (Masiya & Lubinga, 2023; Mkhomazi et al., 2020). The social media content analysis study by Masciandaro et al., (2023) on central

banks, was a single source that referenced a South African company — the South African Reserve Bank's use and engagement on social media to communicate with the public. However, this only concentrated on social media communication at a corporate level and did not consider social media communication at a leader level.

This study aimed to understand why and how leaders in South Africa use their social media accounts to engage with their audience and create a meaningful influence. This aspect of the study is supported by Porter et al. (2015) whose research indicates that the leader's perception of the power of social media results in the use and leveraging of the capabilities of social media to create an impact in the social environment. Therefore, the study also sought to understand the opportunities and challenges that leaders experience with social media communication, in the South African context, as the organisational landscape and public sentiment differs compared to the countries in which similar social media studies were conducted (Gilani et al., 2020; Agboada & Ofori-Birikorang, 2018; Huang & Yeo, 2018).

As Generation Z, who are already tech savvy and proficient on social media, enter the work force, leaders need to align to social media as a key communication tool to bridge the generation gap that exists in the South African workforce (Le Roux, 2019). Thus, this study was needed as a practical lens to assist leaders to navigate the social media landscape in the work context by learning from the experiences of fellow leaders.

### **1.6.2 Business rationale**

From a business perspective the need for this study was required as it is imperative that leaders adapt to changing technologies to remain relevant and create cohesive knowledge sharing environments. Leaders may have a strong offline influence within their business network; however, the digital era requires more online presence to make a significant impact on current matters and inspire future generations. Reactions from the audience on leader's social media posts will provide leaders with a better understanding of audience sentiment and preferences regarding new initiatives, product and service offerings. Social networks with clients and other businesses can enhance competitive advantage. Dialogic communication between leaders and stakeholders on social media will allow leaders to make quicker and better-informed decisions through improved stakeholder communication.

### **1.6.3 Academic rationale**

Social media is more than an entertainment and family, friends' social communication tool. The affordance relating to the professional environment, including leader and employee use requires further research (Zhang et al., 2024). The theoretical gap identified is that there are limited studies conducted in South Africa examining leaders' use of social media and how social profiles and social presence can maximise follower influence and impact. Porter et al. (2015) revealed that there is apprehension amongst leaders to use social media. The study by Huang and Yeo (2018) indicated that leaders are lagging in adopting social media. Furthermore, Zhou et al. (2024) highlights that understanding the leaders' needs, motivations and intentions to use social media is scarce in academic literature. This study further revealed that although academic literature highlights the important for CEOs to connect and influence on social media sites, literature from a leader's point of view is sparse (Zhou et al., 2024). Gilani et al. (2020) also identified the research gap that leaders' perceptions and experiences with social media is lacking. Although Nisar et al. (2019) alludes to the opportunities and challenges leader may face with the use of social media, this aspect is not examined in detail. The study by Kapoor et al. (2018) calls for future research in this domain to refocus on understanding the intentions and behaviours of social media users. A few studies highlighted that there are limited studies conducted in understanding how leaders use their role and self-brand in social media to create an online influence and audience engagement (Gilani et al., 2020; Huang & Yeo, 2018; Agboada & Ofori-Birikorang, 2018). Moreover, the authors indicate that the existing body of literature on leader use and engagement from social media is limited to western countries (Agboada & Ofori-Birikorang, 2018).

This study aims to contribute to the research gaps related to why and how leaders use social media, taking into account the possible opportunities and challenges afforded through social media use.

### **1.7 Research outline**

The structure of the research study follows the definition of the problem and purpose in chapter one, and a literature review contained in chapter two, which presents an analysis of a number of overarching theoretical frameworks to explain social media use and engagement. Chapter three presents the research questions that were used to guide this study, and chapter four outlines the methodology used to undertake this research. Chapter five presents the results of the research obtained through an

analysis of the semi-structured interviews, and a discussion of the findings based on the literature review is presented in chapter six. The research report is concluded in chapter seven which includes recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2 – Literature review**

### **2.1 Chapter introduction**

Chapter one outlined the research problem, highlighting both the academic and business rationale for the study, which is to understand why and how leaders in South Africa use social media, considering the possible opportunities and challenges afforded through social media use, and the underlying factors used to create audience engagement on social media sites. The study aimed to understand the needs, affordance and consequences that the use of social media sites provides leaders in a professional context. Chapter two reviews relevant literature sourced from top rated journals to provide a comprehensive account of the key elements that are known in the field of leader use of social media.

The study made use of the overarching theoretical frameworks of SPT, active and passive social media use, SNT and SET to explain the importance of creating a social media presence for a leader to use to benefit from social exchange with a vast audience and in turn build their social network and create online visibility. The literature reviewed also considered the possible career opportunities for leaders and some of the negative effects of social media use. Media richness theory and the HSM model were considered to explain how underlying factors were used to create social media content. The study focused on a need, affordance and consequence lens for leaders' use of social media.

### **2.2 What is social media?**

Due to the fast-changing nature and integrative use of technology, there is not one commonly accepted definition of social media amongst scholars, as it is difficult to define a fluid concept with a static explanation (Bayer et al., 2020; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). However, authors agree on several similar elements that explain the term social media. Bayer et al. (2020) used Carr and Hayes's (2015) definition as a baseline for social media: that it is an internet-based application that facilitates interactive participation for sharing interpersonal communication between two or more parties, which is user generated to reach large audiences. Similarly, Cade (2018) described social media as a rich media channel which allows real time, dynamic two-way communication for social exchanges and communication of user generated content. Voorveld (2019) and Blankespoor (2018) used Kaplan and

Haenlein's (2010) meaning as a baseline for social media as an internet-based application, where users create their own content which is opportunistically disseminated to public audiences. Based on the literature, the following elements were key to the definition of social media: an internet-based tool which allows users to create, share and interact with a broad audience who derive value to make perceptions based on the content shared, either in real time or asynchronously.

Individuals primarily adopt social media to connect with family and friends around the world (Mollah et al., 2022; Porter et al., 2015), while organisations initially adopt social media to communicate and facilitate information distribution and knowledge sharing internally with employees (Men, 2014; Majchrzak et al., 2013). Social media is so popular because it is accessible to anyone with access to the internet to publicly announce their opinions without restrictions (Cade, 2018). Users are encouraged to create and share their own content, voicing their opinions and perspectives on current topical matters (Bayer et al., 2020; Cade, 2018). The novel features and characteristics of social media distinguish it from traditional communication tools (Rennekamp & Witz, 2021; Bayer et al., 2020; Blankespoor, 2018). This includes the flexibility of a user's choice and preference to communicate with either text, images, audio or video formats, referred to as the message (Bayer et al., 2020; Blankespoor, 2018).

Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021) found that the content format (video or photo, etcetera) has a significant influence on the choice of social media platform selected by the user and in turn on audience reactions. The study was based on media richness theory to prove that by aligning the media channel with the users' needs, communication was effective and efficient (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). Media richness was relevant to this study to understand how leaders curate their content, and if the use of multimedia through video and audio created more audience engagement. Media richness theory confirms that face-to-face communication is the highest along the richness continuum of communication, as it encompasses two-way communication, verbal and non-verbal cues, immediate feedback and a personal focus (Larson & DeChurch, 2020; Jensen et al., 2018). However, the virtual environment also offers a similar style of communication channel through video conferencing facilities (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). Due to the content format posted on social media, there are differing levels of richness, where video and audio posts are deemed to be rich as they provide a sense of interaction, compared to images or photos (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021).

The study by Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021) was conducted on the airline industry through a mixed method approach of audience reactions on Facebook and Instagram fan pages based on the content format where audience reaction was determined by the likes, shares and comments to the post (Rennekamp & Witz, 2021; Huang & Yeo, 2018). The research concluded that rich content such as videos stimulate active engagement via comments from the audience, while photos usually generate likes (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). The study called for similar studies to be undertaken in other business areas. This research study thus aimed to address the gap and determine which social media platforms resulted in the most audience reactions from leader posts based on the content format, in the professional or business context.

Social media also allows for the use of informal language which is not common in traditional written communication or in conference calls (Rennekamp & Witz, 2021; Blankespoor, 2018). The difference in linguistic formality offers a cost and benefit in certain instances (Blankespoor, 2018). Where formal language is detailed, impersonal, in passive voice and objective, it could offer the benefit of preventing misunderstandings (Blankespoor, 2018; Heavy et al., 2018). In contrast, informal language is ambiguous and vague, is more conversational in nature and utilises a subjective approach invoking feelings and opinions, thus affording the audience the possibility of being more receptive and persuaded by the message due to its expressiveness and interpersonal lure (Rennekamp & Witz, 2021).

Furthermore, social media empowers the user to control the tone and non-verbal cues in online messages (Hall et al., 2019; Blankespoor, 2018). Whereas literature suggests that social media should be used as a push and pull channel, the latter referring to requesting feedback from stakeholders and engaging in two-way communication and information sharing, most studies reveal that social media is predominantly used as a push channel, where users' own views and information is pushed and forced onto stakeholders (DePaula et al., 2018; Rennekamp & Witz, 2021). By contrast, traditional communication by way of conference calls and press releases provides a pull channel through its interactive nature of question and answer (Rennekamp & Witz, 2021; Gilani et al., 2020; Lei et al., 2019). Thus, leaders need to be especially alert and conscious of using the appropriate message, language, tone and non-verbal cues to maximise the influence with each social interaction. These factors influence the audience or follower engagement and reaction to a leader's post on social media. Social media savvy leaders are those who can

opportunistically use the two-way conversational nature of social media in real time, at low cost to directly influence, promote convergence of ideas, share knowledge, solicit support and access resources with their audience (Rennekamp & Witz, 2021; Heavy et al., 2020).

The literature of social media research journals reviewed by Kapoor et al. (2018) noted that Facebook and Twitter are the most popular sites used in peer-reviewed journal publications. However, for professional and business-related content, multiple studies reported LinkedIn and X to be the most frequently used platforms (Davis et al., 2020; Feng & Johansson, 2019; Lei et al., 2019; Blankespoor, 2018; Huang & Yeo, 2018).

The profile of corporate social media differs from that of executive personal social media. Corporate social media profiles reflect the official accounts through which a myriad of organisation-specific information was communicated to the public (Feng & Johansson, 2019; Lei et al., 2019). Corporate social media is ideally used for company public relation and marketing initiatives (Rust et al., 2021; Voorveld, 2019), CSR disclosures (Macca et al., 2023; Gómez-Carrasco et al., 2021), crowdsourcing options from non-corporate users (Karunakaran et al., 2022; Lei et al., 2019), consumer engagement (Macca et al., 2023; Lim & Rasul, 2022; de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020; Carlson et al., 2018) and financial information disclosures in capital markets (Feng & Johansson, 2019; Lei et al., 2019; Blankespoor, 2018; Cade, 2018; Grant et al., 2018) due to its cost-effectiveness and wide audience reach. Although leaders were viewed as the intermediary or spokesperson of the firms they managed, all content on their personal account need not relate to the organisation. For the purposes of this study the personal account of the leader was assessed rather than the corporate social media account of their organisation.

### **2.3 Leader use of social media**

Social media affordances include leveraging the leader's own social media presence and profile to establish their own social capital and influence, separate from the company and public relations agendas (Bayer et al., 2020; Heavy et al., 2020). From a fiduciary duty point of view, leaders can share and communicate strategic information, new initiatives and disclosures of the company, by applying control over the content, context and timing of communication, engagements and information sharing (Lei et al., 2019; Nisar et al., 2019; Heavy et al., 2020). Leaders should take advantage of the broad reach of social media to connect and influence multiple

stakeholders, including employees, customers and investors, amongst others, to provide personalised interactions (Nisar et al., 2019; Heavy et al., 2020). Matthews et al. (2022) indicated that a wide range of leaders from various professions, including politicians and religious leaders, are adopting social media due to its unique affordances of communication directly with followers and the ability to influence follower reaction through signal theory (Rennekamp & Witz, 2021) and the Heuristic Systematic Model (Huang & Yeo, 2018). Likewise, for executive leaders, social media offers a myriad of opportunities for the individual and company perspective (Bayer et al., 2020; Lei et al., 2019; Leonardi & Vaast, 2017; Heavy et al., 2020). Some authors indicated that leaders are attracted to leverage social media as an internal and external communication tool with a broad range of stakeholders (Lei et al., 2019; Cade, 2018) along with the non-work, personal interactions (Neeley & Leonardi, 2018) due to the affordance of easy accessibility, cost efficiency and real time interactions of social media. Furthermore, Groysberg and Slind (2012) posited that conversation is the most appropriate form of leadership communication, which is now possible through social media interactions (Rennekamp & Witz, 2021; Larson & DeChurch, 2020). Academic literature indicated that in the USA political environment, Donald Trump overcame the disparity of his opponents' massive advertising campaign by leveraging the power and affordance of social media to communicate and engage directly with the public (Brady et al., 2019).

From a leader perspective of social media use, the following overarching theoretical frameworks were considered relevant and the integrated summary of the links between the various theories for this study is explained in the section below. The theories include SPT, active and passive social media, SNT, SET and career opportunities for a leader, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

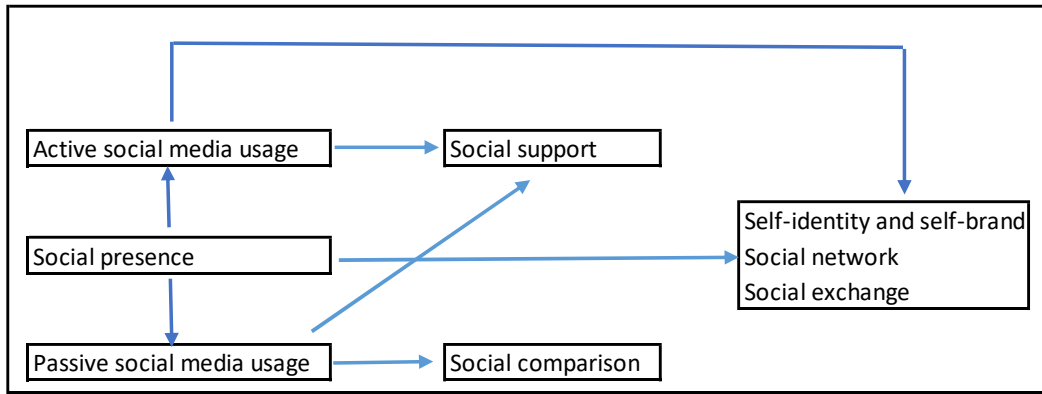


Figure 1

*Integrated summary of overarching theoretical frameworks for leader use of social media*

Source: Researcher adapted based on framework provided in Yang et al. (2021)

### 2.3.1 Social presence theory

Social networking sites require individuals and businesses to create profiles to share personal information to build explicit social connections within that network (Bayer et al., 2019; Voorveld, 2019). Profile creation is based on the SPT which was defined as physical and visual contact, the human and social elements, respectively, which enabled a connection and communication between two parties (Yang et al., 2021; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). SPT was applicable for this study as leaders use social media to facilitate relationship building through social network and communication with stakeholders through social exchange. As such, a leader's social media presence is shaped by their profile and self-image where they present themselves to the audience in their true leadership style. Social presence becomes an inherent factor of social media as the communication channel affords instant, real time intimacy for users (Yang et al., 2021). A social media presence enables users to build social networks through relationships, create social exchanges with others in a virtual context and stay in touch with the outside world (Zhou et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2021). Literature revealed that the majority of adults obtained their daily news from social media sites, keeping them continuously connected to the outside world (Di Domenico et al., 2021). The study by Ren et al. (2024) proclaimed social media as an information channel for instant worldwide news and attention driver compared to traditional media. However, Domenico et al. (2021) stressed that it was vital that users applied their cognitive ability to filter the information overload presented by

social media sites. This aligned to the suggestion proposed by Ren et al. (2024) that users should correlate social media information with traditional media channels to verify the source variability and sentiment intensity which may be exaggerated on social media sites.

A social presence is further influenced by the self-presentation and identity portrayed by the leader (Gilani et al., 2020; Bayer et al., 2020; Agboada & Ofori-Birikorang, 2018). Self-presentation or self-branding is a behaviour which allows the leader to control the self-image, identity and information that they conveyed to the audience so that it may be perceived in a certain manner (Gilani et al., 2020; Bayer et al., 2019; Agboada & Ofori-Birikorang, 2018). However, Bayer et al. (2020) posed this as a particular challenge where leaders are tempted to misrepresent themselves and misinform their followers, tarnishing themselves as being fake by those who know the leader personally (Domenico et al., 2021) Therefore, the leader benefits more by remaining authentic to their true leadership style and behaviours (Bayer et al., 2020). The study by Pagani et al. (2011) concluded that self-identity and self-expression is a driver of active social media use within the advertising domain. Users with personality traits of intrinsic motivation expressed themselves on social media sites regarding products and services, experienced a positive response from customers. Furthermore, the study by Ham et al. (2019) which examined consumer motivation to share content, revealed that social presence and self-presentation are one of the main motivational dimensions. Consumers are motivated to share, connect and create a social presence so other users can understand who they are and the things they care about. Additionally, self-presentation is carefully managed by customers so they can express themselves purposefully in a certain manner to influence other users and earn trust amongst their network to build their own brand for future posts (Ham et al., 2019). By creating a personal brand, leaders are not limited to facilitate company information and initiatives only through this social presence but can maintain a social media identity separate from their organisation (Huang & Yeo, 2018). Leaders were deemed to create social value by becoming social media influencers by shaping, cross pollinating, collaborating and changing the audience attitude and perspectives on a collection of subjects and topical agendas (Heavy et al., 2020; Huang & Yeo, 2018). These attributes enable leaders to become digital leaders, who could drive action, create momentum from others on social networks and encourage online communication and conversations such that strong online communities are built (Banks et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2022; Larson & DeChurch,

2020). DePaula et al. (2018) argued that within the government social media landscape, self-presentation by leaders is used as a push technique to drive their own agenda rather than affording collaborative and information sharing exchanges. Thus, this study aimed to address the research gap in the professional leadership domain in order to understand what motivates leaders to actively engage in social media use, if this was to build their social-identity and self-brand separate from their companies or to serve a greater purpose of being a digital leader and stimulate dialogic and interpersonal interactions with all levels of stakeholders, as well as within their personal network in terms of stakeholder theory (Macca et al., 2023; Lei et al., 2019; Cade, 2018; Huang & Yeo, 2018).

Personality traits of leaders and their behaviours additionally influence distinct outcomes in follower reaction to social media communications (Matthews et al., 2022; Heavy et al., 2020). Personality traits such as overconfidence and grandiose narcissism favour leaders when communication is related to corporate funding and financing (Matthews et al., 2022). Additionally, when leaders apply evangelising and dialogic behaviours, a stronger positive reaction was noted as followers perceived this as promoting convergence, sharing information and sourcing solutions and ideas (Heavy et al., 2020). The experimental study by Grant et al. (2018) revealed different investor reactions to CEO actions of modesty versus bragging in social media compared to the traditional communication method of conference calls. Investors reacted positively in a conference call where the CEO engaged in bragging when discussing the company success. In contrast, investors reacted positively to CEO modesty in social media communication (Matthews et al., 2022; Grant et al., 2018).

In a study by Kapoor et al. (2018), a literature review of social media research journals based on keyword analysis, author co-citations analysis and text analysis of words in the titles and abstracts concluded that the theories most used in social media research were social exchange theory, social network theory and organisational theory. This study revealed that most social media research papers used an organisational lens and considered social commerce, aspects of marketing and political contexts (Kapoor et al., 2018) and did not seek to understand the intentions and behaviours of social media users. The focus of this research project sought to address this gap by exploring the social media behaviours of active and passive leaders. This is explored in the next section.

### **2.3.2 Active and passive use**

A key aspect of social media studies is the extent of social media usage (SMU), which can be classified as either active or passive (Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Verduyn et al., 2022). A leader's social presence is determined by whether the leader is an active or passive user on social media, as this directly impacts the social interactions and engagement level on social media sites. Active social media use is described as interacting with other users, creating and broadcasting owner generated content, direct messaging and responding to comments (Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Verduyn et al., 2022). Passive use refers to consuming and scrolling through social media content without engaging with others and commenting on posts (Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Verduyn et al., 2022). According to this active and passive model, users are active on social media to fulfil a need to connect, have a sense of belonging and gain informational or emotional support from others (Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Zhou et al., 2024; Verduyn et al., 2022). Academic studies hypothesise that active use may have a beneficial effect of social support for users, while the effect of passive use may lead to social comparison and negative effects on well-being (Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Verduyn et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). Social support theory refers to an effect where people feel cared for, valued and can share emotions and experiences with others, while social comparison theory describes how individuals compare themselves to others, and rated their achievements as not as advanced as others or rate others as better than them (Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Davis et al., 2020; Clark et al., 2018). A study conducted on social media use by older adults in China by Yang et al. (2021) supports the hypothesis above and found that social support mediates active use and social presence, whereas passive use mediates social comparison and social presence, and results in loneliness as the negative effect for older adults. However, because the study was based on a population of older adults in China the correlations made may not be valid or transferrable (Yang et al., 2021). The study by Clark et al. (2018) posited that users with a positive attitude towards active social media use fulfil their needs for connecting and interacting with others, and have been found to exhibit the benefits of strong relationships and social support which positively affects happiness and well-being. In order to validate these beneficial outcomes, the study suggested future research to understand the behaviours and motivations of users which underlie the active use of social media (Clark et al., 2018). Additionally, Godard and Holtzman's (2024) meta-analysis study concluded that both active and passive users

have a greater association with online social support, and agreed that active use does yield greater well-being, including a positive effect on the symptoms of anxiety for users. The study cautioned researchers not to make simplistic claims based on the benefits of active use or the possible harm of passive use. To overcome this challenge this study sought to understand these phenomena by gaining the viewpoint of leaders on the benefits and challenges experienced with active and passive social media use. This research project will thus follow the self-report approach suggested by Godard and Holtzman, (2024) as the best measure to determine active and passive social media use by leaders. Furthermore, Verduyn et al. (2022) highlighted that both active and passive use may have a counter effect on outcomes described above. For example, a grandmother would not experience negative outcomes or negative well-being from passively scrolling through her grandchild's social media content. As such, the authors concluded that the use of social media is not inherently good or bad, but is dependent on the context, especially why and how it was being used (Verduyn et al., 2022). The next section expands on one of the many reasons social media is used, which is to create a social network.

### **2.3.3 Social network theory**

SNT explains one of the primary attractions for users of social media — the facilitation of a sense of belonging with others when engaging on social media sites (Yang et al., 2021). Social presence has a close effect on social network theory (SNT), which provides a framework for understanding virtual social relationships, intimacy and commitments amongst social media users and followers (Luqman et al., 2023; Muller & Peres, 2019). SNT highlights online relationships and behaviours that leaders should embody to maintain these relationships. Social network theory was applicable to this study to understand the reasons why leaders deemed it important to build social networks on social media, bearing in mind that they have an established face-to-face network, as well as to determine the benefits and affordances achieved by leaders through the use of social media. Academic literature describes social networks as nodes and ties, where the individual actors or participants within the network represent the nodes and the relationship between said actors or participants represent the ties, affording dyadic relationships (Muller & Peres, 2019; Caniëls & Romijn, 2008). Building on the concept by Pryke (2005), that the actions for these actors create perceived value, Caniëls and Romijn (2008) explained that social connections stimulate areas such as learning and collaboration between the actors within the network, giving rise to new ideas and practices

between diverse people within the network which creates communities of shared beliefs and attitudes. Davis et al. (2020) added that social networks on social media sites afford leaders high visibility. Although Muller and Peres's (2019) study focused on the effect of social networks on innovation performance, their findings that the cohesion, connectedness and conciseness (the three "Cs") of social networks are more reflective of value creation for participants within the network, is applicable to this study. The researcher identified a link between the three "Cs" and Zhou's et al. (2024) needs, affordance and consequences approach. The need level, which refers to engaging on social media sites for a sense of belonging and mutual influence, aligns to cohesion; relatedness and communal interaction align to connectedness; and sharing meaningful information within a social circle align to conciseness. The need then extends some affordances to the leader which results in the consequence of social influence, higher online visibility and digital leadership by taking advantage of the large-scale online access to communicate and disseminate information to various stakeholders (Zhou et al., 2024; Davis et al., 2020; Blankespoor, 2018). However, Muller and Peres (2019) highlighted that a key factor underlying the strong influence within a social network is due to the shared beliefs and homogeneous attributes of the actors, which creates an environment of trust. Where there was trust, peers can easily influence each other as there is a sense of communication source credibility (Brady et al., 2019; Pagani et al., 2011). By contrast, when the communication source is not within the user's social circle, the power of persuasion to alter someone's beliefs is harder (Muller & Peres, 2019). Trust is a critical element of social network theory and is also part of the reason why leaders choose to refrain from being active users on social media (Luqman et al., 2023; Neeley & Leonardi, 2018). Neeley and Leonardi (2018) suggested that leaders are fearful of posting nonwork-related communication on internal social media sites (referred to as enterprise social media) as this could be interpreted as a break in trust between the leader and the organisation or that the leader does not take their leadership role seriously. Trust is also a key element of social exchange for social media use. This is explored in the next section.

#### **2.3.4 Social exchange theory**

A social presence enables social exchange between participants on social media sites (Zhou et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2021). Social exchange theory (SET) posited that individuals interact with each other by weighing the costs versus benefit of their actions and relationships and engage when the cost to benefit relationship is judged

to be optimal (Adongo et al., 2019). The facilitation of knowledge sharing is what creates a social exchange between leaders and followers where valuable and engaging information and knowledge is shared by the leader and results in reciprocity from followers in the form of content generation through comments and reactions (Zhang et al., 2023). In terms of this study, SET assisted the researcher to understand why leaders engage on social media sites considering the benefits versus the costs. The exchange is influenced by key constructs related to trust, respect, control, dependence and co-operation in a two-way relationship (Luqman et al., 2023; Adongo et al., 2019). Trust has a significant bearing in social interactions. As such, social exchange theory was relevant to this study as leaders build their networks through continuous or a series of exchanges with their audience.

The 2023 study by Luqman et al. focused on SET and concluded that, from a leader-follower exchange level, proactiveness by both parties in the way in which they engage on enterprise social media platforms results in both positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side, the proactive use of social media and the resulting communication leads to social and emotional support where trust, mutual respect and the perception that the leader is competent arises (Luqman et al., 2023). On the negative side, employees may be perceived as informal leaders based on the information they share, their level of activity and the degree of innovation their ideas display. This causes psychological distress amongst employees and results in resentful behaviour and misplaced trust (Luqman et al., 2023). This finding deviated from what the authors had expected. Additionally, the study found that relationships were negatively impacted by social exchanges where there was a lack of emotional intelligence and communication skills among leaders and employees, referred to as leader-member exchange (Luqman et al., 2023). A study by Mollah et al. (2022) on leader-member exchange found that although social media use has a significant impact on social exchange between leaders and employees, there is only partial mediation between social media and organisational innovation. The study recommended that leaders and organisations alike use social media for informal and formal communication with Generation Z to better influence and drive innovation from this generation, because they are habitual social media users (Mollah et al., 2022). Accordingly, as these studies mentioned above, focused on leader-member exchange between leader and employees only, and specifically enterprise social media use, this study aimed to determine the extent to which leaders wanted to

engage in social exchange on external social media sites, and if the intention of leaders was to reach multiple stakeholders or only their employees.

A key feature of the virtual environment is that digital leaders need to express effective virtual communication in order to create a social exchange (Nieken, 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Roman et al., 2019). The way leaders frame and signal content to their audience on social media platforms influence how the audience perceived and related to them (Bank et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2022). Rennekamp and Witz (2021) posited that the presence or absence of signals plays a key role in forming audience or follower engagement. Matthews et al. (2022) indicated that leaders should engage in deliberate and costly signalling such that the content makes sense and provides information symmetry to the audience. This is achieved through the use of rhetoric elements, stories, metaphors, facial expression, body gestures, voice and visual signals to frame information so that it resonates and makes sense to the followers (Nieken, 2023; Bank et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2022). Nieken (2023) suggested that leaders who want to be effective digital leaders must develop their rhetoric skills to infer credible information to their audience through their skills, abilities and intentions. Tur et al. (2022) posited that honest costly signals providing credible information is difficult for low ability individuals to transmit. However, Nieken (2023) argued this point, indicating that the nature of social media, with low barriers of entry, large scale communication, often anonymous (since followers did not know the leader personally), make it easy for leaders to fake signals and lie about their intentions. Banks et al. (2022) recommended further research related to digital leader signals and behaviours which influence audience reactions. This recommendation highlights a research gap in the South African context, as the leader's intentional framing and behaviour of curating content for social media posts has not been studied through the self-report method (Zhou et al., 2024; Godard & Holtzman, 2024). Through the self-report method, leaders' opinions and views with regards to use of social media for career opportunities and talent attraction may be better understood. This is covered in the next section.

### **2.3.5 Career opportunities and talent attraction**

Recent literature has acknowledged that there are limited studies looking at the active and passive use of social media in a professional context for exploring career opportunities (Zhang et al., 2023; Davis et al., 2020). To address this gap, the study by Davis et al. (2020) examined the possible career benefits associated with social

media use, focusing on the LinkedIn platform. The study concluded that user networking ability and the frequency of usage mediated seven positive career benefits. These include work-related assistance, career sponsorship, social support, job search assistance, business assistance, protection and political guidance and information and ideas for active users (Davis et al., 2020). Although social support is included as a benefit, it had the lowest correlation in the study. Authors attributed this to the fact that users relied on face-to-face networks for support rather than online networks. The sample population for this study was graduate students who were actively seeking jobs on social media platforms (Davis et al., 2020) and this limits the generalisation of the research finding and indicates the need for more research into passive user behaviours. The study by Zhang et al. (2023) focused on the effects of social media use specifically relating to career exploration and career development. Career exploration is described as the process of sourcing information and cognitive preparation to conduct an effective job search. The author's hypothesis is similar to other studies on social comparison; that social comparison results in anxiety and envy on part of the user, which leads them to engage in career exploration activities for new career goals. In this case active and passive use of social media for career development results in social comparison to colleagues that posted about career achievement and advancement. The study was able to contribute new insights in social comparison theory relating to career success: that career anxiety results in increased career exploration and makes users aware of self-regulation to adjust their cognition and behaviours towards career moves, based on understanding and accepting the self-presentation and impression that is built on social media sites (Zhang et al., 2023). From a recruitment perspective, the research by Koch et al. (2018) revealed that, in the South African context, recruitment opportunities through LinkedIn are severely overlooked. The authors encouraged organisations, recruiters and leaders alike to utilise the affordance of social media to screen potential candidates by viewing their online profile and to attract a wider talent pool of candidates by advertising positions on social media (Koch et al., 2018). The authors cautioned that social media recruitment should be used in conjunction with and as a support function of a planned and approved recruitment strategy (Koch et al., 2018).

As described in the sections above, academic literature indicated that social media and technology advancements have a beneficial effect for leaders, to help build online relationships, connect people around the world and facilitate real time mass communication (Zhou et al., 2024; Nieken, 2023; Bayer et al., 2020, Mollah et al.,

2022). There is also a myriad of opportunities for leaders to actively use social media to become effective digital leader and reap the benefits that the characteristics of social media afford (Matthews et al., 2022; Bayer et al., 2020; Heavy et al., 2020; Leonardi & Vaast, 2017). However, literature also acknowledged the concern and negative effects of social media use, which is covered in the next section.

## **2.4 Negative effects of social media use**

Literature acknowledged the paradox of social media use, where face-to-face interaction is replaced with virtual interactions, news was available in an instant, even though it may be fake news (Domenico et al., 2021) and individuals may be stressed out and experience anxiety from using social media (Tarafdar et al., 2020; Clark et al., 2018). The negative effects of social media use occur when engaging in social media does not fulfil the needs of the individual, where the user experiences isolation, non-acceptance and information shared by connections does not reflect their true lives (Aalbers et al., 2019; Clark et al., 2018). Furthermore, research indicated that passive users are more prone to negative effects such as feelings of low well-being, loneliness, depression, fear of missing out and social comparison due to their choice to lurk behind the screen without interacting or commenting (Tarafdar et al., 2020; Aalbers et al., 2019). By contrast, passive users self-report that they use social media to reduce stress and relieve boredom, and in some cases become habitual users (Tarafdar et al., 2020; Aalbers et al., 2019). Tarafdar et al. (2020) highlighted the conundrum users face with social media use, where they suffer stress and exhaustion from curating content and replying to posts, but also experience an online addiction to social media sites (Yang et al., 2021). The study by Tarafdar et al. (2020) concluded six social media stressors that active users experience: (1) invasion, where users feel that social media is invading their personal lives as they continue using it at inopportune times such as on holiday; (2) pattern, which refers to users feeling stressed as they need to conform to their colleagues or friends user levels; (3) social overload, which is experienced due to the multitude of activities required by active users, such as responding to comments, providing social support to their network and curating content to stay active on social media sites; (4) uncertainty, which refers to the constant updates and changes on social media sites which can be stressful; (5) complexity, which pertains to the difficulties in understanding the technical features, including privacy and data sharing; and (6) disclosure, which is required in order to gain the most benefit out of using social media but creates stress. Research postulated that an individual's personality traits or low self-esteem might

be the reason why they experienced negative effects from social media use, however this is an area that has not been fully explored in academic research (Heavy et al., 2020; Clark et al., 2018). This study aimed to determine if any negative effects were experienced by leaders in south Africa who choose to use social media passively and also the reasons, thereof.

## **2.5 Theoretical framework**

This study aimed to understand the social media landscape from a leader's perspective based on a professional context. The study sought to determine why and how leaders engaged in social media and what benefits and challenges were achieved through a social online presence and the influence thereof on the audience. As such the needs, affordance and consequence lens as described by Zhou et al., (2024) was used as a theoretical framework for this study.

A needs level refers to the psychological needs of a leader to build their brand and reputation, have a sense of belonging, create a network or community to share communal communication and to stay in touch with the world (Zhou et al., 2024; Muller & Peres, 2019). A key factor linked to the needs level is the leader's willingness to actively use and participate on social media platforms (Zhou et al., 2024). From a need's lens, the theoretical frameworks of SPT, social identify, self-brand, SNT and SET were considered to understand the leader's intention and motivation for engaging on social media sites.

The affordance lens refers to the benefits and abilities offered to the leader as a result of the technology and characteristics of social media (Zhou et al., 2024). Affordance is further described by literature as the prospective action that is available to the user because of technology (Leonardi & Vaast, 2017; Majchrzak et al., 2013). In the context of social media, the affordance lens refers to the mutuality of individuals intention and goals with the technology capabilities to result in the potential for a certain action (Leonardi & Vaast, 2017; Majchrzak et al., 2013). In terms of this study, the affordance lens was attributed the benefits that are created as a result of the symbiotic relationship of the leader's social presence, social identity and social exchange when posting content on social media, which creates knowledge sharing, informal and social communication, transparency and information richness, high visibility and network building. The affordance of career opportunities and possible effects of either social support or social comparison were included in this lens to understand the leader's view. The affordance of knowledge sharing on social media

transcended from an intermittent process to a continuous one, due to real time interactions and feedback loops (Matthews et al., 2022; Lei et al., 2019; Blankespoor, 2018; Majchrzak et al., 2013). Informal and social communication is facilitated through linguistic informal language, user control over the tone and non-verbal cues in content and socialising activities (Rennekamp & Witz, 2021; Hall et al., 2019; Nisar et al., 2019). Informal communication stimulates dialogic and interpersonal interactions with all levels of stakeholder, as well as within their personal network (Macca et al., 2023; Lei et al., 2019; Cade, 2018; Huang & Yeo, 2018). The affordance of transparency and information richness is created by leaders using signalling theory with the use of rhetoric elements, audio and visual signals to frame information so that it resonates and makes sense to the followers (Nieken, 2023; Bank et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2022) and that quality of information is not compromised (Nisar et al., 2019). Social media also affords career opportunities (Zhang et al., 2023; Davis et al., 2020). Additionally, leaders can experience social support from their online networks (Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Zhou et al., 2024; Verduyn et al., 2022), or alternatively social comparison when comparing their lives to that of others who display this on social media (Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Davis et al., 2020; Clark et al., 2018).

The consequence level refers to higher online visibility of the leader, large scale communication to various stakeholder on a real time basis, audience reactions as well as an element of extrinsic pressure on the leader to continue curating content and actively engaging in social media (Zhou et al., 2024; Davis et al., 2020; Blankespoor, 2018).

As this study aimed to understand how leaders curated content by examining the underlying factors used by leaders for message content and the resulting influence on the audience to repost or like the message, the Heuristic Systematic Model (HSM) of information processing was applicable. The HSM is a general theory of social information processing explaining how people process social information. In terms of the model, the message or content shared by the executive persuades the recipient in two distinctive ways: one is the use of cues to arrive more easily at a judgment (heuristic information processing), and the other is the effort, scrutiny and careful consideration that constitutes systematic information processing (Yang et al., 2021; Huang & Yeo, 2018). Heuristic information is the audience assessment of the contextual factors of the message sender, including the social attractiveness of the sender, frequency of communication and the industry background (Yang et al., 2021;

Huang & Yeo, 2018). Systemic information relates to the message characteristics including the content type, use of hashtags or links to websites (URLs) and linguistic features relating to the richness of the information (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021; Huang & Yeo, 2018).

Social media topics and subject matter are audience sensitive, where certain conversions or political subjects can have abundant opinions, responses and longevity (Huang & Yeo, 2018). As such, the content of a message is deemed to have the most meaningful influence on the audience (Huang & Yeo, 2018). Adding strategic hashtags, URLs or multimedia makes the message more visible and attracts audience attention quicker, making media richness a key attribute of social media communication (Huang & Yeo, 2018). Lastly, the use of linguistic features such as the leaders' choices to use either formal or informal language may depend on the information being provided and the audience it is directed at. For example, the executive may use formal language when content is directed towards external stakeholders (Huang & Yeo, 2018). However, the interactive nature of social media makes allowances for nuanced language style, typography and the use of emoticons and emojis as an effective part of the language style of the message (Lei et al., 2019; Schulze et al., 2017).

Figure 2 below explains the use of the theoretical framework that has been developed into a conceptual model for the purpose of this study by the researcher. The researcher posited that the use the HSM factors, being the contextual and content factors of the social media message, afforded the leader the opportunity of knowledge sharing, informal and social communication and transparent and information richness, which in turn results in audience engagement through either likes, shares or comments by the audience.

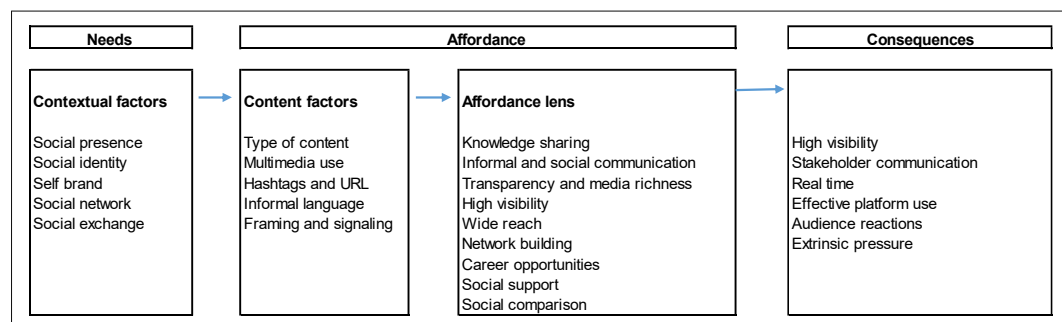


Figure 2

*Theoretical framework used for study*

Source: Researcher created

## **2.6 Chapter conclusion**

Chapter two provided a comprehensive review of the relevant literature in the field of leader use of social media. An introduction of what social media is and how it is used was provided, to set the scene with regard to social media use. The overarching theoretical frameworks of SPT, active and passive social media use, SNT and SET were described in detail to explain the importance of creating a social media presence for a leader, and how active use, social exchange with a vast audience and building an online social network could benefit a leader to gain online visibility and a wider reach. These theories were used to inform the analysis and discussion of the research findings to understand why and how leaders in South Africa use social media. Included in these theories were the possible opportunities and challenges afforded through social media use. Media richness theory and the HSM was used to inform the analysis and discussion for the research findings to explain how underlying factors are used to create social media content. The needs, affordance and consequences lens for leader use of social media further shaped the researcher's questions to address the research problem raised in chapter one.

## Chapter 3 – Research questions

### 3.1 Chapter introduction

Chapter two highlighted the literature review as well as the theory that underpins this study. Based on the research problem, research purpose and literature review, the research study aimed to understand why and how leaders in South Africa use social media, considering the possible opportunities and challenges afforded through social media use, and the underlying factors used to create audience engagement on social media sites. The study aimed to understand the needs, affordance and consequences that the use of social media sites provides leaders in a professional context. This chapter will explain the research questions used as the basis for data gathering to inform the discussion and results of the research study in greater detail.

### 3.2 Explanation of research questions

To accomplish the intended purpose of this study, the main research question, supported by the sub-research questions, was formulated.

***Main question: Why do leaders in South African use social media in the professional context? If not, why not?***

The aim of this research question was to understand why leaders chose to actively engage in social media from in professional or business context. This question specifically aimed in understanding the leader's needs, motivation and intention behind creating a social media presence, in terms of the needs, affordance and consequence lens used by the study. The study sought to determine if the leader consider their self-branding and self-identify on social media to have an impact on their leadership role and ability to influence their online communities. The study also aimed to determine the contrary view on why some leaders choose to passively engage on social media.

***Sub-research question 1: What are the opportunities and benefits that leaders in South Africa experience or perceive from social media?***

***Sub-research question 2: What are the challenges and concerns that leaders in South Africa experience or perceive from social media?***

The purpose of sub-research question 2 and 3 was to gain the leaders own experiences and perceptions of the possible opportunities and challenges afforded through social media use. These questions specifically aimed to explore the

affordance and consequences views of leaders based on the possible opportunities and challenges they experienced through the use of social media. The study sought to understand both positive and negative affordances offered by social media sites to leader in their active or passive use. Furthermore, these sub-questions aimed to determine if leaders experience beneficial or negative effects as a consequence of social media use.

***Sub research question 3: What are the underlying factors that leaders in South Africa use to create content which results in audience influence and engagement on social media posts?***

The aim of this research question was to understand how leaders curated content on social media, by examining the underlying factors used by leaders for content factors through the HSM. This question was formulated to determine the type of content leaders post and how leaders frame these posts, based on the affordance and resulting consequences lens to create influence and audience engagement. The study aimed to understand if leaders intentionally include strategic hashtags, multimedia, videos and linguistic options to make the post more relatable to audiences. In terms of the consequences lens, this research question aimed to determine which social media platforms leaders find most effective to achieve audience reactions based on the type of content they post for active leaders in a professional context, and which platforms passive users scroll through in terms of a professional and business context.

### **3.3 Chapter summary**

This study sought to answer the main research question and three sub-research questions as set out in this chapter, which had been formulated to address the research gaps in the extant literature presented in chapter one and two. Chapter four will present the research methodology utilised in this research study.

## **Chapter 4 – Research methodology**

### **4.1 Chapter introduction**

Chapter four provides an overview of the research methodology followed for completion of this study. The objective of the study was to explore and uncover the phenomena of leaders' own lived experiences in the professional context with social media use, therefore an interpretivist research approach was followed. This chapter details the use of an inductive, qualitative, exploratory research methodology, with data being collected through in-depth semi structured interviews.

### **4.2 Research design**

The research design was an important element of the study as it set out the overall purpose and strategy of the study which enabled the researcher to execute the study (Sallis et al., 2021). As established in the literature, there were limited studies to understand why and how leaders use social media, including their motivation and intentions, and their lived experiences with social media. Additionally, literature posited that leaders were lagging and apprehensive in adopting social media and not evolving with the changing technological environment. The use of social media by leaders was a fairly uncovered social media subject matter. A qualitative and exploratory study was conducted to understand why and how leaders in South Africa used social media, considering the possible opportunities and challenges afforded through social media use, and the underlying factors used to create audience engagement on social media sites. The study focused on the needs, affordance and consequences that the use of social media sites provided leaders in a professional context.

#### **4.2.1 Research philosophy**

The research philosophy provides the fundamental ideas and beliefs of what the study aimed to achieve (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This study aimed to obtain an insider perspective from leaders on their use and experience with social media and its influence on the audience, using a needs, affordance and consequence lens. As such, an interpretivism philosophy was used to understand the leaders' views and perceptions of their role in the social media landscape, within the natural setting of their professional context (Saunders & Lewis, 2018), addressing the research gaps described by multiple social media studies (Lei et al., 2019; Huang & Yeo, 2018; Agboada & Ofori-Birikorang, 2018; Porter et al., 2015). The researcher interacted

with leaders to gain their insights regarding the subject matter, which are subjective in nature.

#### **4.2.2 Research approach**

Inductive research entails a “bottom up” approach where data is collected and analysed to identify emerging themes which build towards theory development (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This study followed an inductive approach. Theoretical frameworks and research gaps shaped the research questions, where the researcher noted alignment or deviations from the literature during the interviews and data analysis. The researcher used these insights from the research participants personal views on their experiences with social media use to build on the theory and, where appropriate, expanded and added to the theory. This explained how the bottom-up approach was implemented and guided the development of the research findings.

As indicated by academic literature, limited studies on how leaders can use their role in social media to create an online influence and the possible opportunities or challenges had been conducted. Thus, this study aimed to contribute to the theory development and theory building (Creswell, 2007). This approach was aligned to the research gap identified by similar studies (Zhou et al., 2024, Yang et al., 2021; Gilani et al., 2020; Huang and Yeo, 2018; Agboada and Ofori-Birikorang, 2018 and Porter et al., 2015).

#### **4.2.3 Research design purpose**

The purpose of the research design was to fundamentally guide the research methodology and plan the data collecting, analysis and interpretations (Sallis et al., 2021). An exploratory study was conducted, as this design guided the researcher to uncover and gain insights on the phenomenon of leaders’ use of social media exploring their own views on social media communication as either active or passive users. The study intended to discover information about social media use, specially related to leaders’ use in the professional context, that was not well understood at present, owing to the limited literature available. An exploratory research design was well suited for a qualitative research method using semi-structured interviews, where the researcher was not sure what the analysis and outcome would reflect (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This was in line with qualitative exploratory studies conducted by

Keles et al. (2023) and Gilani et al. (2020) where research participants perceptions and experiences on social media usage and influence were sought.

#### **4.2.4 Method choice**

The main and sub-research questions of the study required a mono-method qualitative methodology choice as one set of data was collected and analysed (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The single data collection was obtained through in depth, semi-structured interviews with the research participants. Semi-structured interviews allowed for research participants to have open discussions and share their viewpoint on the subject matter as done in similar studies (Gilani et al., 2020; Davis et al., 2020).

#### **4.2.5 Research strategy**

The research strategy was integral to answering the research question and meeting the research goal. The research strategy followed for this study was phenomenological. Based on epistemological idealism, phenomenology posits that the critical source of all meaning and value is through the lived experience of human beings (Creswell, 2007). Individual experiences and perceptions of the leader elicited through an in depth semi-structured interview provided the researcher with a clear and detailed understanding of the phenomenon of social media use by leaders. This strategy was aligned to that described in other social media studies (Gilani et al., 2020; Davis et al., 2020; Huang & Yeo 2018; Agboada and Ofori-Birikorang, 2018). In this study, the researcher sought to understand what the leaders attribute value and meaning to, based on their lived experiences from a needs, affordance and consequence approach due to the nature and characteristics of social media (Zhou et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2023). Additionally, through the phenomenological study, the researcher developed best practices for leaders using social media from their shared experiences (Creswell, 2007).

#### **4.2.6 Time horizon**

The time constraint imposed by the MBA programme dictated a cross-sectional research approach – data was collected and analysed based on a “snapshot” over a planned and co-ordinated period of time (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Furthermore, social media data was collected simultaneously for the sample population. Interviews with the research participants were conducted over a three-week period after ethical clearance was obtained from the University, to understand their lived experiences

with social media and its affordance to influence the audience. This was consistent with similar studies conducted by Keles et al., (2023); Gilani et al., (2020); Huang and Yeo (2018) and Agboada and Ofori-Birikorang (2018).

### **4.3 Research methodology**

Research methodology describes the systemic approach of research techniques and procedures that will be used by the researcher to collect, analyse and interpret the data in order to answer the research question and test the hypothesis (Sallis et al., 2021). The use of a structured approach to the research methodology ensured that the researcher was able to obtain valid and reliable results in order to achieve the research aim and objective (Sallis et al., 2021).

#### **4.3.1 Population**

The population is the entire set of members or group that are applicable to the study that the researcher aimed to engage (Rahi, 2017). Based on the research topic, the population for this study included C-suite leaders, executives and senior top management leaders in the private sector in South Africa. The population was limited to leaders whose leadership roles pertained to teams and work managed within South Africa. The population was extended to all industries to obtain maximum variation of data collection (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). For the purposes of this study, the population included active and passive users as two distinct groups (Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Zhou et al., 2024; Verduyn et al., 2022; Huang & Yeo, 2018). Leaders who were passive users on social media were included as part of the population to determine the reasons and perspectives of these leaders on their choice to not engage on these platforms (Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Verduyn et al., 2022; Clark et al., 2018). By engaging with participants at both ends of the spectrum, the researcher was able to understand both perspectives and address the gaps raised in academic research to either indicate why and how leaders were actively engaging in social media to obtain beneficial effects from a needs, affordance and consequence lens, or explain the apprehension and uncertainty amongst leaders leading to passive use and possible negative effects. As the research objectives aimed to understand the research participants lived experiences and perceptions of social media, reflections on the benefits or challenges, leaders' personal opinions were sought by the researcher.

### **4.3.2 Unit of analysis**

The unit of analysis refers to the specific element or object that the researcher can analyse to draw conclusions regarding the research question and hypothesis (Sallis et al., 2021). The unit of analysis therefore provides an indication of where the input data for the study will be obtained (Sallis et al., 2021). The choice of unit of analysis is dependent on the research aim and the phenomenon being researched. For this study, the unit of analysis was each leader participant who was interviewed, where active and passive leaders were viewed as two distinct groups. This unit of analysis was aligned to similar studies conducted on social media influence (Keles et al., 2023; Gilani et al., 2020; Huang & Yeo, 2018 and Agboada & Ofori-Birikorang, 2018).

### **4.3.3 Sampling method and size**

When a full list of the population can be obtained, the researcher can use probability sampling techniques through various random sampling methods (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). However, since it was impracticable for the researcher to gain access to the full population applicable to this study, a purposive non-probability sampling technique was used for qualitative data collection purposes (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Purposive sampling was used as the researcher's judgement was applied to select the sample which was most useful to meet the purpose and research objectives of this study (Huang & Yeo, 2018). This was achieved by setting an inclusion criterion for the sample. Furthermore, a heterogeneous sampling technique was used to accommodate adequate diverse characteristics providing for sufficient variation of the data collected (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

For the purposes of this study the research participants included holders of senior positions in organisations who were able to directly influence an array of stakeholders. The study included C-suite leaders, executives and senior top management leaders in the private sector in South Africa. The private sector was selected as leaders within this sector are not required by any regulation to share their company information with their stakeholders and therefore their perceptions of social media affordances and consequences to create an impact on their audience aligned to the research objectives. The research participants included active and passive users as two distinct groups. Additionally, the scope was limited to leaders within in South African companies whose leadership roles pertained to teams and work managed within South Africa. A short tenure of the senior leader or executive in their role did not exclude them from this study.

For the purposes of this study, participants were screened before being included in the sample. The following inclusion criteria was set:

- a) Participants who were active users on social media platforms in their personal capacity in a professional context.
- b) Participants who were passive users on social media platforms in their personal capacity in a professional context.
- c) Participants who were currently serving at a C-suite level, executive or top senior management leader position.
- d) Participants who were in the above leadership roles in a South African registered company.

Sample size refers to the number of units selected from the population. The target sample size is an important consideration for the availability of data to provide meaningful analysis and credible research (Marshall et al., 2022; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) suggested that 12 to 18 interviews should be conducted for a phenomenological study. However, Marshall et al., (2022) suggested a sample size of between 15 to 30 interviews for qualitative research designs. Thus, as different authors suggested varying sample sizes for qualitative studies, the researcher followed the guidance provided by Marshall et al., (2022) regarding best practices for sample sizes. This being that the researcher should aim to demonstrate data saturation to ensure there was sufficient data to build a dataset and secondly, that similar previous studies should be used as a guide for the sample size. Similar qualitative studies on social media influences used a sample size of between 10 to 15 participants (Keles et al., 2023; Gilani et al., 2020). Thus, the researcher aimed to conduct between 12 to 15 interviews each at both ends of the spectrum, being representative of active and passive users on social media sites. The researcher conducted 30 semi-structured interviews where 18 interviews were conducted with leaders who were active users and 12 interviews were conducted with passive users, based on leader's self-report method, as guided by academic literature to be useful for such social media studies (Zhou et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2023).

Data saturation is reached when the researcher observes that no new themes appear, and the current themes are repeated by participants (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The following factors are key in achieving data saturation: the nature, scope, quality and number of interviews and the sampling procedure (Marshall et al., 2020).

Data saturation was reached at the 16<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> participants for active and passive users, respectively. The researcher continued with the rest of the interviews for active users post the maximum of 15 interviews to remain professional given the seniority and willingness of such leaders to participate in such a study, as the interviews were set up a month in advance. Based on the nature and scope of this social media study, the researcher was cognisant that the numbers of interviews held achieved data saturation and that participants who met the inclusion criteria were interviewed.

The researcher leveraged her personal social media networks to identify leaders who were active on social media and sent them private messages via these platforms to access their willingness to participate in this study. Furthermore, the researcher sent preliminary WhatsApp messages providing a brief explanation of the study to leaders with whom she had previously engaged or worked in her personal network to identify and categorise them into active and passive users of social media platforms. Positive responses were received from this personal network by leaders who were keen to engage in the interviews. Additionally, the researcher made use of her relationships with the current leaders in her workplace by sending e-mails and personally approaching them to determine if they were willing to participate and requested these interviewees to suggest other participants within their personal and professional networks. The researcher had also provided a brief explanation of her study to her friends and family in order to access their work leader networks. MBA classmates were personally approached by the researcher in their professional capacity as C-suite leaders to participate in the study, with positive responses received. Thus, the researcher was able to screen and reach a diverse range of participants.

#### **4.3.4 Measurement instrument**

The researcher used an interview guide to conduct the in-depth semi-structured interviews to understand the participants experiences and perceptions, including their needs, affordance and consequences, with the phenomenon of either active or passive social media use and gain additional insights (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). As this study followed an inductive research approach to identify the themes relating to why leaders actively or passively use and experience with social media, including the underlying factors of how active users engaged and curated content, semi-structured interviews which including open-ended questions were used by the researcher to allow room to probe or seek clarity for a participant's response (Zhou et al., 2024; Gilani et al., 2020; Davis et al., 2020; Huang & Yeo 2018; Agboada &

Ofori-Birikorang, 2018). The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the researcher to be flexible in adjusting the order of the questions and pivot between a personal and theoretical range of questions, based on the interaction and responses received from the participant (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). All interviews were conducted online by the researcher, using MS Teams to record and transcribe the interview. The interview began with an introduction of the researcher and the research study, followed by questions to acquaint the interviewer with their demographics and characteristics of the participant (leadership role, and user category – active or passive). This was followed by specific research related questions and the interview was concluded by summarising the key elements and thanking the participants for their time. The researcher maintained an open and curious mind allowing more time for the interviewee to share their opinions and experiences. The researcher also actively listened for key terms, ideas and personal experiences and perceptions that could be further promoted. The researcher also made manual notes to keep track of the key points raised.

The interview questions that were used to gain an understanding of the main and sub-research questions were mapped in Table 1 below. The table includes the reference to existing literature that the research leveraged to probe and seek for clarity regarding deviating views and further discussion points.

Table 1

*Integration between research questions supported by academic literature and resulting interview questions*

<b>Research question and sub-research questions</b>	<b>Literature review</b>	<b>Interview questions</b>
<p><b>Main research question:</b> Why and how do leaders in South African use social media to create online influence and audience engagement?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zhou et al. (2024)</li> <li>• Nieken (2023)</li> <li>• Luqman et al. (2023)</li> <li>• Bank et al. (2022)</li> <li>• Matthews et al. (2022)</li> <li>• Yang et al. (2021)</li> <li>• Bayer at al. (2020)</li> <li>• Heavy et al. (2020)</li> <li>• Gilani et al. (2020)</li> <li>• Lei et al. (2019)</li> <li>• Huang and Yeo (2018)</li> <li>• Agboada and Ofori-Birikorang (2018)</li> <li>• Porter et al. (2015)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why do you choose to engage on social media? What is your intention and motivation behind actively using social media?</li> <li>• Which social media platforms do you use, and which one do you prefer? What type of content do you post? What is the frequency of your posts?</li> <li>• Do you think that there are certain behaviours you exhibit when engaging on social media sites?</li> </ul>

<b>Research question and sub-research questions</b>	<b>Literature review</b>	<b>Interview questions</b>
<p><b>Sub research question 1:</b> What are the opportunities and benefits that leaders in South Africa experience or perceive from social media?</p> <p><b>Sub research question 2:</b> What are the challenges and concerns that leaders in South Africa experience or perceive from social media?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zhou et al. (2024)</li> <li>• Godard &amp; Holtzman (2024)</li> <li>• Zhang et al. (2024)</li> <li>• Liu et al. (2023)</li> <li>• Matthews et al. (2022)</li> <li>• Verduyn et al. (2022)</li> <li>• Mollah et al. (2022)</li> <li>• Tur et al. (2022)</li> <li>• Yang et al. (2021)</li> <li>• Davis et al. (2020)</li> <li>• Bayer at al. (2020)</li> <li>• Heavy et al. (2020)</li> <li>• Tarafdar et al. (2020)</li> <li>• Aalbers et al. (2019)</li> <li>• Muller and Peres (2019)</li> <li>• Roman et al. (2019)</li> <li>• Rennekamp &amp; Witz (2021)</li> <li>• Gilani et al. (2020)</li> <li>• Nisar et al. (2019)</li> <li>• Huang and Yeo (2018)</li> <li>• Agboada and Ofori-Birikorang (2018)</li> <li>• Grant et al. (2018)</li> <li>• Clark, et al. (2018)</li> <li>• Leonardi and Vaast (2017)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What have your experiences been with social media use? Explain the opportunities or challenges that you have experienced or perceived from your social media use.</li> <li>• How can you build on these opportunities to create a wider online influence?</li> <li>• How do you perceive that your social media use has the power to create a wider online audience influence?</li> <li>• As a leader, do you experience or perceive that there are other communication channels better suited to create an influence with your stakeholders?</li> <li>• Do you perceive that social media is a generational communication channel and appeals to a certain audience?</li> </ul>

Research question and sub-research questions	Literature review	Interview questions
<p><b>Sub research question 3:</b> What are the underlying factors that leaders in South Africa use to create content which results in audience influence and engagement on social media posts?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nieken (2023)</li> <li>• Bank et al. (2022)</li> <li>• Matthews et al. (2022)</li> <li>• Rennekamp and Witz (2021)</li> <li>• Yang et al. (2021)</li> <li>• Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021)</li> <li>• Lei et al. (2019)</li> <li>• Nisar et al. (2019)</li> <li>• Huang and Yeo (2018)</li> <li>• Agboada and Ofori-Birikorang (2018)</li> <li>• Schulze et al. (2017)</li> <li>• Blankespoor (2018)</li> <li>• Majchrzak et al. (2013)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What type of content do you post? Do you frame your content in a certain manner?</li> <li>• Do you think that the audience are attracted to the use of strategic hashtags and multimedia use in social media posts?</li> <li>• Do you perceive that the use of informal language, nuanced language and emojis make the post more relatable to the audience?</li> <li>• What factors you do consider important when posting on social media?</li> <li>• Are there any ethical considerations that you contemplate when posting on social media?</li> </ul>

Source: Researcher created

#### 4.3.5 Data collection

Data collection is the process of gathering the primary data (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The primary data for this study was collected through the in-depth semi-structured interviews with the participants. These interviews were conducted online through the software application of Microsoft Teams, to ensure that the interview was recorded with the permission from the interviewee, so that the researcher could review and transcribe the interview effectively (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Additionally, the researcher made manual notes during the interview to highlight significant concepts noted. The interviews were arranged for at least 60 minutes to afford

sufficient time to collect the required data. The researcher used an interview guide to outline the context and objective of the study, to ensure that sufficient background of the study was provided to the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The interview guide used by the researcher is reflected in Annexure 1. Each participant was requested to complete an informed consent letter verifying their voluntary participation in the study and informing them that their personal information would be handled in a confidential manner (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The researcher and supervisor details were included in the informed consent letter to enable participant to seek further clarifying information if required. An example of the informed consent letter sent via e-mail to research participants is reflected in Annexure 2. The interview guide together with the informed consent form was included in an e-mail invitation to all participants for the respective interview sessions for record purposes.

The collected data was anonymised and securely stored on the GIBS data storage system. This data will be stored for ten years as dictated by university policy. -The stored data set included signed informed consent statements, transcriptions, recordings, and electronic interviews.

A pilot was conducted with the two independent participants from the sample, one for each distinct group (active and passive users), within the researcher's professional network. The pilot study revealed that the interview questions made sense, were easily understood, the time allocation was sufficient and that the interviewers had a proper technique and recording functionality with Microsoft Teams (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

#### **4.3.6 Data analysis**

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) indicated that data analysis procedures are used to obtain research findings from qualitative data sets. This study followed an inductive research approach to identify the themes relating to leaders active or passive use of social media to understand why and how leaders in South Africa use social media, considering the possible opportunities and challenges this use afforded them. Using the lens of needs, affordance and consequence, a thematic data analysis was performed. Braun and Clarke (2012) indicate that thematic analysis was well suited for qualitative studies since this allowed for a flexible and interpretive approach by the researcher in order to identify patterns and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Based on the inductive approach for this study, thematic analysis allowed the researcher to develop codes and resultant themes which were reflective of the data

set, and did not make use of any pre-existing coding frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This study used the six-phase approach created by Braun and Clarke (2012) and adapted by Byrne (2022). Table 2 below explains the steps that the researcher followed to analyse the data as suggested by academic literature.

Table 2

*Data analysis steps*

Phase	Process
Phase 1: Familiarisation of the data	The researcher evaluated all transcripts derived from Microsoft Teams by listening to the recording and editing the transcript to ensure the accuracy of words and grammar that create meaning in the transcript. The researcher also reviewed the manual notes taken during the interview to ensure these key points were included in the transcript. This process ensured that the researcher had a deep familiarity with the data and selected the appropriate information relevant to the research question.
Phase 2: Generating initial codes	Using Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software, each interview transcribed as text data from Microsoft Teams was digitally input into Atlas.ti. The researcher added a code to each significant statement and pattern made by interviewees. Similar statements and meanings made during the next interviews were given the same code. A total number of 293 codes were generated from the data analysis. The initial codes were the building blocks for the themes that emerged in the later phases. The code created by the researcher was a concise shorthand description of what the researcher deemed relevant in developing themes. All data items were allowed equal bearing.

Phase	Process
<p>Phase 3: Generating themes</p>	<p>The researcher found it difficult to navigate Atlas.ti software to see all 293 codes to merge overlapping or similar concepts. The researcher thus created a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, setting out each participant and the code per interview relating to each research and sub-research question. The researcher worked through columns and rows, colour coding similar and overlapping statements, allowing the researcher to combine similar statements and concepts to create a consolidated number of 66 codes, which were refined into 26 categories. Once the researcher was satisfied that the categories were concise, these were reviewed again to combine where appropriate, and remove those that did not have sufficient backing, resulting in themes being created. The researcher focused on aggregating the individual categories into meaningful themes based on similar patterns and connections. The onus was on the researcher to interpret the relationship between the various codes and the resulting narrative for a theme. This was an iterative process where the researcher considered the research questions and the overall research objectives to ensure the themes clearly represent the findings of the data.</p>

Phase	Process
Phase 5: Defining and naming the themes	The researcher performed a detailed analysis of the themes so that they provided a meaningful and articulate narrative in relation to the dataset and the research questions. In this study, the themes provided a compelling account of the leaders' experience with social media. The theme was then officially named and included in the results chapter. A total of 16 themes resulted from the data analysis in support of the main and sub-research questions.
Phase 6: Producing a report	The researcher completed the data analysis by reporting the themes in a meaningful and logical manner in relation to the study conducted. The leader's experiences and viewpoints with the phenomenon of social media were narrated through the themes identified.

Source: Researcher adaptation from Braun and Clarke (2012)

#### 4.3.7 Data trustworthiness and rigour

Data trustworthiness and rigour for qualitative research is achieved through ensuring the credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability of the quality of data (Keles et al., 2023; Roulston, 2010). In order to ensure the research was sufficiently rigorous and data quality was achieved, the researcher followed the suggestions provided by the academic literature of Roulston (2010). Firstly, two pilot interviews were conducted with participants prior to the primary interviews to test the clarity of the questions and level of information that would be obtained through the responses. This contributed to the reliability and dependability of the research results. The researcher performed data source triangulation through respondent triangulation and theoretical triangulation to enhance the quality and credibility of the data. Respondent triangulation was assessed through heterogeneous sampling of leaders within various leadership roles and industries, which contributing to the variation of the sample. Theoretical triangulation was applied by using the theoretical frameworks of social presence theory, active and passive social media use, SNT, SET, social support and social comparison to explain and interpret the responses obtained from the semi-structured interviews. The researcher adopted a neutral role during the interview

process and refrained from showing emotion to avoid influencing the participant. Furthermore, the anonymity of the participant was assured to them during interview process.

#### **4.3.8 Research ethics**

The researcher applied for ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science Research Ethics Committee, before undertaking the data collection phase. The online application was completed, supported with a brief summary of the research problem, the research methodology, the interview guide and the informed consent letter applicable to this study. The online application was signed by the researcher and approved by the supervisor.

Ethics clearance aimed to ensure that the researcher adhered to the ethical principles required and, through this process, shared the informed consent letter with each interview participant ahead of the interview. While many research participants returned the signed informed consent form prior to the interview, a few verbally consented to the interview and returned the signed consent form after an e-mail reminder from the researcher. At the onset of the interview, the confidentiality of views and information shared during the interview was reiterated, with outcomes being anonymously thematised. Refer to Annexure 3 for the ethical clearance approval form received from the University of Pretoria's Ethics Committee.

#### **4.3.8 Limitations**

This research study was limited to the South African context and therefore cannot be applied in other settings. Due to the size of the sample and the manner in which participants were selected the sample was not representative of all industries in the South African market. Due to the exploratory qualitative nature of the study, generalisation of the study results to the broader population was limited.

The nature of the data collected was from a leader perspective of their lived experiences with social media use, and therefore the study did not make any inference to corporate social media accounts. Based on the qualitative interviews conducted for data collection, the possibility of subject bias might exist in the way research participants interpreted the open-ended questions and if they shared their views and experiences honestly and freely (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Since study participants were limited to the private sector the results might not be transferrable to leaders within the public sector, where information dissemination is more

controlled and regulated in terms of regulatory and legislative laws. Furthermore, the study did not seek to gain the view of employees, other stakeholder or the public as the audience.

The thematic analysis and researcher interpretations of the findings might reflect a subjective bias by the researcher.

#### **4.4 Chapter conclusion**

This chapter presented the research methodology which was followed for completion of this study. The study followed an inductive, qualitative, exploratory research methodology, with data being collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The results of the analysis of data obtained via semi-structured interviews are discussed in chapter five.

## **Chapter 5 – Results**

### **5.1 Chapter introduction**

This chapter aims to present key findings derived from semi-structured interviews with leaders, exploring both active and passive social media use within professional contexts, exploring and uncovering the phenomena of the needs, affordance and consequences that the use of social media sites provides leaders as a communication channel. The results are presented in this chapter based on a total of 30 semi-structured interviews, 18 with leaders who were active social media users and 12 with leader who were passive social media users. The key findings are presented in terms of the research questions formulated in chapter three. The presentation of the results set out below are based on the themes that emerged from qualitative analysis of the interviews in relation to the research questions.

During analysis of the interviews, the findings were first categorised based on significant statements which were categorised into code groups. These code groups subsequently informed the themes that emerged from the data analysis. These were used to answer the research questions where relevant.

This chapter begins with a description of the research participants, followed by data triangulation and the analysis approach. What follows is a presentation of results for the research and sub-research questions identified in chapter three that aimed to answer the overall research question through the sampled participants lived experience of the phenomenon.

### **5.2 Description of research participants**

As this study aimed to understand leaders' views to why they did, or why they refrained from engaging on social media sites in a professional context, the extent of either active or passive social media use is a key factor in understanding this phenomenon, as the participants experiences and views would be significantly influenced by the manner in which they use social media. Therefore, active and passive users were interviewed to understand both sides of the spectrum. Based on the accessibility to the researcher, leaders from a diverse set of industries with various years of experience in a leadership role were included. Although the tenure in a leadership role did not exclude any participant, the years of experience within a leadership role added value to the study as it assisted the researcher to understand how leaders perceive social media as a new age generation communication channel

based on their own leadership journey and how the length of tenure in a role (role maturity) informs the decision of what information is deemed relevant to share on such platforms,

The researcher conducted 30 semi-structured interviews, 18 with active user leaders and 12 with passive user leaders, based on leader's self-report method, as guided by academic literature to be useful for such social media studies (Zhou et al., 2024). Although the interviews were conducted randomly between active and passive users, Table 3 below describes the participants separated into two distinct groups (active and passive users) so that the codes and data saturation made sense for each category. The names of the participants and their respective organisations were not disclosed to preserve their anonymity. Participants were categorised as either active user participants (AUP) or passive user participants (PUP), representing the extent of their social media use and numbered according to the interview number (as shown in Table 3).

From the 18 interviews conducted for active users, four were from the automotive industry, four from the professional services industry, two from the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry and two consulting specialists. The remainder of the interviewees were from varying industries, with one representative from each of the following: broadcasting, financial services, mining services, technology sector, electricity sector and venture capital.

From the 12 interviews conducted on passive leader use, seven were from the financial services sector. The insurance and finance sector were disaggregated from financial services and shown separately with one respondent each. The remaining participants represented retail, professional services and automotive industries with a single respondent each. The participants also held different leadership roles, included some C-suite leaders, directors, executives and senior managers. The purpose of varying the industries and leadership role was to allow the researcher to gain heterogeneity in the sample and views and enable a rich set of data to be collected.

The researcher was cautious not to make generalisations on the sample regarding the active users and the industries they represent. Although it may appear that due to the nature of professional services and consulting work, a social media presence may be beneficial, while leaders in the financial services sector may be constrained in the dissemination of information due to confidentiality, this study intends to

understand individual leaders' preferences and perceptions with social media use, and sample heterogeneity assists in this pursuit.

Data was collected over a three-week period through semi-structured interviews being held virtually over MS Teams based on the availability of participants. As the interviews were not held in person, the request for participants to be in an uninterrupted area was made, with permission to record the interview and commence electronic transcription through the MS Teams functionality obtained. To ensure the building of trust, video cameras were switched on especially during the introduction and closing of the interviews, and participants were taken through the informed consent letter and the anonymity of results in the reporting. In some cases, videos were switched off after the first few interview questions to ensure stable connectivity. The interviews averaged around 33 minutes with the longest interviews being 55 minutes and 45 minutes with the AUP and PUP respectively, as shown in Table 3. Based on the initial pilot study conducted on a passive user, the researcher expected this group's interviews to be shorter than the active users as there are less elements that need to be addressed from a passive user social media phenomenon relating to the research and sub-research questions.

To demonstrate that data saturation was reached, that is where no new significant statements and commonalities are found. Table 3 below reflects the number of unique codes generated per interview. A total of 293 codes were generated from the data analysis. The codebook developed from the transcribed interviews using Atlas.ti are included in Annexure 5. A total number of 16 themes emerged to support the main and sub-research questions. Data saturation was reached at the 16<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> participants for active and passive users, respectively. The researcher continued with the rest of the interviews to remain professional given the seniority and willingness of such leaders to participate in such a study since the interviews were set up a month in advance. Further details of the data analysis process used by the researcher is explained later in this chapter.

Table 3

*Description of research participants*

Active user participant (AUP)/ Passive user participant (PUP)	Senior role	Industry	Age group	Years in a leadership role	Interview length (minutes- rounded up to the nearest minute)	No of codes
AUP1	CEO	Consultant- Strategy and change management	44-49	10	45	55
AUP2	Senior Manager	Automotive	40-49	12	32	32
AUP3	Managing Director	Broadcasting and media	40-49	over 20	35	22
AUP4	Senior Manager	Financial services	26-39	3	32	18
AUP5	Head of Department	Mining services	40-49	13	30	16
AUP6	Associate Director	Professional services	26-39	5	30	9
AUP7	Senior Manager: Africa Region	FMCG (Fast moving consumer goods)	26-39	14	34	7
AUP8	Vice President: Sales	Technology	26-39	8	32	14
AUP9	Director	Professional services	40-49	17	50	7
AUP10	Executive and Business Coach	Electricity sector and start ups	40-49	over 20	55	6
AUP11	Managing Director	Venture capital	40-49	15	44	4
AUP12	Consumer Services Director	Automotive	40-49	10	35	4
AUP13	Finance Director	FMCG	40-49	2	30	3
AUP14	Senior Manager	Automotive	40-49	12	43	2
AUP15	Executive Head	In house and consultant- Culture specialist	50-59	12	35	1
AUP16	Director	Professional services	40-49	17	27	0
AUP17	Head Corporate Finance	Professional services	40-49	11	26	0
AUP18	Chief Risk Officer	Automotive	26-39	2	35	0
PUP1	Senior Manager	Financial services	40-49	10	25	16
PUP2	Senior Manager: Software Development	Financial services	40-49	12	23	19
PUP3	Senior Manager	Financial services	40-49	15	43	20
PUP4	Senior Manager: Group Reporting	Finance	26-39	3	25	11
PUP5	Finance Manager	Retail	26-39	7	30	10
PUP6	Senior Manager	Financial services	40-49	3	20	8
PUP7	Head of Department: Risk	Insurance	40-49	16	35	4
PUP8	Associate Director	Professional services	26-39	9	20	3
PUP9	Senior Manager: Marketing	Automotive	40-49	9	30	2
PUP10	Senior Manager: Risk Management	Financial services	26-39	6	19	0
PUP11	Head of Department: Financial Markets	Financial services	50-59	over 20	20	0
PUP12	Head of Department: Financial Reporting	Financial services	40-49	10	23	0
				Total	963	293
				Average	33	293

**5.3 Data Triangulation**

The researcher undertook data triangulation to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of active and passive social media use resulting in from participants experiences and perceptions of social media. This was achieved through data source triangulation using multiple and diverse participants as well as

social media observation. Firstly, the researcher interviewed a range of participants from varying industries with different years of experience in their leadership roles and differing leadership positions which provided sufficient diversity amongst the sample to ensure reliability and validity of the data collected. Secondly, post the interview, the researcher analysed the participants social media account that was primarily used for professional social media engagements as self-reported by the leaders. The researcher viewed content posted within the last year of active users to validate that the participants responses during the interview matched their activity and engagement on the respective social media sites. The passive user's social media profile was observed to validate that they were indeed passive users.

Furthermore, the researcher achieved data triangulation using theoretical triangulation where the multiple theoretical frameworks of social presence theory, SNT, SET, active and passive social media use, social support and social comparison were used to explain and interpret the data specifically relating to research question one and sub-research questions one and two. The HSM, media richness theory and framing and signalling theories were used to explain and interpret the data relating to sub-research question three.

#### **5.4 Data analysis approach**

The study followed an inductive, qualitative, exploratory research methodology, with data being collected through in-depth semi structured interviews, which were captured in audio and text format. All interviews were digitally transcribed using the software application Microsoft Teams. The researcher evaluated all transcripts derived from Microsoft Teams by listening to the recording and editing the transcript to ensure the accuracy of words and grammar that provide meaning in the transcript. The researcher also reviewed the manual notes taken during the interview to ensure these key points were included in the transcript. Using Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software, each interview was transcribed as text data from Microsoft Teams and was digitally input into Atlas.ti. and analysed to produce a thematic analysis of the data. During the analysis, the researcher added a code to each significant statement made by the interviewees. Similar statements and meanings made during the next interviews were given the same code. A total number of 293 codes were generated from the data analysis. Although Atlas.ti was able to provide a drop-down list of the quotes made by the respective participants relating to a particular code, the researcher found it difficult to navigate this software to see all 293 codes in order

to merge overlapping or similar concepts. Accordingly, the researcher created a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, setting out each participant and the code per interview relating to each research and sub-research question. Sub-research questions one and two relating to leader opportunities and challenges experienced or perceived through social media use were combined to understand and map the differences against each other. The Excel approach was easier for the researcher owing to the researcher's proficiency and experience with Excel. This enabled the researcher to see all 293 codes holistically on one sheet and work through columns and rows, colour coding similar and overlapping statements, allowing the researcher to combine similar statement and concepts to create a consolidated number of 66 codes, which were refined into 26 categories. Once the researcher was satisfied that the categories were concise, these were reviewed again to combine where appropriate, and remove those that did not have sufficient backing, resulting in themes being created. This was an iterative process where the researcher considered the research questions and the overall research objectives to ensure the themes clearly represent the findings of the data. The researcher reviewed the names of the themes, changing some to be more succinct and meaningful. A total of 16 themes were created to provide a narrative and support for the main and sub-research questions. This exercise was conducted over a period of two weeks and took approximately 30 hours, which aided the researcher in understanding and presenting the results of the data as reported below.

## **5.5 Presentation of results**

This study aimed to explore the needs, affordance and consequences that the use of social media provides leaders in a professional context as a new age communication channel. To understand this phenomenon, research and sub-research questions were formulated to answer why and how leaders use social media, including the leaders' experiences and perceptions of the opportunities and challenges afforded by with social media.

Themes were developed for the research and sub-research questions, with sub-research questions one and two relating to leader opportunities and challenges experienced or perceived through social media use being combined to understand and map out the theme differences against each other.

## **Main question research**

### ***Why do leaders in South African use social media in the professional context? If not, why not?***

The purpose of this research question was to understand why leaders chose to actively engage in social media from a professional context. This question specifically aimed at understanding leader's needs, motivation and intention behind creating a social media presence. The study sought to determine if the leader consider their self-branding and self-identify on social media to have an impact on their leadership role and their ability to influence their online communities. The study also aimed to determine the contrary view on why some leaders choose to passively engage on social media.

The data analysis done by the researcher revealed the following themes in support of the main research question to enable the researcher to develop an understanding of why leader chose to use social media, as either an active or passive social media user. The themes summarised below in Figure 3 assisted the researcher to understanding the need, motivation and intention behind active users creating a social media presence, where personal brand was the most significant factor. The researcher was also able to determine the contrary viewpoints from passive users regarding their personal perceptions and preferences to not actively engage on social media.

Figure 3 below depicts the iterative process the researcher used to review and refine first level codes to be grouped as second level categorises and then as themes to address the main research question. An initial set of 17 first level codes were created for the main research question, which were refined into eight categories and further reviewed into six themes which clearly represent the findings of the data. The researcher reviewed the names of the themes, changing some to be more succinct and meaningful.

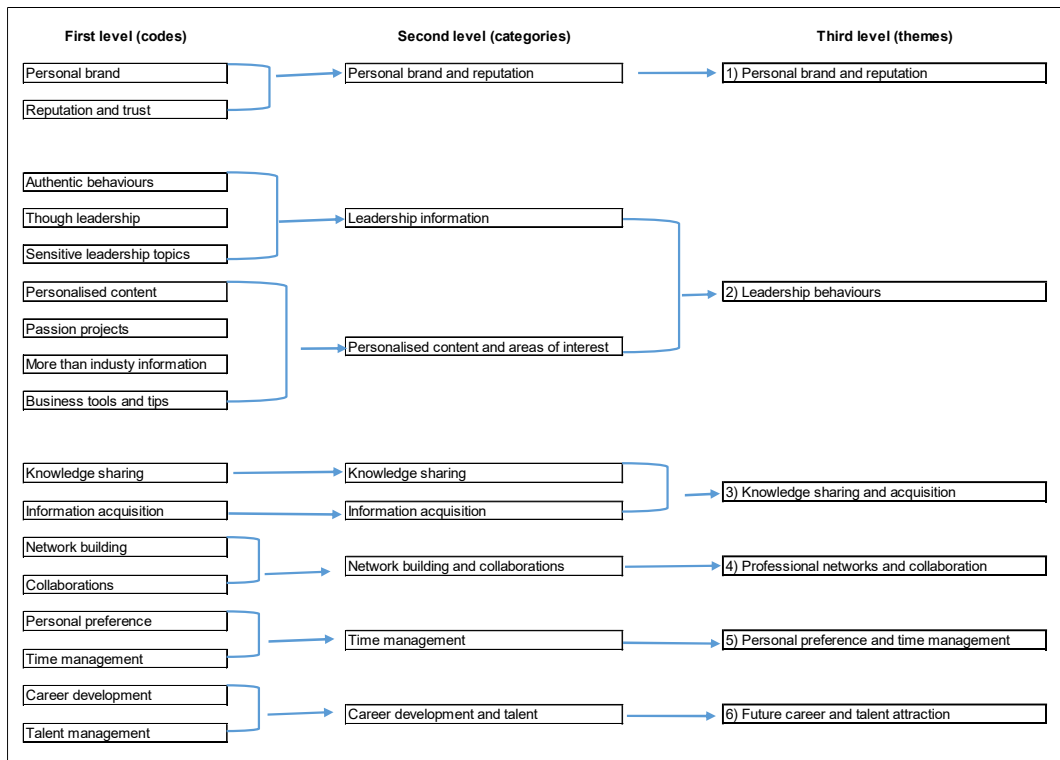


Figure 3

*Themes in support of the main research question*

### 5.5.1 Theme 1: Personal brand and reputation

This theme relates to leaders choosing to actively engage on social media to build their own personal brand as an individual leader, to create an awareness of their skills and expertise, allowing them to build trust with an online community and to get people to think and be influenced to change their perspectives.

Almost all AUPs in this study indicated that this was a primary reason to interact on social media sites. This is supported by the following direct quotes from participants.

*AUP1: "It is the means for me to get out my message to people so that people can find me, and I can build my own reputation and legitimacy. Somebody said to me it's not about who you know, it's about who you are. So social media is helping me build my brand and building reputation. When it is built on trust, people will hire me to do people's strategies or do some training."*

*AUP8: “Look, I think in particular from a professional perspective and it's important to have an online presence and for various reasons. And I think it's a good mechanism to advertise yourself within the market that you're operating in.”*

*AUP10: “Objective number one is I use social media to create my own brand.”*

The researcher was able to establish that from a profession context, building a personal brand and reputation for their skills and experience is one of the main needs contributing to leaders' decisions to actively interact on social media sites.

### **5.5.2 Theme 2: Leadership behaviours**

This theme covers a number of behaviours and attributes that leaders choose to embody, showing their motivation and intention when actively using social media, as discussed below. Some quotes in support of the theme are also presented.

Active users describe how important it is to embody professional behaviours, but also to be true to their leadership style and personalities so they are viewed as authentic in their profile and content. This is supported by the following direct quotes from participants.

*AUP9: “It's more about the authenticity and it actually makes people almost want to say you can identify with or you can see similarities.”*

*AUP3: “How you curate the content that you want to put across still has to come across as your authentic opinion. How they connect with an advert post for example versus how they connect with content that is curated and is based on your life, is very different.”*

These statements clearly indicate how important authentic behaviours are on social media. The audience finds content more relatable when a leader is vulnerable and shows their true self. An AUP indicated that she has seen that the audience is very aware when a leader portrays themselves in a more positive light and caring nature on social media versus their real leadership style, that the audience have included negative reactions calling the leader out on their untrue persona.

At least eight AUPs within various industries indicated that they engage on social media to share ideas and experiences from a thought leadership perspective. This is supported by the following direct quotes from participants.

*AUP7: "I want to achieve from a career point of view of getting my name out there as a thought leader in my specific profession. I think it is important that one is active where people are able to really want to engage with you, but also so that you can see whether or not you are a relevant individual in terms of some of the things that you're talking about."*

*AUP11: "So I actually do have a newsletter on LinkedIn, and that's primarily how I connect with a lot of people, by placing myself as a tool in the thought leadership space, because I also do a lot of speaking engagements."*

The results reveal that thought leadership behaviours and ideas are an important aspect of a leader's engagement on social media where the intention is to share experiences and suggestions on skills and expertise in particular fields to become industry leaders.

AUPs, specifically in the professional services industry, indicated that they are provided with lots of generic content by their organisation to share on social media sites, which they choose to personalise and share alongside their own experiences to make the content more relatable to a wider audience. This is supported by the following direct quotes from participants.

*AUP16: "Global firm puts out a lot of the generic stuff coming from say the organisational social media handle on LinkedIn. But in there is personalisation and if it's coming from a specific individual thought leader. It means a bit more and individuals find it a bit easier to relate to those. I have tailored most of the messages based on my sort of own experience, my perspectives."*

*AUP17: "Transactions or deals that we've publicly announced, but specifically including my teams and my expertise showing sort of sector expertise, the specific actions, advice offered and stop points in the transactions or in a particular area which creates information awareness around your expertise, because it shows that you're a leader in your chosen"*

*field with your team and if somebody's looking for that type of service in the corporate world and then hopefully that resonates with them.”*

These statements highlighted to the researcher that leaders who choose to actively interact on social media, do so with much intent, such that they do not simply repost company content but add their own experiences and skills making it more human and relatable. These leaders are actively trying to communicate a message to the audience.

Four AUPs declared that they deliberately did not post any work-related content on their social media accounts but rather curated content regarding leadership and relevant topical that are passionate about, including their own leadership journeys, their struggles, business tips and tools, coaching suggestions, women in the workplace and motivational content to get other leaders talking and encouraged. This is supported by the following direct quotes from participants.

*AUP18: “It's more about motivating others, cause I mean the content that I share, it's more about achievement goals regarding what am I working on in my personal capacity, like studies. So, I mean, it's more about motivating other young girls and the other woman who are thinking is not possible to be out there and to be successful and being in a leadership role. So, some of the people when they see my profile, they will comment and the next thing they send me message asking me to be their mentor or to guide them. My posts show my resilience, tough time and also, I post about new learnings as If I have learned something new and it was quite impactful that I want to share.”*

*AUP12: “I actively engage only on LinkedIn, so I like separate very much my work life from my personal life. I am like very kind of strict with myself on how I do it. So that that's really the only social media I would I use, and I put actively post on and I do it with a lot of intent. I'm trying to build a brand around myself that is separate to that of the company, just to like to diversify my portfolio so that I can exist as separate person going forward. So, for example, I am like a very proud feminist, and I post a lot on female issues and women in the workplace, especially in male dominated environments have built up like a name for myself in the industry. I post on stuff that I like care about, so it's feminine feminist things or and it's like the country.”*

These statements above are so powerful and impactful to this study, showing that a leader's use of social media can be created with such intent and enthusiasm to spread a meaningful message to the audience. The researcher was able to interpret that majority AUP's use their personal profiles to share through leadership ideas pertaining to their areas of expertise and business content relating to their organisation, which is personalised and included their own experiences. From the data analysis, the researcher found that only four AUPs indicated that they intentionally do not post any company content, this content shared is much more personal and relates to their own leadership role, expanding to more sensitive leadership issues such a gender equality in the workplace and showing their struggles as female leaders to inspire other female leaders, as well as useful business tips and tools to assist business leaders.

### **5.5.3 Theme 3: Knowledge sharing and acquisition**

In the professional context all participants raised this theme as one of the core reasons they use social media. All active participants mentioned that the reason for engaging is to share their knowledge, expertise, technical skills and new developments in their professions, as well as to share and disseminate information about the companies they lead, including the products, services and CSR projects. Another aspect for active users is knowledge acquisition to keep abreast of industry and professional best practices from the rest of the world, macroeconomics, geopolitics and world news, to follow other inspirational local and international leaders and to be open minded and understand clients and other peoples perceptiveness. Included in this theme is the exchange that occurs when an AUP shares content and then interacts with the comments and reactions from their followers.

Passive users primary use of social media pertains to knowledge acquisition, from a professional context following thought leaders in their industry and technical opinions, looking at polarised views and understanding cultural differences and sourcing daily news.

Since all participants aligned with this theme, the one most inclusive quote has been selected by the researcher that best describes this theme.

*AUP2: "Its two- fold. One is to share information regarding knowledge and expertise on the role and insights about my leadership capacity. Associated with my role I share official information on our product lines, new*

*developments in our business which my team is directly involved in, but I'm very careful I how I position this. The other side is that I engage on social media to acquire knowledge as to what people are feeling and thinking at that point in time so I can post around that topic sharing information that I might have from my own professional perspective but I'm also looking to understand the customers experience of the product and gain insights on improvements that I can take back to my role."*

The researcher understands that knowledge sharing and information acquisition over social media platforms is one of the affordances of social media that leaders take up quite seriously, with passive users mainly using the information acquisition opportunities. This theme addresses the reasons why active and passive user choose to use social media. The opportunities and drawbacks of knowledge sharing and information acquisition from social media sites is covered in the presentation of sub-research question two and three below.

#### **5.5.4 Theme 4: Professional networks and collaborations**

Another central theme amongst majority the AUPs is the use of their social media profiles to build and grow their professional network so they can have meaningful connections and not just many followers. It is also an opportunity to reach out to inspirational leaders, locally and globally to engage with them and create a global community that recognises the leaders' brand. At least three active users indicated that they leverage their social media networks to build connections with clients, other business and entrepreneurs to create collaborations. An important aspect of professional networks raised by two ACPs was to create a community for ideas, professional development and training, where leaders can leverage systems thinking to build better industries and become industry leaders. The professional network also allows leaders to keep in touch with alumni and collaborate and use each other's services in certain instance. The quotes below explain the users' sentiments.

*AUP6: "So I mean, from a professional perspective it's on LinkedIn. It's really about connecting with our other leaders and clients, getting out there and making yourself known, not only in your industry and other industries, but also in terms of getting potential clients business development, using it as a platform to see is there a new people we can connect to work to bring in business for instance. And also collaborating. We recently had a*

*collaboration with Theo Baloyi. He does a lot of work with entrepreneurs and owns Bathu Shoes. We provided some professional work and posted our interactions with him, and he re-posted it and that got like thousands of likes. You never really would have that professional endorsement that can reach such an audience.”*

*AUP3: “To build a community around ideas and leadership development, and to be able to harness that community for business purposes. So, it has those two legs. the business leg and social leg.”*

As reflected above, the researcher was able to understand leaders’ reliance on their professional networks for their own growth as well as business development.

### **5.5.5 Theme 5: Personal preference and time management**

This theme covers many of the reasons why leaders choose to be passive on social media. One being they do not have much more to add than the company content already shared. Secondly that in their leadership capacity, the leader is seen as a representative of the company even when posting personal views and the risk of contradicting the organisations views with personal content may be a cause for controversy. An example provided by a PUP was about sharing personal thoughts and concern for the people struggling on a particular side for the war in Gaza, which might be in contradiction to the view maintained by the company, or if the organisation does not voice a view, this may be interpreted as an official company standpoint due to the leader’s position. Additionally, at least three PUPs indicated that they are hesitant to actively engage in social media, as they are always viewed as a representative of the organisation based on their leadership role and it is difficult and requires much time and effort to create a brand separate from the company they lead. Two PUPs also shared that they were discouraged from actively engaging on social media sites following the untrue reflections and bragging behaviours adopted by leaders within their own work environments on social media sites with no consequence management. The quotes below explain the users’ sentiments.

*PUP1: “And it comes down to personal preference for two reasons. Firstly, I’m not really sure who would be following my posts. I just don’t really have a particular audience. Secondly, I think there is a bit of a risk to posting things. You know, as a senior manager at the bank, you might post*

*something that might not be aligned with the view of the bank, and if you post say something on economics that might contradict and you know what the bank has been saying and so you could also get into a bit of trouble, I suppose if you post something very political also. I felt sometimes that viewing social media this wasn't the most productive way to spend half an hour, because sometimes you go down these holes, right? So, you click on one thing, and you click on another and next thing you know you're reading about like I don't know, something that has no interest to you. So sometimes it can feel like a waste of time, and in that sense takes away from your day, yeah."*

*PUP3: "One is that I'm sort of careful about what I put out there and I feel that I'm just generally a private person and so moments in my life and things like that, I prefer just to keep them in my head rather than putting them out there and then, you know, ten years or five years from now I might have a regret. Some of these things we've seen, how they can really take a turn when someone picks it up."*

*PUP6: "So I don't want to create a digital footprint and that's just a personal choice because I'm very private. The other thing is I just don't have time."*

*PUP4: "I have so much work that my work doesn't require me to be engaging on social media, and so in my spare time it's not something that I would want to do from a time perspective because as soon as you put something out there then someone needs to respond and then you need to engage and that requires energy and time, but from my preference perspective I am introverted by nature, so engaging with people steals from my energy and so even if it's on social media in my spare time, in order to recharge myself and my energy, I prefer to do things that don't involve people."*

Most passive users stipulated that this was a personal preference as they are private people and prefer to keep their views off social media as it can have repercussions in the future. A major factor raised by at least seven passive participants was that curating content required a significant amount of time and effort, which they would prefer to spend in other meaningful personal activities. Further to this, two PUPs indicated that there is a plethora of company content

disseminated on social media sites, that they do not wish to add to their already busy schedules and areas of responsibilities by adding more information, that might not even add any value. Additionally, this theme also includes leaders who become discouraged to actively engage on social media, by the derogatory and untrue behaviours embodied by other leaders on social media.

#### **5.5.6 Theme 6: Future career and talent attraction**

This theme encompasses the choice of both active and passive leaders to use social media for career, leadership and business development. Both active and passive participants indicated that they scroll through social media sites for career opportunities and especially to understand the skills and expertise companies are looking for within the various leadership bands. A key element of the career development opportunities is that users particularly concentrate on the self-development aspect, where at least eight participants in total indicated that they use the LinkedIn learnings application to enhance their skills and technical know-how. At least two active participants indicated that their online presence has led to them being headhunted for specialists' leadership roles. Active users have also indicated that they use the platforms for talent attraction and recruitment purposes especially for high intellectual property jobs. One most inclusive quote has been selected by the researcher that best describes this theme.

*AUP4: "I have found that I'm followed by a lot of people who are looking for work at the organisation and based on my profession., Frequently I get messages from people on LinkedIn who need guidance with further studies and mentoring to reach such leadership roles. Yes, I always make it a point to respond, in instances where I cannot assist, I get them in touch with the respective human resources department."*

This was an interesting theme for the researcher that arose from the interviews – that the participants were so candid in explaining that they leverage social media for career and self- development. The quote above demonstrates to the researcher that leaders are invested in the careers of future generations when users reach out to leaders, due to their social media profiles for guidance, coaching, career and study advise and leaders proactively respond and assist.

## 5.6 Presentation of result for sub-research questions

### Sub-research questions 1 and 2

***Sub-research question 1: What are the opportunities and benefits that leaders in South Africa experience or perceive from social media?***

***Sub-research question 2: What are the challenges and concerns that leaders in South Africa experience or perceive from social media?***

The purpose of sub-research question one and two was formulated to gain the leaders own experiences and perceptions of the possible opportunities and challenges afforded through social media use. These questions specifically aimed to explore the affordance and consequences views of leaders based on the possible opportunities and challenges they experienced through the use of social media. The study sought to understand both positive and negative affordances offered by social media sites to leaders in their active or passive use. Furthermore, these sub-questions aimed to determine if leaders experience beneficial or negative effects as a consequence of social media use.

The data analysis done by the researcher revealed the following themes in support of sub-research questions one and two. The researcher gained an understanding of leaders own experiences and perceptions in terms of the possible opportunities and challenges afforded through social media use. The themes encapsulate both positive and negative affordances offered by social media sites to leaders in their active or passive use, including the social, mental and emotion effects, which have been presented in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4 depicts the iterative process the researcher used to review and refine the first level codes to be grouped as second level category and then as themes to address the sub-research questions one and two. An initial set of 37 first level codes were created, which were refined into 11 categories and further reviewed into six themes which clearly represent the findings of the data. The researcher reviewed the names of the themes, changing some to be more succinct and meaningful.

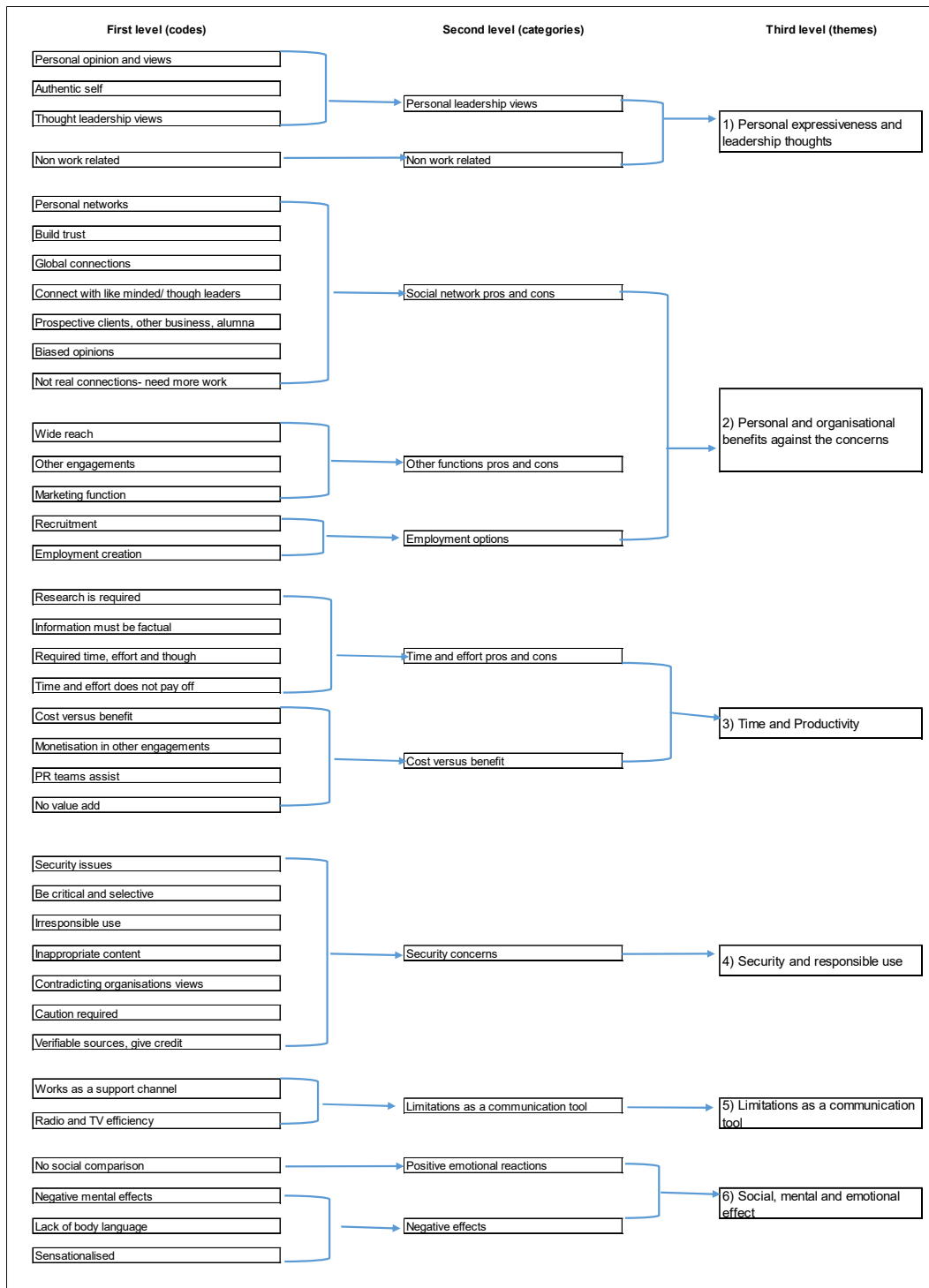


Figure 4

*Themes in support of the research questions one and two*

### **5.6.1 Them 1: Personal expressiveness and leadership thoughts**

This refers to the opportunities described by active users that leaders can put forward the thoughts, opinions and ideas that are important to them, which can get people thinking and talking. The leaders described that there were no restrictions to express themselves, as long as they are responsible in their use and do not infer anything untoward about the organisation. At least four active participants shared that they had no restrictions from their companies, as these accounts are their personal accounts, and so when posting professional content, be it related to the work environment, females in the workplace and motivational content, leaders are free to be authentic and use words, phrases and visuals that represent them. A specific topic that many participants liked to express their views about were thought leadership and leadership self enhancement. The quote below has been selected by the researcher to best describe the personal expressiveness opportunity that active leaders perceive social media affords to them.

*AUP18: "I can be free, express myself in my own words because the content is meant to be motivational and inspiring even in the professional aspect, when I show my true self and my struggle, people understand who I am and what I stand for. People want you to show up in your most authentic self, so in as much as you can sell inspiration, they also want to know who you really are, and they want to know how you actually live your life day to day. So, your words must be your own."*

The researcher draws the link between this theme as the opportunity afforded by social media for leaders to be their authentic selves and express themselves in their own words, to the theme in the main research question regarding active user choice to use social media as a leadership behaviour to express themselves.

### **5.6.2 Theme 2: Personal and organisational benefits against the concerns**

This theme encompasses several of the positive opportunities and benefits against the challenges and concerns, afforded and consequence by social media for both the individual leader and extending into the organisation. Some quotes in support of the theme are also presented.

The first opportunity that most active participants experience is the networking opportunities and relationship building. At least four AUPs have indicated that they have been able to connect with thought leaders in their industries and have created

communities to leverage learnings and experiences off each other. This further enables relationships to be built between leaders and many have voiced that they maintain these relationships offline as well. Social media also allows leaders to connect across boundaries, building global networks for themselves. Active users in the professional services specifically indicated that they get many connection requests on social media from potential clients to enquire about services, affording growing relationships or at least “a foot in the door” as mentioned by AUP6. A few participants alluded that they enjoy engaging on such platforms to get connected with the younger professional generation, to consider their views, understand their mindset and learn tips from tech savvy youth. On the other side, two active users indicated that social media allows them to engage with other levels of clients and staff as they usually only meet the C-suite leaders in face-to-face engagements. However, a few active and passive users also raised the concern with the networks on social media, that communication within networks can result in biased opinions. Further to this, leaders alluded that real connections are not build on social media sites, these only add to the number of your connections. Much more effort is required to connect with other leaders either via e-mail or telephone to actually build and maintain a relationship, “you have to take the connection offline for the real magic to happen” as stated by AUP7. Additionally, connections and engagements are limited to those who have a social presence. The quotes below explain the users’ sentiments.

*AUP5: “So I would say the opportunities was for me to connect and engage with likeminded professionals, reaching out online was a way to open a conversation. Also posting interesting and useful content makes your audience grow quite quick because your followers then recommend that or share it within their networks. And so, if you are name is popping up while you're sharing interesting information, your chances of a network following you is higher. However, this is a challenge as well in the terms of you only get responses from people that want to respond, and that it might be a biased group within your network. So, you are only able to reach the people that want to engage on social media, not the people that you may necessarily want to engage with or need to engage with you.”*

*AUP13: "I think it obviously breaks down boundaries. Some of my connections are spread across Africa and other parts of the world. You form part of a global community, and you can engage with people outside of your region. For example, where there was a commonality identified on LinkedIn, I mean, it led to a conversation for 30 minutes as a direct result of that, we kind of set up even a follow up so this is one of the benefits I think that t such platforms provide."*

*AUP10: "I'll go and connect to them and then I'll send them a LinkedIn message, but the relationship is built through follow up phone calls, MS teams or Zoom, virtual or face-to-face interactions and sometimes they can even just be an email or an exchange of messages."*

Linked to network and relationships, the open access of social media affords a wider reach to a diverse audience which AUPs experience as an opportunity, where they will receive comments from various professionals. The speed at which information travels on social media was also noted as a benefit by AUP13, where product information is shared on social media and reposted and reshared so quickly by the audience. At least 4 AUPs indicated that their profiles and content shared have gained high visibility leading to face-to-face speaking engagements for various events, and this also has a network effect, where companies get in touch with the leader for speaking engagements for their own company. This is supported by the following direct quote from a participant.

*AUP15: "So yeah, so I've had a couple of companies calling and saying we see you do these videos and online interactions, they actually speak on this and that which was posted on LinkedIn. And would you be open to come and speak at our company or come and speak to our Exco team? So, it's given a lot more visibility then for example just a google search. So, I've actually had quite a lot of engagements like that because, the content is so relevant. Culture is massive in any business and other leaders want to get it right."*

At least three AUPs agree on the marketing benefit of company products and services on social media, which translates into sales for the organisation. However, the opposite may also be experienced, where one passive and active user each indicated that they are very cautious of customers comments of new products on social media platforms. Where negative comments can spread so fast leading to

reputational damage and low sales of a product. The passive participants also shared their reluctance to engage on social media to the vast volume of advertising, spam and user's social media as a push channel. One most inclusive quote has been selected by the researcher that best describes this user perspective.

*AUP2: "That's official information, which is already public knowledge, but it's just to get more marketing out to people who are interested. But because it's related to the business brand, I'm very careful in how I position that right or well I need to make sure that it's very factual. I watch the comments and when someone says a feature is not fine, I engage so I can offer assistance to explain or get them in touch with the after sales. You have to manage the comments cause it might affect the product and brand directly in bad light."*

Lastly, the affordance for due diligence for potential employees is another benefit of social media, as reported by three active leader participants. Leaders have viewed the profiles of possible candidates to verify that their character and values described in the interviews aligns to their social media persona, as far as possible. Two active users have indicated that social media has resulted in employment creation, where companies hire teams to manage the social media profiles of individual leaders and the official company profile. The other element of career opportunity afforded by social media is to apply for jobs directly through platforms such as LinkedIn. This is supported by the following direct quotes from participants.

*AUP17: "The other purpose is for recruitment, but recruitment in that we aim to attract high intelligent property position. It's not a formal sort of vetting process but it's a gage on what the person perceives is important to discuss or put out there over such platforms."*

*AUP8: "Look, I think the opportunities is you know I can speak for my career it's you know I've moved jobs twice and you know a large proportion of the information. Ironically, when we went in the interview that the CV they pulled up was printed off LinkedIn. So, I think that gives a visibility of people doing a bit of due diligence and research on you as an individual."*

In conclusion, the researcher was able to determine that networking, relationship building and a wider reach for a diverse audience are some of the positive affordances of social media for active users. However, there are limitations associated with network and relationship building on social media sites. Social media

also benefits career opportunities by applying for jobs directly and viewing profiles as a due diligence method for potential employees.

### **5.6.3 Theme 3: Time and productivity**

This theme encompasses active users lived experiences considering the time and effort that is required to curate meaningful and impactful content on social media which is viewed as quite a challenge with mixed results. Two AUPs specifically indicated they spend days on research, rewording and visually enhancing their post to ensure it is factually correct and impactful, however often the posts do not gain attention nor the traction they were hoping for. At least five AUPs have also eluded that although they have been able to create a brand for themselves on social media, they have not yet been able to monetise any value from social media, meaning they have not had any new business or collaborations directly from social media engagements. This highlights that active engagements do not result in anything productive from a professional context, adequately described as the “cost versus benefit” is not justified by AUP1. A direct quote from an active participant is included below.

*AUP14: “I’ll say this, you will sometimes anticipate that certain posts or certain content will really perform and do well and based on you know your core number of followers and who you’re putting in all the effort, and sometimes it just doesn’t go well, it doesn’t grab the attention. And so that can be a bit of a challenge. So, I think that was what was a drawback for me when it came to Twitter, in that if I wasn’t providing that level of short, snappy, quick, constant updates, I found myself gaining a very slow rate of users or followers.”*

In contrast, two AUPs time and effort to curate content has been extremely successful with many positive responses and further ventures afforded. One AUPs posts on navigating the work environment and the leaders own trials and tribulations feature regularly in *Daily Maverick*. Another example from AUP15 who posts live videos in the office regarding day-to-day operations and comradeship in the workspace, leadership decisions, people management and culture, has been able to grow their brands and businesses based on their interactions on social media sites. A big contributor to this as advised by these two respective AUPs is that the words written or spoken are their own, the content is authentic to them as leaders, although

the public relations (PR) teams assist with the administrative and technical aspects. This is supported by the following direct quote from a participant.

*AUP15: "You know you learn the way you communicate best; I know I can articulate speaking, so I prefer videos, the PR team only assist in some of the writing. I spend a lot of time with the team getting the content right with the video shot in one take, so I am authentic, with employees talking in the background in their natural state, because I think of the very intentional way of saying things and putting things out there, people are aware. So, people then realise, OK, so this is you're not just posting ideas out there, but you actually believe in it and has translated into it's a monetary reward but it's sort of part of that intentionality."*

The PUP experiences and perceptions are also included within this theme, showing the contrast in opinions that the time spent on social media is a time spend poorly and not productive, PUPs question if there is truly any value add to using social media in a professional context. While these leaders do understand that social media is a unique communication channel to enhance social, family, friendly interactions and keep in touch with people around the world, the social element does not infer professional benefits. Furthermore, PUPs perception is that once you post something, there is an expectation from your followers or audience to respond, and to respond immediately so that the post remains relevant and gains traction, which is not practical in the business environment. The passive user voice that in such cases, leaders have PR teams running their social media profile, which defeats the purpose of a social interaction with the real leader. This is supported by the following direct quotes from participants.

*PUP7: "If you really want to become active, you need the time and effort to put into it and you know that many I'm sure you've come across many senior leaders in big organisations have teams of people doing this on their behalf. I mean their personal interaction almost becomes very limited at some point because they do not have the time to maintain any kind of a presence on the Internet. I think it's something that one needs to seriously consider the amount of effort versus the amount that you get out of it."*

*PUP10: "So I think that that's for me being the main kind of sense or feeling that it invokes for me is a little bit of boredom because there's repetition and*

*limited new ideas coming out and I don't see the real value in it. You see the volumes that appearing where you know you seeing the same thing repeatedly. It's just the faces changed, or the voice has changed. Another aspect if that the connections add no value, if you start accepting unnecessary connections day one by day 10, you're gonna find that you have you know 100 new connection requests. They're trying to build their number of connections so it's more self-promoting almost.”*

In conclusion, this theme demonstrates the opportunities along with new ventures that come through when active users authentically reveal themselves by taking the required time and effort to curate their content in their own words and thoughts, supported by factual information. On the other hand, some content does not relate to the audience as expected and results in non-productive, non-monetising instances and few follower responses. As for the passive participants they would like to remain passive users as these leaders perceive that the time and effort required to curate a post for social media does not lead to anything productive nor value adding.

#### **5.6.4 Them 4: Security and responsible use**

One of the key factors that arose as a challenge for passive users was open access of social media, leaving personal profiles susceptible to hacking or cloning, which could result in serve reputational damage for the individual leader as well as the organisation due to fake or misleading information disseminated. At least two PUPs and AUP each spoke about the awareness of cyberbullying on social media sites as a security concern. One of these PUPs indicated that the faceless nature of some responders emboldens them to send ignorant and hurtful comments with no recourse to the cyberbullying. However, as active users are more proficient with the features and applications of social media sites due to regular use, an AUP indicated that they have blocked certain feeds, disconnected with some users and reported such responders to protect themselves. Furthermore, active leaders voiced that they are critical and selective of the information they post and consume on social media, in an effort to be responsible users.

Security encompasses the responsible use of social media through shared content, shared comments and reactions. Many AUPs and PUPs refer to unethical and irresponsible use of social media as a concern, where leaders must be able to verify their source of information, give credit where it is due, and be aware of the appropriateness of the content posted for professional or business purposes. AUP6

and PUP2 gave examples that talking about God and religion is not appropriate on a professional platform. Another key concern related to responsible use is the spreading of fake news, that users are enticed by the sensationalism and repost and share this. The rate at which fake news spreads is worrying for many participants within both groups. Additionally, at the risk of incorrect or contradictory information being spread, some leaders and organisations prefer that there is only one spokesperson with personal account to share professional content for the organisation. This is supported by the following direct quotes from participants.

*PUP5: "I'm aware of people cloning your ID. I think like as technology always changes, people need to adapt. But I think social media is a tool and it just really depends on how you use it. You shouldn't let it consume you but use it wisely and even use it to your advantage, being mindful of the risks associated."*

*PUP11: "My concern is more someone hacking your account and using your profile which is very, very dangerous obviously maybe spreading false information. Our organisation comes out unique based on the sensitive and confidential information coming from the company, where other companies have three or more spokespersons, our ultimate spokesperson is the head executive on all matters relating to the company. I might give that wrong impression of what I was trying to say. And the repercussions could be damaging for me and the company."*

*AUP3: "And it's constantly important that you realise that what goes on the Internet stays on the Internet and at any given time you must be able to take responsibility for it. So, what you put out there, the amount of skin, so to say of your life that you put on social media, you need to be able to take responsibility for it in its impact."*

This theme is summed up appropriately by the analogy provided by one participant each from the respective groups, referring to social media use as a "double edged sword" and "two-way dagger". The researcher understands leaders' perspective that it is important for them to have a social media presence and be digitally savvy in this digital age. but leaders must proceed with caution with the content and information they share; it should be credible, verifiable and not bring any risk to the individual leader or organisation.

### **5.6.5 Theme 5: Limitations as a communication channel**

While both active and passive leaders acknowledge that social media is a useful communication tool, especially regarding the knowledge sharing and acquisition side, there are some limitations identified with the use of social media as an effective communication channel. Five AUPs indicated that social media is only useful when used in conjunction with other media streams such as the official company website and communication to employees via internal e-mails. This allows for a consistent message to be shared across communication channels, providing a wider reach. However, noting that in the South African context the majority of the population do not have access to the internet, the best means to communicate remains via traditional methods of television and radio. In addition, two AUP indicated that fake and incorrect information spreads much faster on social media than on other communication channels. The other limitation viewed as a concern for active users is that there are only a limited number of leaders on social media. Those older than 50, have built their leadership connections and do not really engage on social media for professional purposes, but rather for social and family reasons. This is supported by the following direct quotes from participants.

*PUP9: “And then I think also like sometimes your traditional communication channels like just face-to-face communication channels and those internal communication channels with your own employees, those work much better. But also, there should be a focus on omni channels and have the constant message across all these omni channels, then the message gets out there.”*

*AUP9: “So I still think face-to-face, traditional channels are probably the best. Go and try and get the CEO of a company who is in his 50s to speak to you via social media – it’s not going to happen.”*

The leaders’ views help the researcher gain perspective that both active and passive users identify that certain limitations exist regarding the use of social media as an effective communication channel. Especially in the South African context where most people do not have access to social media and thus cannot be influenced through such a channel.

### **5.6.6 Theme 6: Social, mental and emotional effect**

This theme considers the effects of social media use on all aspects of well-being including social, mental and emotional well-being. Based on the data analysis the

researcher came to the conclusion that leaders experienced only one positive sentiment from a social aspect, being when they saw posts of past colleagues or alumni being promoted and excelling in their careers. Active and passive users agree that they are not harbouring feeling of social comparison, attributable to their leadership maturity. The quote below has been selected by the researcher to best describe this aspect.

*PUP3: "Don't compare yourself and look at other people's lives on social media because they never post their failures. We live in a world where you don't see how fast people are progressing, you might think that your life is so great. Whereas you know it reminds you that you can be, you can do better I don't see that as a negative at all. But looking at colleagues' career strides, I actually think it's a positive, it makes me happy for them."*

Other than this, both active and passive users have contributed to this section describing the negative effects they perceive and, in some instances, have experienced. Two AUPs have explicitly indicated that actively engaging on social media is mentally exhausting and socially demoralising, especially when they see other leaders bragging and promoting misleading information about themselves. Also, there is the continuous need to engage with the audience when content is posted and sometimes leaders do not have the time to do so. Another AUP expressed the fear and guilt experienced when posting about politics in a jovial manner, the comments and responses were so negative and demeaning that the user went off all social media platforms for at least five years, but this served as a lesson as to how sensitive and mean the audience can be. The quote below has been selected by the researcher to best describe this effect of social media use.

*AUP11: "I just need to do like these detoxes from social media. It's like there's just too much lie., I look at the people I know personally, leaders that is, and the stuff that they post, and it's almost as if I know that they not that. As much as it's not a personal thing for me, I mean it doesn't say anything about me, but at the end of the day, I find it they mislead a lot of people."*

The PUPs expressed quite a few negative effects perceived to social, mental and emotional well-being. These include that because there so much information on social media, with polarised and opposing views, a user is left confused as to what is the truth and what to belief. A few active and passive users voiced that you need to be selective and critical of the information you choose to take in from social media.

Two PUPs raised the fact that due to the online nature of social media sites, users are actually left in isolation as there is no face-to-face interaction and support. Furthermore, the lack of body language and signalling cues from leaders makes users feel detached and left to interpret the message. At least two passive users voiced that some content is over sensationalised to evoke many emotions in a user. Lastly and most concerning is that social media can become addictive to users, where they are distracted from tasks and meetings and not present in the moment. This is supported by the following direct quotes from participants. The quotes below explain the users' sentiments.

*PUP8: "You see people checking and engaging on these platforms during meetings. I've also seen it in-person conferences. I find it very distracting. People are not present, and my concern is that for young kids, even though I don't have my own, that they are learning to be addicted to social media, but a big part is example we are setting."*

*PUP12: "I find the comments a little bit depressing, Why should I go against someone's viewpoint, it's their opinion, and comments would say very disturbing things. You create a specific sentiment around the individual or specific issue. You know things are not just black and white. There's some bit of grey and you know, as people, we need to always have that in mind and not just miss other people's opinion or other people's views on the basis of what we think. People can be ignorant and hurtful."*

This theme and the quotes provided make the researcher realise that users experience and perceive more negative social, mental and emotional feelings than feelings of support. Both active and passive users have explained the mental and emotional stress from comments and responses on social media due to a lack of understanding and acceptance amongst users. A big concern for a few passive users is that they perceive more users are becoming habitual and addicted to social media sites and that they are not present in the professional workspace.

#### **5.6.7 Tabular presentation of challenges and concerns that arose per theme for sub-research questions one and two**

The themes in support of the sub-research questions one and two encapsulate both positive and negative affordances offered by social media sites to the leader in their active or passive use. These have been summarised in Table 4 below.

Table 4

*Summary of challenges and concerns per theme for sub-research questions one and two*

Opportunities and benefits	Challenges and concerns
<b><i>Theme 1: Personal expressiveness and leadership thoughts</i></b>	
Leaders can be their authentic selves and express themselves in their own words.	
<b><i>Theme 2: Personal and organisational benefits against the concerns</i></b>	
Networking opportunities and relationship building are afforded by social media sites by being able to connect with thought leaders, and leverage of online network communities.	The concern with the networks on social media is that communication within the networks can result in biased opinions. Leaders alluded that real connections are not built on social media sites, but offline through more personal and interactive communication.
Social media allows leaders to connect across boundaries, building global networks for themselves, as well as with potential clients.	
Open access of social media affords wider reach to a diverse audience leading to high visibility of the leader.	
The marketing benefit for company products and services on social media is afforded when the leader communicates these aspects. which translates into sales for the organisation.	Leaders are cautious of negative comments from customers which could result in reputational damage and low sales of a product.

Opportunities and benefits	Challenges and concerns
<p>Social media benefits career opportunities by applying for jobs directly on these platforms and viewing profiles as a due diligence method for potential employees.</p>	
<p><b><i>Theme 3: Time and Productivity</i></b></p>	
<p>New ventures and opportunities arise when leaders afford themselves the time and effort to curate authentic, yet factual information.</p>	<p>Content might not be as impactful to the audience as anticipated, making the time and effort spent non-productive.</p>
	<p>Passive users perceive that there is not much value add on social media and therefore not worth the time and effort required to curate content.</p>
<p><b><i>Theme 4: Security and responsible use</i></b></p>	
<p>Leaders are critical and selective of the information they post and consume on social media, in effort to be responsible users.</p>	<p>Accounts are susceptible cloning and hacking which could result in severe reputational damage for the individual leader as well as the organisation due to fake or misleading information disseminated.</p>
	<p>When leaders do not validate their sources of information, give credit where it is due, and post inappropriate professional and business content, the result is experienced in a lack of audience interaction or negative reactions as this is viewed as unethical and irresponsible use of social media.</p>

Opportunities and benefits	Challenges and concerns
<b>Theme 5: Limitations as a communication tool</b>	
	Leaders perceive that social media is only useful when used in conjunctions with other media streams such as the official company website and communications to employees via internal e-mails, such that there is a consistent message providing a wider reach.
	There is also a perception that most leaders over 50 years are not on social media as they have already built their networks and career.
<b>Theme 6: Social, mental and emotional effect</b>	
Leaders experienced only one positive sentiment from a social aspect, being when they saw posts of past colleagues or alumni being promoted and excelling in their careers. Active and passive users agree that they were not harbouring feelings of social comparison, attributable to their leadership maturity.	Active users reported that social media is mentally exhausting and socially demoralising, especially when they see others leader bragging and promoting misleading information about themselves.
	A big concern for a few passive users is that they perceive more users are becoming habitual and addicted to social media sites that they are not present in the professional workspace.

### Sub-research questions 3

***What are the underlying factors that leaders in South Africa use to create content which results in audience influence and engagement on social media posts?***

The aim of this research question was to understand how leaders curate content on social media, by examining the underlying factors used by leaders for content factors through the HSM. This question was formulated to determine the type of content leaders post and how leaders frame these posts, using the affordance and resulting consequences lens, to create an influence and audience engagement. The study aimed to understand if leaders intentionally include strategic hashtags, multimedia, videos and linguistic options to make the post more relatable to audiences. In terms of the consequences lens, this research question aimed to determine which social media platforms leaders find most effective to achieve audience reactions based on the type of content they post for active leaders in a professional context, and which platforms passive users scroll through in terms of a professional and business context.

The data analysis done by the researcher revealed the following themes in support of sub-research question three. The themes, summarised in Figure 5 below, assisted the researcher in interpreting how the HSM is used in practice by leaders to leverage the affordance of social media to curate content that is attractive, visually appealing, in the appropriate language and sends the correct signal to the audience. Leaders shared their views that these factors result in audience interaction and high visibility.

Figure 5 below depicts the iterative process the researcher used to review and refine the first level codes to be grouped as second level categories and then as themes to address sub-research question three. An initial set of 12 first level codes were created, which were refined into seven categories and further reviewed into four themes which clearly represent the findings of the data. The researcher reviewed the names of the themes, changing some to be more succinct and meaningful.

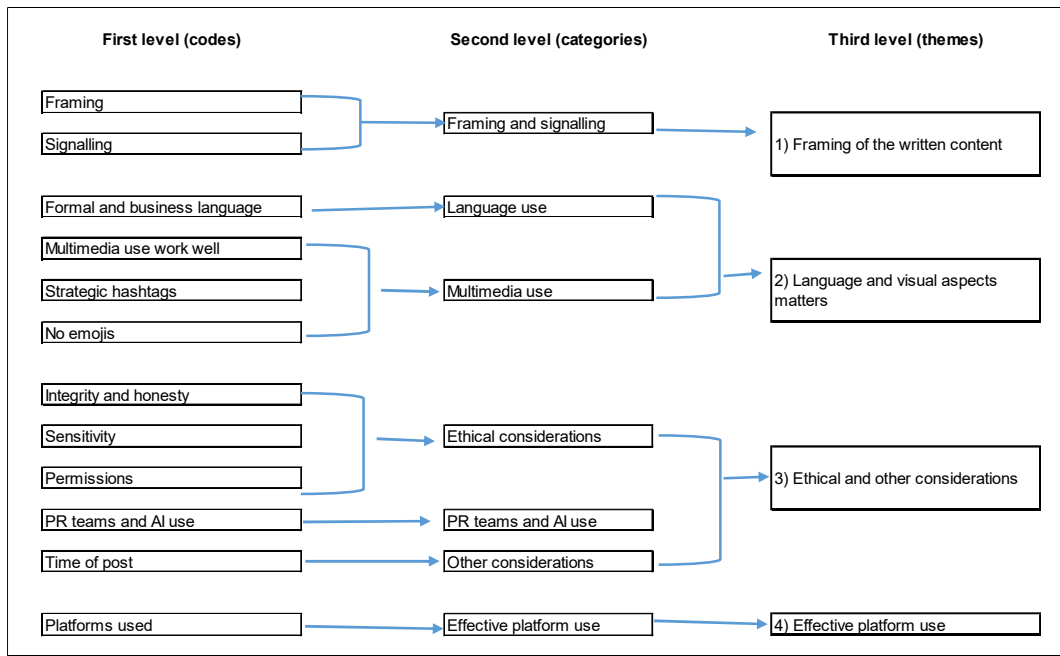


Figure 5

*Themes in support of research question three*

**5.6.8 Theme 1: Framing of the written content**

All active participants stress that the content in written word, be it short or long posts, is of utmost importance and much thought and consideration is put into every post. There is consensus amongst active participants that the content must be more than a “FYI”. It must be conscious and purposeful and resonate with human beings. For instance, where a story is told or opinions are voiced, supported by factual evidence, open ended questions can follow to engage with the audience. The main aim of users paying so much attention to the written content, is the consequences of audience interaction and high visibility that is achieved. Three AUPs stated that they make sure there is a balance between their personal posts which include their own experiences in a professional context, and professional posts relating to the company and its products and services. Four active users described that they consciously think about the signals they send with the posts and read it a few times with an open mind to understand it from the audience point of view. Two active participants indicated that a family member or close friend is asked to review the content before the post is shared, as a verification that the message is clear and meaningful. The researcher found it interesting that one AUP commented that they add pop culture song references to certain posts to make more it current and fun to read. This is supported by the following direct quotes from participants.

*AUP13: "I don't want to become the person that posts everything and anything to everyone. It is very important to be aware of that difference and to also be constantly aware of the objective you have with a post, and therefore then it will inform the kind of content that you put on. I am mindful that there must be a message that speaks to the audience."*

*AUP1: "I think it's the call to action that is really important. It's what are you hoping to achieve. Sometimes I curate content and leave the post unposted for a few days and then come back to it. I can see with a fresh mind if the message and signals come out strong that there will be some reactions from the audience. I find then these LinkedIn posts one gets more visibility. But I do a lot of research and fact checking."*

The researcher was able to conclude that active leaders pay much attention to the manner in which they curate and set up their posts. Much attention and thought was put into the written content to ensure it comes out as relatable to the audience and has some value to the audience. The researcher understood that leaders consider many factors when framing their posts, these include that there is a value add and purpose to the post, that they achieve a balance between professional work and professional personal content, the signals sent out and how they perceive the audience will respond.

### **5.6.9 Theme 2: Language and visual aspects matters**

This theme explains the use of language preferences and visuals in the form of photos and videos that active users consider when setting up their posts. Included in this section is the use of strategic hashtags and emojis. All active users attest to the use of photos and videos as highly beneficial when used in conjunction with written posts as they get more audience reactions.

With regard to language used, all AUPs indicated that they used formal and business language in their posts. Five users indicated that in some instance they include informal language, where appropriate, so that words and phrases are abbreviated or shortened, but remain respectful. Two participants alluded to the use of a conversation tone in some posts, so they can attract audience opinions. The leaders advised the researcher they take care to ensure that the language used is respectful, has no spelling errors and that mindful terminology is used including industry acronyms to demonstrate thought leadership. This is supported by the following direct quote from a participant.

*AUP6: "I still prefer to use proper language in terms of grammar and punctuation so it will be more formal type communication, sometimes business language with industry acronyms. Sometimes you want to appeal to a younger audience or a relaxed audience so then I'd use informal language rather than sounding like a robot or like a chatbot, these AI generated thing nowadays is going in the opposite direction. There has to be a human element to communication."*

Two active users found that when they add pictures of themselves to a post which relates to personal leadership experiences or insights gained, there is more audience reactions. The participants unanimously agreed that they try to include visual aspects, including videos, graphs, charts and illustrations, amongst others, as this adds to the impact of the written content. Two AUPs noted that their personal preference is to consume content with more visuals as after a long day at work, they do not want to read lengthy wordy posts. This is supported by the following direct quotes from participants.

*AUP3: "Yes, there's definitely a certain way the use of language, the timing of the post, the content that I put out, the use of audio visuals is very important, depending on what I'm trying to achieve. So, my image has to be on it for personal stories, and secondly when I'm trying to get people to engage and talk, there's a video. There's more attraction when there is a video. So yes, certainly I pay very close attention to how I create my content and the visuals I add."*

*AUP7: "People, social media won't work if you don't have a hashtag. Social media works well if there's a picture. Social media works better if there's a video, it's the algorithm or whatever the social media platform has decided is the best approach or what will be they deem popular. If you have an external link on your LinkedIn post, you have a lesser chance of it being popular because LinkedIn doesn't want you to leave the platform."*

At least eight AUPs indicated that the use of hashtags is always strategic and is intended to draw attention to a particular topic. Only two active users indicated that they make use of emojis, but this is very rare and only where appropriate for example to break a paragraph with a "thumbs up." The remainder of leaders voiced that they do not feel that emojis are appropriate for professional context posts and it may

cause controversy as it is open to interruption. This is supported by the following direct quotes to express the participants views.

*AUP9: “I don’t think I’ve ever used emojis because I think they sometimes can be interpreted differently. So, for me that’s a bit over the top, like you could put a happy face, but someone could be like, it’s not relevant to put a happy face and why are you happy about this fact. So, no I think it could lead to a downfall in professionalism.”*

*AUP7: “When I’m passionate about it, I’m passionate about leadership, Africa, diversity, so those will always have a hashtag, So, that’s how I see a hashtag. Hashtag is almost highlighting what it is I’m about and what I want to bring attention to.”*

The researcher was able to note that majority of active users keep the language in posts more formal than informal, paying attention to the spelling, tone and terminology used. Leaders make an effort to include visuals in the form of photos, videos, graphs, charts and illustrations where appropriate as they perceive these land better with the audience. With regard to hashtags, the researcher noted the key element was that it was strategic and made to draw attention to a topic. Lastly, emojis are rarely used are they are deemed inappropriate and open to interruption.

### **5.6.10 Theme 3: Ethical and other considerations**

This theme encapsulates the importance of ethical considerations for both active and passive users, as well as the timeliness factor that leaders deemed important when creating content. The importance of keeping true to their own values, integrity and honesty is highly ranked for the majority of the active users, including that leaders ensure that their posts are sensitive to race, gender and are generally inclusive. AUP1 specifically referred to a “metacultural approach of communicating” based on the nature of her profession where her post should appeal to vast cultural backgrounds. Another key element that at least three active participants highlighted as part of ethics was crediting videos or content from another user and getting permission before tagging someone. At least two passive users indicated that they stop reading post immediately when the content has disrespectful or incentive views. The quote below has been selected by the researcher to best describe this view.

*AUP9: "I mean, we live in such a diverse world. People have also become very sensitive to issues, right. So definitely take into account ethical considerations and sometimes even go so far as to say you know you need to ask permission for certain things if you're going to be tagging people or saying certain things. You need to be sensitive around what you post, because it can be taken differently. I guess respect right to respect cultural sensitivity and you've got to respect privacy of people."*

At least three passive and four active users alluded to the perception that many leaders rely on PR teams or artificial intelligence (AI) applications to write the posts. Both groups agreed that users can easily pick up when something is AI generated as it lacks the human emotion. These active leaders further indicated that even when they post personal content, they are conscious they represent the company directly or indirectly, and as such prefer to have content reviewed by the PR instead of the PR team writing the entire post. The quote below has been selected by the researcher to best describe this aspect.

*PUP2: "I mean ethics, and digital ethics is alone still in its infancy. I mean, if you look at the ethics in AI there isn't a lot of work done. Because people can see when it's just an AI download, it's just information overload there's no connection."*

Another consideration five active leader users alluded to is the time the post is sent out. Three indicated that they strive to post or schedule posts, so it only sends out during weekdays and between working hours only. In contrast the other two users voiced they prefer to post on Friday afternoon, as most leaders are relaxing then and most likely to engage more. AUP15 mentioned an interesting factor that his posts are meant to be timeless. Based on the nature of his leadership role, many posts are generated live at functions and occasions, like during the rugby world cup, but the intention is that the information and message in the post must still be valid and relevant after the event. This is supported by the following direct quote from a participant.

*AUP5" So if I post something on a Monday morning, I'm not going to get many views because everybody is engaged in work. It's the beginning of the week, but if I post something on a Friday afternoon, most likely get more engagement because people are winding down and they're looking at social media around there. So those factors play a part."*

An undisputable factor relating to the content on social media for active and passive users is the integrity and ethical considerations by being respectful and sensitive to the multicultural society we live in. Both groups of leaders voice that AI generated posts are easily picked up by the audience which reduces interaction. Further another consideration when posting on social media is the time of the post and the timelessness of the post.

#### **5.6.11 Theme 4: Effective platform use**

All active users except for ACP2, use LinkedIn as their preferred social media platform for profession and business content. AUP2 had specifically created a Facebook group related to his professional area of interest being a particular vehicle range, which also links directly to his leadership role position. The participant is very clear that he only shares content that is publicly available and provides some more insights and know-how on certain features. Three AUPs indicated that they tried to use the platform X for professional content but did not manage to gain any traction and therefore continued actively on LinkedIn. The majority of the active users indicated that they post content at least once a month, or more frequently when there is something noteworthy or interesting to share. Four active users explained that the post once a month is sufficient to ensure their social visibility as a leader, and also that they can afford enough time to interact with audience comments and reactions.

All passive user participants only viewed LinkedIn for professional and business content. In addition, three viewed X on an occasional basis for global business news, but X is mainly viewed for personal areas on interest. This is supported by the following direct quotes from the research participants.

*AUP16: 'From the different social media platforms the one I have served the I find the most relevant to interact on is LinkedIn. Like Instagram, Twitter or Facebook I'm browsing socially but not active in a professional sense. But LinkedIn is the one I prefer the most.'*

*AUP14: "So I focus more on LinkedIn, and the frequency I would say, I probably post something once every month or so. So, if I post something, I'll check in almost every day to see how it's tracking."*

Based on the sample, the researcher concluded that in the South African context, LinkedIn is the preferred social media site that both active and passive users.

## 5.7 Chapter conclusion

This chapter presented the results obtained from the qualitative research study with research participants, that allowed the researcher to uncover the phenomena of the needs, affordance and consequences that the use of social media sites provides leaders in a professional and business context. The results are based on the views of 18 active user participants and 12 passive user participants on social media, which enabled the researcher to gain perspective from the two distinct groups to understand both perspectives. This chapter included a description of the research participants. The researcher explained how data triangulation was achieved and the process followed for the data analysis approach. The researcher was able to interpret the themes and draw conclusions for the main and sub-research question which aligned to the needs, affordance and consequences lens used by the study.

In addressing the main research question of understanding why leaders choose to actively engage, or alternatively to passively view social media from a professional context, the needs lens was used. The researcher concluded that the needs, motivation and intention behind leaders creating a social media presence for active users was primarily to create a personal brand. The other significant theme relating to a need basis was for knowledge sharing and knowledge acquiring, which was shared by active and passive users of social media. The other themes that emerged regarding leaders' needs was to express certain leadership behaviours, to build professional networks and relationships, the personal preferences and time aspect for passive leaders and future career opportunities.

In addressing sub-research questions one and two in understanding of leaders own experiences and perceptions in terms of the possible opportunities and challenges of social media use, the affordances and consequences were considered by the researcher. The data analysis allowed the researcher to interpret that leaders were afforded the opportunity to express their personal opinions and authentic selves on social media sites and build professional networks and relationships. Along with the opportunities, active users also highlighted areas of concern where the networks and relationships only materialised into meaningful connections when personal and interactive communication was sought offline. The researcher noted that some leaders used their personal profile to market products and services related to their companies, in such instances benefits and concerns were noted, where the benefits resulted in sales and concerns from negative comments resulted in reputational

damage and low sales. An affordance of social media used by leaders in South Africa was the career opportunities allowing them to be headhunted for new roles and do simple due diligence on possible job candidates. The third theme that emerged in this section was that the time and effort put in by leaders to create purposeful and meaningful content for the audience, resulted in audience reactions and high visibility, in contrast though, passive user perceived the time and effort required to curate posts as wasteful and did not add much to their leadership careers. The researcher was able to understand many participants concerns regarding the security and open access nature of social media sites as well as unethical and irresponsible use of social media. Hacking and cloning of accounts may result in reputational damage for the individual leader as well as the organisation due to fake or misleading dissemination of information. A limitation was noted that social media is a useful communication tool when used in conjunction with other media streams, as this results in a wider reach. Lastly, in terms of the social, mental and emotional effects of social media use, active and passive users agreed that they were not harbouring feelings of social comparison which was attributable to their leadership maturity. However, a few users mentioned that social media can be mentally exhausting and socially demoralising, given the nature of continuous engage with the audience, and that users are getting addicted to social media sites.

In addressing sub-research question three, the researcher was able to interpret how the HSM used in this study is used in practice by leaders to leverage the affordance of social media to curate content that is attractive, visually appealing, in the appropriate language and sends the correct signal to the audience. The researcher understood that leaders consider many factors when framing their posts. These include that there is a value add, purpose to the post and that opinions are voiced supported by factual evidence. With regards to the HSM features of linguistics, the researcher found that most active users prefer to use formal language on social media sites when sharing professional and business content. With regards to multimedia use and hashtags, the researcher found that leaders deliberately include visuals such as photo and videos, as they perceive this lands better with the audience, and hashtags are used strategically to draw attention to a topic. However, emojis are rarely used as they are deemed inappropriate and open to interpretation. A significant factor for all users is the ethical considerations of being respectful and sensitive to all cultures, races and groups and to post with honesty and integrity. Leaders are not keen to use AI to generate posts and passive users indicated that

they could see when AI had been used. The time of the post and the timelessness of the post was another consideration that leaders pay attention to when posting on social media sites, Lastly, based on the sample of participants indicating that they prefer to use LinkedIn as the primary social media site for professional and business content, the researcher made this generalisation for the purposes to this study.

The following chapter will discuss the results of the finding with reference to the literature review, research problem and research questions.

## Chapter 6 – Discussion of Results

### 6.1 Chapter introduction

Chapter six provides a discussion of the findings set out in chapter five. The results from the research questions in chapter five are compared against the extant literature presented in chapter two and the research questions raised in chapter three. This chapter seeks to integrate the findings of the semi-structured interviews with the literature review, the research problem and the research questions.

The discussion highlights consistencies between the findings and the extant literature or, alternatively, where the findings deviate from the literature. Where new findings were discovered that are not covered by the current body of literature, the study had identified this as a contribution to the extant literature in the field of leader's use of social media. This chapter provides the study's contribution to literature in understanding leaders' needs, motivations, the opportunities and challenges, and the manner in which social media is used in a professional context.

### 6.2 Discussion of main research question and sub-research questions one and two

Due to the link between the leaders needs that result in affordances and consequence on social media use, some of the themes from the main research question and the affordance in terms of opportunities and concerns experienced by the leader addressed in sub-research questions one and two, have been integrated to provide a holistic discussion of the related topics.

***Why do leaders in South African use social media in the professional context?  
If not, why not?***

The purpose of this research question was to understand why leaders choose to actively engage or alternative, passively use social media from a professional context.

***Sub-research question 1: What are the opportunities and benefits that leaders in South Africa experience or perceive from social media?***

***Sub-research question 2: What are the challenges and concerns that leaders in South Africa experience or perceive from social media?***

The purpose of sub-research question one and two was formulated to gain the leaders own experiences and perceptions of the possible opportunities and challenges afforded through social media use.

Based on the data analysis, the researcher was able to formulate themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews in respect to these questions explained in chapter five. The findings of these themes are compared to the extant literature, substantiating or deviating from the literature as follows.

### **6.2.1 Personal brand, personal expressiveness and reputation**

As this main research question pertained to a leader's needs, it was found that a leader's primary reason to use social media sites was to build their own personal brand as an individual leader. The motivation and intention behind this personal brand are to create an awareness around their skills and expertise, allowing them to build trust with an online community and to get people thinking and influenced to change their perspectives. This is supported by academic literature by Zhou et al. (2024) which indicated that the leader's choice to actively use social media to fulfil their primary psychological need of a leader to build their image, brand and reputation, which could result in audience influence. This aligns to social presence theory, where leaders shape their profile and self-image to present themselves to the audience in their true leadership style to have social and human connections (Yang et al., 2021; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Although not indicated as a primary need but an affordance, the studies by Bayer et al., (2020) and Heavy et al., (2020) had a similar construct that leaders should use the personal profiles to establish their own social capital and influence, separate from their company. Aligned to Yang et al., (2021) in order to fulfil this need, leaders chose to actively use social media, thus maintaining a social presence to enable interactions.

### **6.2.2 Leadership behaviours**

As part of showcasing their motivation and intention when actively using social media, the findings revealed that leaders purposefully embody several behaviours and attributes, as discussed below.

Leaders in the study indicated that while they maintained professional behaviours on social media sites, an important attribute was for them to be authentic to their leadership style and personalities. Whereas authentic behaviours were endorsed by various studies, they also cautioned that leaders might control their self-image and

self-presentation such that it was only viewed in a positive manner (Gilani et al., 2020; Bayer et al., 2020; Agboada & Ofori-Birikorang, 2018). Contrary to this was the challenge raised by Bayer et al. (2020) that leaders might be tempted to misrepresent themselves. Participants of this study stressed that their intention was to be authentic, as they experienced that the audience found them more relatable when the leader was vulnerable and showed their true self. In agreement with the study by Domenico et al. (2021), an active user participant indicated that the audience and those who knew the leader personally would call out the leader for being fake when revealing a different persona on social media to their actual behaviours. Moreover, the AUPs stated they intentionally expressed themselves authentically so that they might earn trust to build their own brand for future posts, which was aligned to the results of the study by Ham et al. (2019) which was conducted from a consumer point of view as the social media user. Deviating from Matthews et al. (2022) which concluded that behaviours of overconfidence and grandiose narcissism favour leaders when communication about finance, the researcher found that active users were more inclined towards evangelising, dialogic and modest behaviours as described by Heavy et al., (2020) and Grant et al., (2018).

Whereas the findings revealed that eight AUPs within various industries used social media to share ideas and experiences from a thought leadership perspective, the view from other academic studies differed in that the reason to engage on social media was from a digital leadership perspective (Banks et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2022; Larson & DeChurch, 2020). The participants voiced that from a thought leader perspective the intention was to share experiences and suggestions on skills and expertise in particular fields to become industry leaders. Digital leadership related to leaders utilising digital channels effectively to stay relevant, taking advantage of the large-scale online access to communicate and disseminate information to various stakeholder (Banks et al., 2022; Larson & DeChurch, 2020). Thus, the intention of the leadership perspective differed, where one is to share expertise to become industry leaders and digital leadership relates to effective virtual communication (Liu et al., 2023; Roman et al., 2019).

An interesting insight emerged from the interviews, where AUPs in the professional services industry specifically, indicated that they choose to personalise and share their own experiences related to the multiple generic content provided by their organisation, making it more relatable to a wider audience. This contrasted to the academic literature which points out that leaders use social media from a fiduciary

duty point of view to share and communicate strategic information, new initiatives and company financial disclosures by applying control over the content, context and timing of communication (Lei et al., 2019; Nisar et al., 2019; Heavy et al., 2020). Since academic literature does not specifically identify personalising the content, this element was viewed as an extension to the element of control over the content and context in existing literature.

The research findings revealed that four AUP behaviours were described as deliberate to not post any work-related content on social media accounts but rather curate content regarding leadership and relevant topical posts that they were passionate about, including their own leadership journeys, their struggles, business tips and tools, coaching suggestions, women in the workplace and motivational content to get other leaders talking and encouraged. The leader's intention and motivation was to communicate a personal and meaningful message to the audience, as articulated in the study by Huang & Yeo, (2018). This finding links directly to the academic literature which indicates that users were encouraged to create and share their own content, voicing their opinions and perspectives on current topical matters on social media (Bayer et al., 2020; Cade, 2018). The findings of this study where that these AUPs indicated they intentionally shared personal and what might be viewed as sensitive leadership agendas, which reinforced the research by Cade (2018) that social media allows such opinions to be shared without any restrictions.

### **6.2.3 Knowledge sharing and acquisition**

As this main research question pertained to a leader's needs, the researcher found that all participants, active and passive users, raised knowledge sharing and acquisition as one of the core reasons why they use social media in a professional context. All active participants referred to the reason for engaging to share their knowledge, expertise, technical skills, new developments in their professions, disseminate company information, but also to acquire knowledge to keep abreast of industry and professional updates from the rest of the world. This sharing of knowledge facilitated SET on social media platforms where leaders could interact with the comments and reactions from their followers (Luqman et al., 2023; Adongo et al., 2019). This finding is further supported by a leader's need to create a social exchange, in terms of a providing benefits of trust, respect and co-operation with their followers, which created a reciprocal knowledge-sharing relationships at the little cost

to the leader (Luqman et al., 2023; Adongo et al., 2019). Although other academic studies view knowledge sharing as an affordance on social media due to the continuous, real-time interactions and feedback loops (Matthews et al., 2022; Lei et al., 2019; Blankespoor, 2018; Majchrzak et al., 2013), rather than a leader's need, the construct of knowledge sharing, and acquisition is supported by existing literature.

On the passive users' side, this study found that knowledge acquisition in a professional context was the primary reason for passive leaders' use of social media. This included following thought leaders in their industry and technical opinions, looking at polarised views and understanding cultural differences and sourcing daily news. The finding of this study pertaining to passive users was deemed as a significant contribution to literature, as this addressed the research gap raised by Davis et al. (2020) to specifically further examine passive users' social media behaviours. The findings are also in contrast to existing literature which indicated that passive users need for social media was for online social support (Godard and Holtzman, 2024).

#### **6.2.4 Professional networks and collaborations**

In line with existing studies, the majority the AUPs indicated their need to use social media to build and grow their professional network so they could have meaningful connections and not just many followers (Bayer et al., 2020; Voorveld, 2019; Lei et al., 2019; Blankespoor, 2018; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In terms of social network theory, extant literature referred to the leaders need to connect with others to have a sense of belonging (Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Zhou et al., 2024; Verduyn et al., 2022). However, this view was not shared by the participants of this study. The participants were mainly seeking professional networks to connect with like-minded individuals, clients, and other businesses to create collaborations and business development, which is more aligned to three "Cs" (cohesion, connectedness and conciseness) mentioned by Muller and Peres (2019) where mutual influence related to cohesion, relatedness and communal interaction linked to connectedness and sharing meaningful information within a social circle related to conciseness. The participants responded that wider reach and speed at which information reaches networks, had resulted in high visibility and further ventures for the leader, which supported literature that the broad reach and networking affordance result in high visibility (Davis et al., 2020; Nisar et al., 2019; Heavy et al., 2020). The findings

therefore supported SNT for leaders' use in social media, due to the vast professional networking affordances including connecting to like-minded and thought leaders. Further in agreement with the academic studies of Mollah et al. (2022) and Porter et al. (2015), that individuals primarily adopted social media to connect with family and friends around the world, the participants indicated that they made use of different social media platforms for this purpose separate from the professional and business purpose social media sites used.

The study was able to provide more depth to the study by Clark, et al. (2018) that posited that active users had found relational benefits of strong relationships and social support, affecting their happiness and well-being. The findings revealed that leaders had only built strong relationships when taking the connection offline from the social media site and interacting more personally through other communication channels, such as e-mail or phone calls. This finding was supported by Davis et al., (2020), where the authors posited that the lowest correlation between social support and benefits of social media was due to users relying on face-to-face networks for social support rather than online networks. This aspect of the findings added more clarity to literature with regards to SNT on social media by distinguishing how leaders leverage their online social networks versus those connections that they shared in a face-to-face relationship.

In alignment with the concern raised by Muller & Peres (2019), this study's participants shared the feeling that opinions shared within a network might be biased due to the shared beliefs and homogeneous attributes of the users, not allowing for polarised views. Passive participants voiced their reluctance to engage on social media as they experienced it as a push channel, where users' views and information was forced onto stakeholders as described by the existing literature (DePaula et al., 2018; Rennekamp & Witz, 2021).

#### **6.2.5 Personal preference, time and productivity**

The findings regarding passive users' personal preference and choice not to actively engage on social media sites was considered as a significant contribution to the extant literature. This study provided further evidence to the remarks made in the study by Porter et al. (2015) that there was apprehension amongst leaders to use social media and the study by Huang & Yeo (2018) that leaders were lagging in the adoption of social media. Whereas the existing literature on passive users need for social media was limited to seeking online social support (Godard & Holtzman

(2024), the findings revealed multiple factors that inform passive users' preference. One being that they do not have much more to add to the content already shared by the company. Secondly that in their leadership capacity, the leader is seen as a representative of the company even when posting personal views and the risk of contradicting the organisations views with personal content might be a cause for controversy, explained the apprehension raised by Porter et al. (2018). A major factor raised by at least seven passive participants was that curating content required a significant amount of time and effort, which they would prefer to spend in other meaningful personal activities. The participants also indicated that there with the plethora of company content disseminated on social media sites; that they did not wish to add to their already busy schedules and areas of responsibilities by disseminating more information that might not even add any value. These findings added new insights to literature regarding passive users' perceptions as to why they chose to lag in their use of social media as the time and effort required to curate content was deemed non-productive and non-value adding to them.

Active participants acknowledged the cost versus benefit effect on social exchange as discussed in the literature (Zhang et al., 2023; Luqman et al., 2023; Adongo et al., 2019). In some instances, the time and effort to curate authentic and personal posts resulted in monetisation through further ventures, and in other instances posts did not create the engagement anticipated by the leader.

### **6.2.6 Future career and talent attraction**

The researcher found that both active and passive leaders use LinkedIn in particular for career, leadership and business development purposes. This finding adding insights to Davis et al. (2020) call for more research to understand passive user behaviours towards career opportunities on social media. The researcher found that passive participants scrolled through social media sites for career opportunities and especially to understand the skills and expertise companies were looking for within the various leadership bands. The participants also viewed career advertisements to enhance their skills and technical know-how by using the LinkedIn learnings application. In agreement with the recent study by Zhang et al. (2023), participants revealed that they did not experience the social comparison effect when exposed reports of colleagues and leaders career achievements, owing to the level of their leadership maturity. This finding links directly with Zhang et al. (2023) where users self-regulate and adjust their cognition and behaviours towards this kind of

information based on an understanding of how people tend to use self-presentation and impression on social media sites. From a South African context, this study makes a significant contribution to the call by Koch et al. (2018) showing that South African leaders do indeed use social media as a due diligence tool for screening potential candidates and recruitment tool for positions through direct application on LinkedIn.

### **6.2.7 Security and responsible use**

The concern regarding the security, privacy and open access of social media sites which makes users profiles susceptible to hacking and cloning, was viewed as a significant contribution to the literature. Passive user suggested that cloned profiles could result in the spreading of false and misleading information, leading to reputation risk and negative consequence for the individual leader and the organisation. Since other studies had not examined the challenges and concerns experienced by users on social media, this study highlights significant issues relating to security and responsible use of social media. One being that social media is a tool, and users must be mindful of how they use it, explaining that users should be selective and wise regarding the type of content they consume. Secondly, as this study pertained to social media use from a professional context, the appropriateness of content was a key element of responsible use, where posting content on God and religion is deemed inappropriate for professional conduct in some instances. Further to this, users must ensure that they verify information as credible, supported by factual evidence and give credit to others work where required.

### **6.2.8 Limitations as a communication channel**

The study found that leaders experienced social media as an effective communication tool only when used in conjunction with and as a support channel to other media streams such as the official company website and communications to employees via internal e-mails, such that there is a consistent message providing a wider reach. This finding was in support of Ren et al. (2024) that users should correlate the information of social media with traditional media channels to verify the source variability and sentiment intensity which may be exaggerated on social media sites. The study also added new insights to the limitation of social media use, that within the South African context, where the majority of the population does not have access to the internet, the best means to communicate remain via traditional methods of television and radio for broader leadership and business development topics.

### **6.2.9 Social, mental and emotional effect**

The active users' experiences of negative mental and emotional effects aligned to the research by Tarafdar et al. (2020) in terms of the six stressors identified by the study, relating to feeling of anxiety and mental exhaustion from continuous engagement and drive to stay relevant on social media. The use of social media also led to a feeling of being demoralised when participants saw other leaders posts bragging and promoting misleading information about themselves, linking to another aspect of existing literature that the audience responded more positively to leader modesty than bragging on social media (Matthews et al., 2022; Grant et al., 2018).

Deviating significantly from the extant literature, was that passive users do not experience negative effects of loneliness, depression or fear of missing out from their choice to be passive users (Tarafdar et al., 2020; Aalbers et al., 2019). Rather, passive users felt that the time spent on social media was wasteful and added no value to them, contrasting with literature which indicates that they turn to social media to relieve stress and boredom (Tarafdar et al., 2020; Aalbers et al., 2019). The extant literature indicated that the due to the nature of passive use and not engaging, users experienced negative effects on well-being and suffered the effects of social comparison (Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Verduyn et al., 2022). The findings of this study were contrary to this statement, as passive users revealed that they did not have feelings that their achievements were not good enough or their colleagues were better than them (Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Clark et al., 2018). This is attributable to their level of maturity and in understanding that only positives and accomplishments are shown on social media, and that struggles and failures are not reflected.

A concern raised by participants that is echoed in the study by Yang et al. (2021) was that of addiction to social media sites.

### **6.3 Discussion of sub-research question three**

#### ***What are the underlying factors that leaders in South Africa use to create content which results in audience influence and engagement on social media posts?***

The aim of this research question was to understand how leaders curated content on social media so that it resulted in audience influence and engagement. This question examined the underlying factors used by leaders for content factors through the HSM model, based on the affordance and resulting consequences lens. This research question specifically addressed the gap posed in academic literature regarding how leaders framed and curated their social media content so that it created an online influence and audience engagement to them as leaders, separate from the company's

corporate social media account (Gilani et al., 2020; Huang & Yeo, 2018; Agboada & Ofori-Birikorang, 2018).

### **6.3.1 Framing of the written content**

The study found that all active participants paid much attention to the manner in which they curated and set up their posts. In framing posts, active users indicated that they were conscious and purposeful with their content so that it resonated with human beings and added value to the audience. They thought about the tone, signals that were sent and read it a few times with an open mind, supporting literature that states leaders must use deliberate and costly signalling such that the content makes sense and provides information symmetry to the audience (Nieken, 2023; Bank et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2022). AUPs shared that they tried to strike a balance between their professional work and the professional personal content they shared, and where appropriate added nuances like pop culture song references to attract the audience. Furthermore, leaders sought second opinions from family and friends to read the post before sharing it. These insights added depth to the existing literature by providing more detail to how leaders frame and think about their written posts (Rennekamp & Witz, 2021; Hall et al., 2019; Nisar et al., 2019).

Contrasting the active leader point of view that they considered the signals sent, passive users highlighted that the lack of body language, verbal cues and tone leaves users feeling detached and left to interpret the message. This is aligned to the argument raised by Nieken (2023) that the nature of social media, with low barriers of entry, large scale communication and often anonymous, made it easy for leaders to fake signals and lie about their intentions.

### **6.3.2 Language and visual aspects matters**

Whereas the literature provided a strong case for the use of informal language in social media posts, the study's participants preference for formal and business language, contrasted to other studies (Rennekamp & Witz, 2021; Hall et al., 2019; Nisar et al., 2019). Leaders also shared that they ensured the language used was respectful, had no spelling errors and that mindful terminology was used including industry acronyms to demonstrate thought leadership.

Consistent with academic studies, the study found that the use of strategic hashtags, multimedia and visuals including videos, graphs and illustrations in posts made them more visible and attracted more audience reactions (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021; Huang & Yeo, 2018). This validated media richness as a key factor for effective and efficient social media communication, where video and audio posts were deemed to be rich as

they provided a sense of interaction (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). However, the study participants view on the use of emojis contrasted to the literature regarding the use of emojis where the participants viewed this as inappropriate and open to interruption when relaying professional content (Lei et al., 2019; Schulze et al., 2017).

### **6.3.3 Ethical and other considerations**

The area of ethics related to social media use is scarce in the extant literature, with only the mention that leaders should provide credible information to the audience (Nieken, 2023). This study added valuable insights to ethical and timeliness considerations that leaders deemed important as additional factors when creating content on social media sites. The participants shared that keeping true to their own values, integrity and honesty was highly ranked in terms of ethical behaviours on social media. Further, leaders ensured that their posts were sensitive to race and gender and created a sense of inclusion. Active users highlighted the importance of crediting others work when used, requesting permission before tagging someone in a post and that the use of AI to generate posts was not reflective of authentic and personal messages. The timing of the post and the timelessness of the post was also another factor that leaders consider in their posts. Where some scheduled posts to only send out during working hours, other active users preferred to share content over weekends. The timelessness of posts refers to content, which is generated at live functions and occasions, like during the rugby world cup, and framed in a manner that remains valid and relevant after the event.

### **6.3.4 Effective platform use**

In agreement with literature, the study found that all participants except one, use LinkedIn as the primary social media platform for professional and business content (Davis et al., 2020; Feng & Johansson, 2019; Lei et al., 2019; Blankespoor, 2018; Huang & Yeo, 2018).

## **6.4 Chapter conclusion**

This chapter provided a discussion of the findings set out in chapter five, highlighting consistencies and extensions between the findings and the extant literature, or, alternatively, deviations from the literature. The new findings that were discovered by the study, have been identified as a significant contribution to the extant literature in the field of leader's use of social media.

There were several consistencies noted between the findings of this study and extant literature regarding active users' reasons for engaging on social media, considering their needs, motivation and intentions, which resulted in certain affordance and

consequences. These included the primary reason for active use being to build their personal brand and self-image (Zhou et al., 2024; Bayer et al., 2020; and Heavy et al., 2020). Leaders used social networks to gain high visibility and a wide reach (Davis et al., 2020; Bayer et al., 2020; Voorveld, 2019; Lei et al., 2019; Blankespoor, 2018), acknowledging that social media worked well as a support channel (Ren et al., 2024). The sharing of knowledge i facilitated SET on social media platforms where leaders could interact with the comments and reactions from their followers (Luqman et al., 2023; Adongo et al., 2019). The findings validated the applicability of SPT, SNT and SET in leader use of social media. However, the participants intention on being viewed as thought leaders provided a contrast to literature of being viewed as a digital leader (Banks et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2022; Larson & DeChurch, 2020).

Active users' experiences of negative mental and emotional effects aligned to the research by Tarafdar et al., (2020) where feeling of anxiety, stress and mental exhaustion were experienced from the continuous engagement that is required to stay relevant on social media.

With regards to the sub-research question three, addressing how leaders use the HSM model to frame and curate content, consistencies with regards to framing and signalling of posts and the importance of media richness through the use of strategic hashtags, multimedia and visuals were aligned to extant literature (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021; Huang & Yeo, 2018). The study provided a contrasting view on language and the use of emojis, where formal language and no emojis was preferred in posts. The study also provided valuable insights into ethical and timeliness considerations as additional factors that leaders deemed important when creating content.

### **Significant insights from passive users**

The findings of this study pertaining to passive users was deemed as a significant contribution to literature, as this addressed the research gap raised by Davis et al. (2020) to specifically examine passive users' social media behaviours. With regard to the sharing and acquisition of knowledge in the third theme, the active users need to engage in such to facilitate social exchange was supported by academic literature (Luqman et al., 2023; Adongo et al., 2019). However, knowledge acquisition was found to be the primary reason for passive leader's use of social media from a professional context, which contrasts with existing literature which indicates that passive users need for social media is for online social support (Godard & Holtzman, 2024).

This study provides insights to passive users' personal preferences and choice not to actively engage on social media sites by revealing multiple factors that informed their

decision. This included factors such as the time and effort required to curate content which is deemed non-productive and non-value adding to these leaders, contributing to the reason that Huang & Yeo (2018) remarked that leaders were lagging in social media use. This study contributed to the reason for the apprehension raised by Porter et al. (2018), which was to avoid the risk of contradicting the organisations views with personal content that may be a cause for controversy.

The study was able to add contributions to the recent literature regarding the use of social media sites for career development, where passive participants scrolled for job opportunities and used the LinkedIn learnings application to enhance their skill and technical abilities. Additionally, the study addressed the concern raised by Koch et al. (2018) showing that South African leaders were indeed using social media as a screening tool for potential candidates and recruiting positions through direct application on LinkedIn.

The concerns raised by passive users regarding the security, privacy and open access of social media sites provided further depth to the negative implications of social media use. The participants raised concerns of user's profiles being susceptible to hacking and cloning, resulting in the spreading of false and misleading information, which could lead to reputation risk and negative consequence for the individual leader and the organisation. As such, the research participants called for responsible social media use, where users were critical of and applied cognition when selecting information and content for consumption. Further to this, users ensured that they verified their information as credible, supported by factual evidence, giving credit to others work where required and, importantly, considered the appropriateness of the content shared in their professional context.

Significant deviations were found regarding passive users social, mental and emotional well-being as compared to the existing literature. Passive users showed no indication of any negative effects such as loneliness, depression, fear of missing out, nor that they use social media to relieve stress and boredom. Rather, they viewed the time spent scrolling through social media as wasteful and non-productive. Passive users also did not harbour feelings of social comparison when viewing their colleagues' careers successes posted on social media. They attribute this to their leadership maturity and cognition in understanding that the struggles are not displayed on social media.

The insights into passive users' personal preferences and experiences with social media offered new areas of research, but also played a vital role in gaining a more completed picture of audience behaviour. From a practical viewpoint, this will help leaders and

organisations understand how content is perceived by a broader audience, not limited to the active users' perceptions. Although passive users do not engage with posts, they contribute to metrics like impressions and view counts, which influence the overall reach and visibility of content. Insights into their preferences could help shape leaders and organisation social media strategies to gain more audience interaction, followers and unbiased opinions.

## **Chapter 7 – Conclusion and recommendations**

### **7.1 Chapter introduction**

The purpose of this study was to understand the social media landscape relating to the virtual work environment from a leader's perspective. Specifically, the study sought to understand why and how leaders in South Africa use social media, considering the possible opportunities and challenges afforded through social media use, and the underlying factors used to create audience engagement on social media sites. The study focused on the needs, affordance and consequences that the use of social media sites provides leaders in a professional context.

To gain an understanding of these factors, the study made use of the following overarching theoretical frameworks; social presence theory, active and passive social media use, SNT, SET, and HSM. By gaining leaders insights on these factors, the study aimed to contribute to the limited literature addressing leaders' use and engagement of social media in the South African context.

Chapter six provided a discussion of the results of the main and sub-research questions against extant literature. Chapter seven drew this study to a close by providing a summary of the research objectives, principal findings of the research and contributions and relevance of the new findings, followed by the key limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

### **7.2 Research objectives**

The literature provided a strong case for leader's use of social media as a communication channel to influence stakeholders (Macca et al., 2023; Huang & Yeo, 2018). With the proliferation of social media use by the public, there is a greater need for leaders to utilise the power and affordances of social media to leverage the opportunities thereof (Gilani et al., 2020; Lei et al., 2019; Heavy et al., 2020). Yet in the South African professional work environment space, there is limited literature available relating to leader social media presence, adoption and usage over the past decade. This study aimed to address this research gap, by exploring South African leaders lived experiences and perceptions in respect of the reason for using social media, the opportunities or challenges and determining how leaders created an audience influence and engagement with social media. In examining these factors, the needs, affordance and consequences approach through self-report by the leaders was followed as suggested by Zhou et al. (2024). From a practical lens the study aimed to assist leaders navigate the social media landscape in the work context by learning from the experiences of fellow leaders.

As the research objective was to explore and understand the phenomena of leaders' social media use through their own lived experiences and perceptions, the research approach was interpretivist. The study followed an inductive, qualitative, exploratory research methodology, with data being collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Research participants were divided into two distinct groups: active users, who frequently engaged with their audiences on social media, and passive users, who primarily consumed content without significant interaction. In total, 30 semi-structured interviews conducted, 18 interviews with leaders who were active users and 12 with leader who were passive social media users. This, allowed the researcher to gain insights from both perspectives to draw on similarities and the vast differences in user experiences and perceptions.

### **7.3 Principal research findings**

The results obtained from the qualitative research study with research participants allowed the researcher to uncover the phenomena of the needs, affordance and consequences that the use of social media sites provided leaders in a professional and business context. The themes that emerged and researcher interpretation of the findings for the main and sub-research questions are explained below.

In addressing the main research question of understanding why leaders choose to actively engage on social media sites from a professional context, the researcher understood the leader's primary need was to build their own personal brand as an individual leader, to create an awareness of their skills and expertise, with the intention of building trust with an online community and to get people thinking and influenced to change their perspectives. The other significant theme relating to a need basis was for knowledge sharing and knowledge acquisition, which was shared by active and passive participants. The findings validated the application of SPT, SNT and SET in leader use of social media. In contrast to the extant literature for passive users which indicated that such users seek social support from social media (Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Verduyn et al., 2022), passive participants voiced knowledge acquisition as their primary reason for viewing social media. The other themes that emerged regarding leaders' needs was to express certain leadership behaviours, to build professional networks and relationships and to identify future career opportunities.

In addressing sub-research questions one and two in the understanding of leaders own experiences and perceptions in terms of the possible opportunities and challenges of social media use, the affordances and consequences were considered by the researcher. The data analysis allowed the researcher to interpret that leaders were

afforded the opportunity to express their personal opinions and authentic selves on social media sites and build professional networks and relationships, which resulted in audience reactions and high visibility for the leaders own profile. However, active users highlighted areas of concerns when using social media, that the social networks and relationships only materialised into meaningful connections when personal and interactive communication was sought offline. This finding provides more depth to the studies of Clark et al. (2018) and Davis et al. (2020), by explaining how the relational benefits of networks are achieved.

An affordance of social media used by leaders in South Africa was the career opportunities allowing them to be headhunted for new roles and do simple due diligence on possible job candidates. As such, this study was able to address the concern raised by Koch at al. (2018) showing that South African leaders are indeed using social media as a screening tool for potential candidates and recruiting positions through direct application on LinkedIn.

From the active user's perspective, participants agreed with existing literature regarding the cost versus benefit effect of social exchange, where in some instances the time and effort to curate authentic and personal posts resulted in monetisation through further ventures, and in other instances the post did not create the engagement anticipated by the leader (Zhang et al., 2023; Luqman et al., 2023; Adongo et al., 2019). By contrast, passive users perceived the time and effort required to curate posts as wasteful and not much value added for their leadership careers.

The researcher was able to understand many participants concerns regarding the security and open access nature of social media sites as well unethical and irresponsible use of social media, which provided further depth to negative implications of social media use. Possible hacking and cloning of an account may result in reputational damage for the individual leader as well as the organisation due to the dissemination of fake or misleading information.

A limitation of social media as a communication channel was in agreement to extant literature, where participants noted that social media is most effective as a supporting channel to other traditional media streams and the official company website. This finding was in support of Ren et al. (2024) that users should correlate the information of social media with traditional media channels to verify the source variability and sentiment intensity which may be exaggerated on social media sites. The study also added new insights to the limitations of social media use, that within the South African context, where the majority of the population does not have access to the internet and the best means

to communicate remains via traditional methods of television and radio for broader leadership and business development topics

In terms of the social, mental and emotional effects of social media use, active and passive users agreed that they do not harbouring feelings of social comparison which was attributable to their leadership maturity. Active users' experiences of negative mental and emotional effects aligned to the research by Tarafdar et al. (2020) where feeling of anxiety, stress and mental exhaustion were experienced due to the continuous engagement that was required to stay relevant on social media. Additionally, participants concern for addiction to social media sites, supports the research by Yang et al., (2021). However, passive users social, mental and emotional effects from social media use, differed significantly from the extant literature. This study based on the South African context, has made a contribution to this area of the literature.

In addressing sub-research question three, the researcher was able to interpret how the HSM model of this study was used in practice by leaders to leverage the affordance of social media to curate content that was attractive, visually appealing, in the appropriate language and sent the correct signal to the audience. The researcher understood that leaders considered many factors when framing their posts, these included that there was a value add, purpose to the post and deliberate and costly signals were sent, such that the content made sense to the audience, aligning to other research studies (Nieken, 2023; Bank et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2022). The participants agreed that media richness theory is a key factor in communication on social media sites, where strategic hashtags, multimedia and visuals made content more visible and attracted audience reactions (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021; Huang & Yeo, 2018). However, with regard to language preferences, research participants indicated that formal and business language was used when sharing professional and business content. This deviated from academic studies which posited that due to the affordance of informal and nuanced language options, users are drawn to this format (Rennekamp & Witz, 2021; Hall et al., 2019; Nisar et al., 2019). Furthermore, based on the sample of participants who indicated their preference to the use of LinkedIn as the primary social media site for professional and business content, the researcher made this generalisation for the purposes to this study which is in agreement to the literature reviewed (Davis et al., 2020; Feng & Johansson, 2019; Lei et al., 2019; Blankespoor, 2018; Huang & Yeo, 2018).

Based on the conceptual model of the theoretical frameworks applicable to this study in terms of a needs, affordance and consequence lens, as provided in Figure 2 in chapter two, Figure 6 below reveals the consistencies, deviations and contributions to the model where the deviations and contributions to theoretical framework model are highlighted in

blue. Figure 6 provides a graphical view of the principal research findings discussed above in this section.

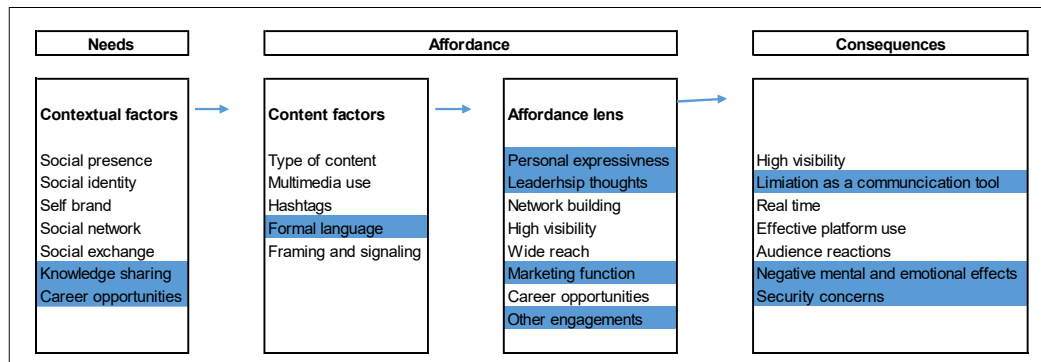


Figure 6

*Principal research finding in terms of the theoretical frameworks*

Source: Researcher created

#### 7.4 Contributions and relevance of the new findings

The study found that leaders in South Africa were intentional in their use of social media in order to be viewed as thought leaders, whereas the extant literature posits that leader use social media to be viewed as a digital leader (Banks et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2022; Larson & DeChurch, 2020). By sharing insights, trends and expertise, leaders positioned themselves as thought leaders in their industry, attracting audience attention and respect, while digital leadership related to leaders' effective use of digital tools to communicate to stakeholders in the virtual environment (Liu et al., 2023; Roman et al., 2019).

From a practical business perspective, the study puts forward many opportunities due to the affordance of the uniqueness of social media as a CMC tool. These include affording a platform for the leader to express their thoughts, ideas, skills and experiences in an authentic manner; to build a social network with like-minded individuals; and leveraging and learning from thought leaders, thus allowing a leader self-development in his field and holistically as a leader. Further, social networks with clients and other businesses could enhance competitive advantage and improve stakeholder communication. In the capacity as spokesperson of the organisation on social media sites, the leader would be able to understand the business from the audience perspective due to the engagement and in turn drive organisational agility. From a career perspective, the leaders were able to browse for career opportunities

and use social media as a screening tool for potential candidates. On an overall basis, this study would assist active leader to navigate the social media landscape in the work context by learning from the experiences of fellow leaders.

### **Contributions from passive user participants**

The findings of this study pertaining to passive users are deemed to be a significant contribution to literature, as this addressed the research gap raised by Davis et al., (2020) to specifically examine passive users' social media behaviours. The insights into passive users' personal preferences and experiences with social media offer academics new areas for research, but also play a vital role in gaining a more complete picture of audience behaviour.

The first notable contribution in respect of passive users is that knowledge acquisition is the primary reason for passive leader's use of social media from a professional context. This contrasted to existing literature which indicated that passive users need for social media is for online social support (Godard & Holtzman, 2024). In understanding this aspect, active users and organisations will be better informed as to the type of knowledge the audience requires and what knowledge is most sought out, for example, technical skills development, industry and professional updates, macroeconomics, geopolitics, world news, and what local and international leaders are working on and deemed significant for the professional environment. Linked to information acquisition, passive participants shared that they used social media sites for career advancement opportunities, scrolling through the job advertisement, applying for higher designations on the LinkedIn platform and leveraging the LinkedIn learnings application to enhance their skill and technical abilities.

This study also provided insights to passive users' personal preferences and choice not to actively engage on social media sites by revealing multiple factors that informed their decision. One being their perception that the time and effort required to curate content was deemed non-productive and non-value adding to these leaders, contributing to the reason that Huang & Yeo (2018) remarked that leaders are lagging in social media use. Another concern with social media use in their capacity as a leader, was that they directly or indirectly represent the organisation, where personal content might be interpreted as the organisations view or may contradict the companies view, leaving both the leader and organisation at reputational risk.

The concerns raised by passive users regarding the security, privacy and open access of social media sites highlighted the importance of responsible social media usage. This aspect informed leaders that the audience was looking for credible information, supported by factual evidence, that credit be given to others work when used and that appropriate professional or business content was shared. Users must be aware of the risk of hacked and cloned accounts and the repercussions for the leader.

Significant deviations were found regarding passive users social, mental and emotional well-being compared to the exiting literature. Passive users showed no indication of negative effects such as loneliness, depression, fear of missing out and social comparison, nor that they use social media to relive stress and boredom. This, indicated that the passive users of social media in this study did not suffer the negative effects described by extant literature.

From a practical viewpoint, this will help leaders and organisations understand how content is perceived by a broader audience, not limited to active users' perceptions. Although passive users do not engage with posts, they contribute to metrics like impressions and view counts, which influence the overall reach and visibility of content. Insights into their preferences can help shape leader's social media strategies to gain more audience interaction, followers and unbiased opinions.

### **7.5 Limitations of the study**

This research study was limited to the South African context and therefore cannot be applied to other settings. Due to research participants that the researcher could access in particular industries, there is limited representation from industries within the South African market. Moreover, due to the exploratory qualitative nature of the study, the generalisation of the study results is limited in its application to the broader population.

The nature of the data collected was from a leader perspective of their lived experiences with social media use, and therefore the study does not make any inference to corporate social media accounts. Based on the qualitative interviews conducted for data collection, the possibility of subject bias may exist in the way the research participants interpreted the open-ended questions and if they shared the views and experiences honestly and freely (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In this study participants were limited to the private sector, and as such the results may not be

transferrable to leaders within the public sector, where information dissemination is more controlled and regulated in terms of regulatory and legislative laws. Furthermore, the study did not seek to gain the views of employees, other stakeholders or the public.

The thematic analysis and researcher interpretations of the findings may reflect the subjective bias of the researcher.

### **7.6 Recommendation for future research**

The findings of the study pertaining to active users were mostly in support of existing literature, with the exception of the importance of thought leadership from a South African leader perspective. There were significant contributions from the passive user's perspective emanating from this study. As passive users primarily consume content without significant interaction, their views can be transferable as those of the audience views. However, as the sample size was relatively small in relation to the general audience, further studies to understand the audience perspective is recommended. Further studies examining leader use of social media to specifically share company content could be undertaken to provide organisational specific opportunities and understand stakeholders' reactions. Future studies can be extended to leaders of public listed companies, do understand why and how leaders use social media as a communication channel given that information dissemination is more controlled and regulated in terms of regulatory and legislative laws.

All but one of the participants of this study indicated that they primarily used LinkedIn as the platform for professional and business content. Future studies could be expanded to other platforms, including the growing use by the South African population of TikTok. Future studies may seek to use quantitative methods to do research, through content analysis for example, including a bigger sample size and gaining an understanding of the audience reactions, to validate the conclusion of this study.

### **7.7 Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to understand the social media landscape relating to the virtual work environment from a leader's perspective. Specifically, the study sought to understand why and how leaders in South Africa used social media, considering the possible opportunities and challenges afforded through social media use, and the underlying factors used to create audience engagement on social media

sites. The study focused on the needs, affordance and consequences that the use of social media sites provided leaders in a professional context.

The findings of the study pertaining to active users were mostly in support of existing literature. Leaders stated that they experienced opportunities due to the affordance of the uniqueness of social media as a CMC tool. However, some concerns with building social networks, responsible use and negative mental and emotional effects were noted. From a practical business perspective, the study will assist active leaders to navigate the social media landscape in the work context by learning from the experiences of fellow leaders.

The insights into passive users' personal preferences and experiences with social media was deemed a significant contribution to the field of social media use. This offers academics new areas for research, but also plays a vital role in gaining a more complete picture of audience behaviour. From a practical viewpoint, this will help leaders and organisations to understand how content is perceived by a broader audience, not limited to the active users' perceptions. Although passive users do not engage with posts, they contribute to metrics like impressions and view counts, which influence the overall reach and visibility of content. Insights into their preferences could help shape leader's social media strategies to gain more audience interaction, followers and unbiased opinions.

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## **Annexure 1: Interview guide**

### **Introduction of the researcher and background of the study**

#### **Introduction of the participant:**

1. Demographics:
  - Gender: Male; female; non-binary; prefer not to say.
  - Age: 18-25; 26-39; 40-49; 50-59; over 60 years
  - Work experience in years: 0-5; 6-10; 11-20; over 20 years
  - Industry/ies you work in, your industry experience
  - Years in a leadership role and your organisation

#### **PART A: Leader social media active use (to be answered if the leader is active on social media):**

##### **Social network and social exchange theory**

2. Why do you choose to engage on social media? What is your intention and motivation behind actively using social media?
3. Which social media platforms do you use, and which one do you prefer? What type of content do you post? What is the frequency of your posts?
4. Do you think that there are certain behaviours you exhibit when engaging on social media sites?
5. Which social media platform provides the more audience responses via likes, shares and comments?
6. Do you monitor the audience reaction to you posts? Do you respond to comments/interactions of your followers?

##### **Perceived opportunities or challenges of social media use:**

7. What have your experiences been with social media use? Explain the opportunities or challenges that you have experienced or perceived from your social media use.
8. How can you build on these opportunities to create a wider online influence and enhance your social network? Do you rely on these social networks for other purposes?
9. How do you perceive that your social media use has the power to create a wider online audience influence on corporate and personal endeavours?
10. As a leader, do you experience or perceive that there are other communication channels better suited to create an influence with your stakeholders?

11. Do you perceive that social media is a generational communication channel and appeals to a certain audience?

**The underlying factors that contribute to creating social media influence**

12. Do you frame your posts in a certain manner to get more audience engagement?
13. Do you think that the audience are attracted to the use of strategic hashtags and multimedia use in social media posts?
14. Do you perceive that the use of informal language, nuanced language and emojis make the post more relatable to the audience?
15. What other factors you do consider important when posting on social media?
16. Are there any ethical considerations that you contemplate when posting on social media?

**PART B: Leaders who are passive on social media (scroll and like, but do not actively post content)**

17. Why have you not actively engaged in the use of social media in your capacity as a leader?
18. Which platforms do you look at and what content do you view?
19. Are there particular leaders or company content you view?
20. What have your perceptions of social media use? Explain if you feel there are possible opportunities or challenges from social media usage.
21. Do you experience any emotions or feelings when passively scrolling through content, good or bad?
22. As a leader, do you perceive that social media use can enhance knowledge sharing and network building that can positively impact your leadership role?
23. As a leader, do you experience or perceive that there are other communication channels better suited to create an influence with your stakeholders?
24. Do you perceive that social media is a generational communication channel and appeals to a certain audience?
25. Reflecting on this interview, should you consider actively using social media? Do you perceive there would be some value to your role as a leader?

## Annexure 2: Informed consent letter



I am a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and currently completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA.

I am conducting research to understand why leaders in South African use social media. The study intends to understand if leaders experience opportunities and benefits from social media usage, or in contrast are challenges and barriers experienced. Furthermore, the study seeks to understand the underlying factors on social media influence by executives in South Africa, which result in audience engagement and reposting of content shared. Additionally, the research aims to determine the reasons and perspectives of those leaders who do not actively engage on social media platforms.

Our interview is expected to last about an hour and will help me gather themes to support my objective as aforementioned. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. All data will be reported without identifiers and will be treated with confidentiality. Your name or any mentioned company name will not be reported in my findings. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

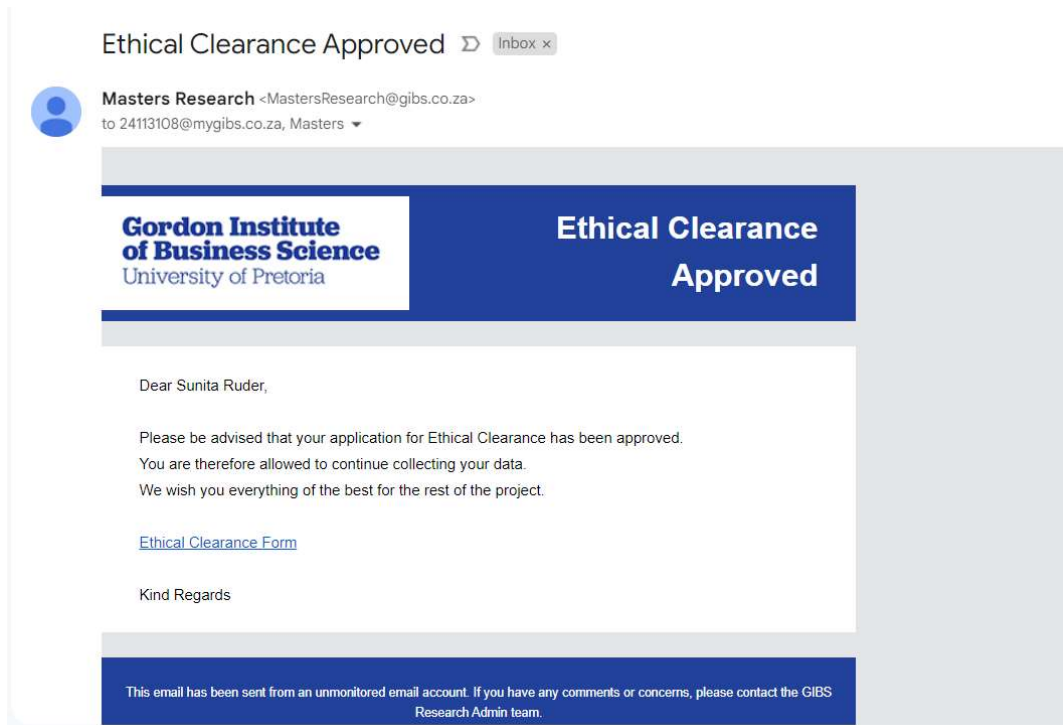
If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher details:	Supervisor details:
Name: Sunita Ruder	Name: Alicia Fourie
E-mail: 24113108@mygibs.co.za	E-mail: fouriea@gibs.co.za
Phone: 072 266 7080	Phone: 011 771 4223

Signature of participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

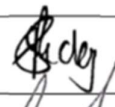

Signature of researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Annexure 3: Ethical clearance approval



## Appendix 4: Copyright form

### 22.1 COPYRIGHT DECLARATION FORM

Student details			
Surname:	Ruder	Initials:	SG
Student number:	24113108		
Email:	24113108@mygibs.co.za		
Phone:	072 266 7080		
Qualification details			
Degree:	MBA	Year completed:	2024
Title of research:	Social Media as a Communication Channel: Leader's Needs, Affordances and Consequences in a Professional Context		
Supervisor:	Alicia Fourie		
Supervisor email:	fouriea@gibs.co.za		
Access			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A.	My research is not confidential and may be made available in the GIBS Information Centre and on UPSpace.		
I give permission to display my email address on the UPSpace website			
Yes		No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> B.	My research is confidential and may <b>NOT</b> be made available in the GIBS Information Centre nor on UPSpace.		
Please indicate embargo period requested			
Two years		Please attach a letter of motivation to substantiate your request. Without a letter embargo will not be granted.	
Permanent		Permission from the Vice-Principal: Research and Postgraduate Studies at UP is required for permanent embargo. Please attach a copy permission letter. Without a letter permanent embargo will not be granted.	
Copyright declaration			
I hereby declare that I have not used unethical research practices nor gained material dishonesty in this electronic version of my research submitted. Where appropriate, written permission statement(s) were obtained from the owner(s) of third-party copyrighted matter included in my research, allowing distribution as specified below.			
I hereby assign, transfer and make over to the University of Pretoria my rights of copyright in the submitted work to the extent that it has not already been affected in terms of the contract I entered into at registration. I understand that all rights with regard to the intellectual property of my research, vest in the University who has the right to reproduce, distribute and/or publish the work in any manner it may deem fit.			
Signature:		Date:	25 October 2024
Supervisor signature:		Date:	25 October 2024

## Annexure 5: Code book

Themes is support of the main research question with their first level codes

### Theme: Personal brand and reputation

Build reputation and legitimacy  
Create own brand  
More personal  
Creating awareness  
Harness and build influence  
Influence to change perspectives  
Online presence is vital for a leader  
Gain recognition and awareness, people know who you are and your services  
Building your own brand and reputation  
Build on trust  
Create a social presence

### Theme: Leadership behaviours

Authentic behaviour  
People connect to authenticity  
Better narrative than company posts  
Post regarding thought leadership  
Nature of the job to be active on social media, what consumers or people like, what they want  
  
Communicate things you are passionate about  
Personalisation of organisation generic messages, makes it more human and relatable  
Business tools and tips  
Show your true leadership style  
Leadership behaviour displayed online must be same as in person  
Tailor to own experiences  
Personalise own expertise and skills  
Sensitive leadership topics  
Own leadership journey  
Use to motivate others  
Engage with people on various topics

### Theme: Knowledge sharing and acquisition

Knowledge sharing  
Skills and technical expertise areas  
Factual to provide information  
Research platform, what other technical specialist do things  
Share information not properly aware of related to product  
Public official information relating to work product  
Use information from customers to understand experience with the product  
Take suggestions from customers back to the job, improvement, customer perceptions

Educate - inform and entertain

**Theme: Knowledge sharing and acquisition continued**

Know what's happening globally

Local, international news and sports

Keep up with industry connections

Follow business leaders

Macroeconomic +geopolitics

Keep abreast what colleagues are doing serves as a conversation starter

Where other leaders move - provide service especially in mining consulting services

Information around expertise

Look at news, other leaders

Follow items of personal interest

Nothing to do with leadership or role

Travel information's

Easy access to information and get information across

Used for knowledge sharing and peer networks

Understand cultural differences across boundaries

**Theme: Professional networks and collaboration**

Building own network

Building a community for ideas

Social leg and business leg

Systems thinking, share ideas

Social networking events

Connecting to new clients

Collaborating with other business

Looking at mutual connections to grow your network

Reach out to other influential leaders

Connect with young people who are tech savvy

Assess competitors' information, what they are doing

Speaking engagements

Networking opportunities

Higher reach

Connect with alumni

Relationship building starting point

Speaking engagements lead to further business

Influence how work is conducted

Network within organisation and communicate within internal structure

**Theme: Personal preference and time management**

Depends on what you post about and how people engage with it

Formal channels, shareholder meetings more impactful

Platforms depends on intended use

Certain platforms attract certain audience

Not much value add

So much information out there

Time and effort to post

Still an official representative of the company, watch what you communicate

Risk of contradiction company

**Theme: Personal preference and time management continued**

Time and effort to separate personal brand

Viewed as company view

Discouraged due to fake reflections

Waste of time

Private person

Rather keep it in my head due to later repercussions

Do not want a digital footprint

Already have so many responsibilities

No time energy introverted so draining

**Theme: Future career and talent attraction**

Work opportunities

Business development

Self-development

Intentional growth platform

People reach out for assistance to coach and jobs at the organisation

Study advice

Headhunted for specific roles

Enhance technical skills and knowledge

Future career

Look for talent

Self-development information

Diversify portfolio

LinkedIn learning

Look for jobs

Recruiting

Strategic use for career intentions

Information gathering on employment requirements

Employment creation

Gives some background before hiring individual

Due diligence for new jobs - are you who you say you are versus what you post

**Themes in support of sub-research questions one and two with their first level codes**

**Theme: Personal expressiveness and leadership thoughts**

Personal views and ideas

Sometimes opinionated

Thought leadership views

What I'm passionate about

Not always work related

Get people thinking

No restrictions

Change perspectives

Motivational

True and authentic

### **Theme: Personal and organisational benefits against the concerns**

Network building  
Relationship  
Biased responses from network group  
Leverage through leadership  
Connected to the rest of the world  
Many people call in to say we saw your profile, explain more about your services  
Higher reach  
High visibility  
Very careful how information provided in light of leadership role  
Global network  
Connect like minds  
Only adds value when you have knowledge people informing on certain topics of expertise within a network  
Damage to personal brand  
Breaks boundaries, beyond African and other parts of the world connections  
Leadership maturity  
Speaking engagement  
Only get limited responses  
When only engage personally with other CEO/ CFO's, it is an opportunity to engage with all levels of employees  
Different response when a company speaks than a leader speaks  
Offline relationships  
Allows a foot in the door  
Marketing activities  
Organic competitive growth  
Recruitment and employment opportunities for leader and organisation  
Spam  
Need to build personal connections to actually build network

### **Theme: Time and productivity**

Nothing more to say to an additional audience  
Time issue  
Need a subscription to access certain profiles  
Not get the tractions  
Not able to monetarise anything  
PR teams assist with admin  
Get other ventures  
Cost factor vs benefit  
Waste of time, doom scrolling  
Risk adverse  
Amount of time and effort to maintain social presence  
Not a priority  
Best when designated spokesperson 1 or 2 people  
People want instant responses  
A lot of ads, app that summarise book, much more useful time spent  
In person conferences, people with their heads down viewing SM

Lot of repetition

### **Theme: Time and productivity continued**

Limited original material, reposts from organisations

Boredom

Networking same like volume, unnecessary connections, forgot who they are over time

Does not equal real value add relations

Time needed to research

### **Theme: Security and responsible use**

What's goes on the internet stays there forever

Take responsibility for impact of content

Users generate content only control part of it

Faceless, make one more bold

People who post on my account also a reflection of me

Block certain feeds if it doesn't look or feel right, very self-aware

Cyberbullying

Hacking, cloning

Post something not aligned to organisation

Reliance on no verifiable sources

Better to use official channel, company own website

Formal channel and SM support the formal feed

Some things not appropriate on SM

Unethical use

Digital bullying

Irresponsible user, respond to things one is ignorant about

Ethics of AI

Double edge sword

Need to be critical

Fraud open access

Engage cautiously

Sensational and not peer reviewed

Two-way dagger to stay relevant

Digital literacy digital savvy - mean to have a social network

Need to be critical

Bad news, fake news travels fast

Reputational risk amplified

### **Theme: Limitations as a communication tool**

Omnichannel so traditional +SM

Television + radio content all supplemented with social media posts

Only reach people with a social presence

Better communication channel other speaking engagements, face-to-face

Transactions not relational

Social media is a support structure to other communication channels

Generational use, Facebook resonated with older generation

Open to interpretation

Incorrection information spiral out of control

F2F lands better

Men on the street - use traditional media TV and radio

**Theme: Limitations as a communication tool continued**

Big advertising campaign

Cautions not to divulge sensitive/ confidential information

**Theme: Social, mental and emotional effect**

No social comparison

Misleading information

Make you feel isolated

Creates a lot of emotions

Distracting people always checking social media, habit

Acquire knowledge what people are feeling, what people need

Psychological safety required

People are being bullied and feel anxiety in the workplace

Creates a feeling that you should also work - to achieve what colleagues have

Extend of emotion is important, want to be vulnerable to society

Social media detox

Exhausting - consistent and continuous, hire someone, but content does not match your own thought and message

People want to buy not be sold, so should be a pull medium

Spare time to do other activities, CEO rather golf, CEO is not using social media to look for people to work with

Not fulling present

Positive emotions to encourage people

Tell a story versus what people perceive

Mental wellness not shown

Personal experience, wrote serious things in a no serious manner- went dark from SM for 9 years

Addictive

Polarised views

No signalling, no body language

Maturing not to emotionally respond

Guilt - too much time wasted

**Themes is support of sub-research questions three with their first level codes**

**Theme: Framing of the written content**

Meaningful and purposeful

Opinion pieces get more reactions

More than FYI

Call to action

Makes sense

Work related content

Read it's a few times

Get people to think, should resonate with a human being

How you create accurate content and what people interpret/connect with can be different

Story told in post

Balance between personal and professional experience

### **Theme: Framing of the written content**

Pop culture references, make it more current

Open ended questions

Conscious with a purpose

Post personal experiences, of leadership journey, learnings, struggle women month posts

Positives and negatives posts, struggle with decision making how this was overcome

Post what is the truth from own lived experiences, people react

Consciously think about the signalling given

### **Theme: Language and visual aspects matters**

Professional language

Industry specific acronyms

Works better with videos

Visuals including graphs

Emojis to break a paragraph

Words used in post are important, impacts what other information is pushed to users

Using correct pronouns

Mindful terminology

No incorrect spelling

Don't want to sound like chatbot, people can recognise that AI and loses appeal

Personal touch, add photos or videos

Visual driven posts

Hashtags must be strategic

Informal language on business platform but stay respectful

Companies' sources pictures and links, need to make the post your own

Appeal to younger audience, more informal language

Hashtags highlight what I'm about

Vocabulary draws attention

Emoji open to interpretation

Have some else read post to give you true opinion on serious matters

Real videos with people talking in background, truth most relatable, show reality

### **Theme: Ethical and other considerations**

Time of day and day of week

Timeless posts - must be able to understand at any point

Use some guidelines from PR

Not be controversial

Not insulting or not harmful, but be inclusive

Function to schedule posts so it comes out during work hours

Ask permission before tagging someone

Don't post in anger

Ethical consideration, reputation issues

Always directly or indirectly representing your employer

Socially aware

Brand will last for 10 years  
Endorse integrity and honesty  
Adheres to own value system  
Rather be quite than incentive  
Timeous - timing of posts, must be relevant  
Sensitive towards gender, race  
Refer to metaculture  
People using AI to create posts, cannot be sure what is trustful

**Theme: Effective platform use**

Need to understand the audience  
Multigeneration communication channel  
Each platform works differently, depending on your intention  
LinkedIn works best for professional use  
X does not get traction

## **Annexure 6: Editor additional support declaration**

I, Sharon Clarke, the editor, declare that I have only rendered the services as listed and detailed below as contract by Sunita Geerish Ruder in fulfilment of the requirements for a master's degree at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria.

Services rendered:

- Corrected typographical errors, misspelt words, grammar and punctuation.
- Ensured that in-text references were in the correct style (APA, 7th Edition) and were included in the reference list.
- Ensured that the reference list was in the correct format and in the correct style.
- Ensured that the format/page layout of the document was aligned to the GIBS green pages.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a circled 'S' followed by the letters 'ark' and a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Sharon Clarke

Email: [sharonmclarke0013@gmail.com](mailto:sharonmclarke0013@gmail.com)

Cell: +27 83 600 9238