UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Accounting firms' use of social media platforms

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DECLARATION

I, Rashika Dundraj declare that:

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ABSTRACT

Social media can be described as a phenomenon that has completely transformed the world on both professional and personal levels. It has considerably improved relations, encouraged new affiliations and created entirely new avenues and approaches to business. The constant growth of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn serve as an indication of the potential reach that an organisation can obtain by strategically and methodically utilising these platforms. Research has proven that despite the wide array of social media platforms available, social media is not very widely utilised by accountants. This has raised the question, "Can social media be beneficial to the accounting profession?"

This study aimed to explore the current social media trends and with the aid of interviews, determine if social media is a viable and effective solution for accountants in terms of engagement with stakeholders, marketing as well as for general collaboration. Due to the nature of the study, the qualitative approach was adopted. A –semi-structured interview schedule was constructed and participants were asked a series of 16 questions. All participants held senior positions and were the most suitable to assist with the study. Six companies were approached and selected to fulfil the objectives of the study.

The data collected led to the conclusion that whilst social media has been implemented in accounting firms, there is no distinct social media plan in existence, nor has social media been prioritised. Furthermore, the participants did not have any expectations from social media, it was merely employed to create awareness with the hope of attracting new clientele. These findings culminated in a number of recommendations being documented in order to assist and encourage accounting firms to implement social media. It is recommended that accounting firms create social teams, who will serve to keep clients abreast of latest developments as well as counteract negative publicity. Further, accounting firms should identify their target audience and aim to maximise their coverage. They can also exploit the most popular social media platforms, and aim to expand their range as widely as possible.

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CHAPTER ONE
OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The early 1900s saw the advent of pamphlets, songs and poetry as various means of forming, developing and securing an identity. The 1950s saw television adverts, newspaper and magazine adverts and radio as the means of brand communication (Samkin & Sikka, 2010). The 21st century has heralded the cyber world, which has created a new way of communication for individuals and organisations alike. Social media encompasses the use of social networks to educate individuals on various offerings. Other functions of social media include fostering new business as well as connecting individuals and organisations (Stone, 2012).

Social media is a platform, by which marketers engross, network and harness partners with the intention of presenting opportunities concerning a particular organisation. Chikandiwa, Contogiannis and Jembere (2013) claimed that social media has paved a clear path in the enhancement of customer relations management. It is therefore necessary to develop and implement distinct social media models which will facilitate clear, problem-free communication (Chikandiwa et al., 2013).

Due to the rapid advancement of technology, the electronic marketplace attracted much attention from researchers during 2005 to 2015, as the internet has indeed transformed the way in which one searches for information. The electronic era allows a consumer to make informed decisions regarding their intended online transaction, at their own convenience (King, Racherla & Bush, 2014).

This study aimed to examine how social media in the accounting field has evolved, and the impact that social networking currently has on the profession. It further aimed to explore a selection of social media platforms available and the possible positive impact that it may have. In addition, the study assessed whether social networking is crucial to the survival of an accounting practice, i.e. are practices who do not employ this marketing method doomed for failure?

1.2 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

Accountants had this ingrained fear of using social media for business purposes. The concern was maintaining their trustworthy image and the handling of sensitive information (O'Donohoe et al., 1991). Despite this, many accountants have taken to social media as part of their strategic plans and have reaped much success (Clow et al., 2009). Social media sites offer cheaper and quicker opportunities to communicate with clients and competitors as well as enable them to keep an eye on current trends. This facilitates the process of counteracting changes in trends more efficiently as well as aiding in creating a competitive edge (Sztrojiny, 2011).

Social media has fast become an integral aspect in every industry. Accountants, however, are yet to embrace the trend and actually look into effectively incorporating social media into their accounting practices. As there is no prior research on the topic, this study serves as a foundation for accountants who are looking to implement social media into their accounting practices. Further, it will provide a basis on which are the most preferred and effective sites for accountants.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Currently, social media is utilised as a means of connecting people throughout the world through forums, blogs and social networks, amongst others. It is prevalent in all fields, and enables users to converse online and share experiences as well as valuable information. All fields such as medical, engineering, etc. are moving towards information technology; however, the accounting field is less known, hence the study aims to contribute towards advancements within the accounting sector.

From a business perspective, social media offers endless opportunities in terms of promotion of a companies' brand, product offerings as well as service offerings. The internet, more specifically social sites, provides a platform for consumers to communicate freely concerning any product or service. This proves to be both beneficial and detrimental to an industry, as the reach that one can obtain with social media far exceeds the reach obtained by any traditional marketing channel (Arca, 2012).

The literature does not provide any information pertaining to whether or not Accountants / Accounting firms use social media, and if they do, the reasons for the usage thereof. The researcher will attempt to establish whether social media is use by Accounting firms and why they should be using them. Auditing firms are included when referring to Accounting firms.

1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study was to explore accounting firms' use of social media and to establish their preferred social media platforms.

The following were the objectives of the study:

1. To establish if accounting firms are using social media.
2. To determine which social media platforms they prefer.
3. To determine how each company measures the benefits of social media usage.
4. To determine if any limitations with social media have been experienced by any of the participants.
5. To determine if respondents visit their competitors' pages.
6. To determine if social media has been used for marketing purposes.

The research explored the different platforms available for accountants, as well as the value that social media has added to the respective participants' companies.

1.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The study focused on small and medium accounting / auditing firms who had a social media presence. In the context of the study, small accounting firms may be described as a firm comprising a single director, with a small staff compliment. Medium sized firms include firms that form part of a national group. A purposive sample of six companies were chosen based on judgement sampling. This was due to the respondents exhibiting the requisite experiences necessary to participate in the study. All companies that participated in the study were based in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Of the six participating firms, four firms constituted the local branch of a larger, national group.

1.6 DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND TREATMENT OF DATA

The researcher adopted the qualitative approach to research. A loosely structured interview schedule (Appendix 3) was employed to gather data. This provided some flexibility in the data collection process as the interviewer was able to probe where necessary and pose follow-up questions in order to gain clarity and understanding of the participants' train of thought.

The researcher analysed the data and extracted themes based on the responses received. This provided a structure for the presentation of results in this dissertation. The themes were extracted and categorised within the objectives of the study. This ensured that the context of the data remained intact.

The presentation of results are accompanied by visual representations. Word clouds, graphs and tables have been utilised for this purpose. These visual representations which were then interpreted and the conclusions drawn are presented in later chapters. In some instances, direct quotations are provided in order to provide clarity and add to the credibility of the study. However, in most instances the researcher has paraphrased the responses due to the poor language of the replies received.

1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The sampling method selected resulted in only the KwaZulu-Natal region being utilised. However, the purpose of the study was to gather proficient opinions and ideas regarding the implementation and usage of social media. The reliability of data is warranted as the assimilation and evaluation of data can be verified. However, the manner in which the data has been interpreted may differ. Limitations are discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.

1.8 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

The research process was carried out in a logical and orderly manner. Table 1.1. depicts the layout of the study, which is set out in five chapters.

Table 1.1: Layout of the study

Chapter	Description
One	Chapter One presents a synopsis of the study. The research process is presented, followed by the motivation for the study and problem statement. The aims and objective are then presented, followed by the population and sample and data collection methods. Finally, the limitations of the study are presented.
Two	Chapter two presents a literature review on business use of social media. It further provides a breakdown of the various social media channels available as well as an in-depth look into a selection of these channels.
Three	Chapter three provides an outline of the research methodology, sampling methods selected as well as research design and approach of the study.
Four	Chapter four presents an analysis of the data collected. The objectives of the study are outlined, followed by a thematic representation of the data assimilated.
Five	Chapter five presents the conclusion to the study. It supplies a summary of the conclusions and recommendations drawn. It further provides limitations to the study as well as recommendations for future research.

1.9 SUMMARY

Social media has become an integral part of societies' daily lives. Social media can be described as a revolution, one that seamlessly combines commercial, professional and personal aspects (Arca, 2012). It provides flawless interaction between various parties, professions and landscapes. The study aimed to explore accounting firms' use of social media. This chapter presented the motivation for the study, followed by the problem statement, as well as the aims and objectives of the study. The population and sample were

then outlined, followed by the limitations and finally the outline of the study. The next chapter comprises the literature review, which highlights the various social media channels available as well as statistics concerning a selection of the available channels.

CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The last few decades have seen a paradigm shift in the way business is being conducted, and how people react and interact with one another. The advent of personal computers, the internet and social media has had a profound impact on the manner in which business is being administered. Social media has evolved enormously, and is being continuously reinvented, thus encompassing dynamic growth and a revolutionised era of business conduct. The introduction of smart phones, tablets and palm tops has seen a vast increase in accessibility to social media, thus enhancing the ease of use and overall effectiveness of these channels (Saravanakumar & Suganthalakshmi, 2012). This chapter focuses on analysing the recent literature pertaining to social media and providing academic insight into a selection of the various platforms available. The inherent characteristics of these selected platforms are also explored. The fundamental benefits and intrinsic weaknesses of each platform are evaluated. This chapter further considers each component of social media and its origin. The chapter also highlights the underlying history of technology as well as the internet, which has played an instrumental role in the transformation of business as it is today.

2.2 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Onn and Sorooshian (2013) defined information technology as computer hardware and software solutions that provide management, operational and strategic support within organisations. Information technology can be further explained as the technology that is utilised by an organisation to gather, process and circulate information in all its forms (Onn & Sorooshian, 2013). Information technology must be distinguished from information systems, as these terms are often used interchangeably.

Nickerson (2001) described information systems as a compilation of components that collaborate with the aim of aiding in the administration and functioning of an organisation.

Stair and Reynolds (2006) further defined information systems as a set of interconnected elements that accumulate, arrange, store and distribute data and information in order to meet a specific purpose.

Information technology and information systems are fundamental components in conducting business in the digital economy, and can result in the achievement of competitive advantage (Turban et al., 2005).

2.3   THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN ORGANISATIONS

Business in the digital economy is carried out by the use of web-based systems as well as other electronic networks. The majority of private and public organisations utilise information technology to support their organisations. The reason for doing so is that information technology has become the major catalyst in carrying out business-related activities (Turban et al., 2005).

The impact of technology on business is rapidly growing. Various types of organisations utilise information systems to track and record their daily undertakings. Manual processes are continuously being automated, thus transforming the nature and structure of organisations. This notion of continuous improvement entails constantly seeking ways to improve business processes, hence adding value to service offerings. The effect thereof is long-term profitability as a result of increased customer satisfaction and loyalty (Stair & Reynolds, 2006).

Technology is necessary as large amounts of data are prevalent in organisations. The need to process this information with speed and accuracy is continuously growing. The use of processing units ensures that such information is conveyed efficiently with minimum error, hence increasing accuracy and limiting possibility of human error. This enhances reliability and reduces costs to an organisation. An added advantage is the ability to maximise the volume of information processed. Technology enables infinite amounts of information to be processed, stored and streamlines the reporting function. This enables organisations to compete effectively with similar organisations (Nickerson, 2001).

Information systems were initially created to simplify accounting and financial functions. As these tasks were simplified, managers began to realise the added advantage of using technology to increase the overall effectiveness of an organisation (Stair and Reynolds, 2006).

2.4   THE EVOLUTION OF TECHNOLOGY

Technology is rapidly advancing. The technological age has equipped businesses with a very powerful tool, one that has created convenience, and inspired and encouraged international relations (Moniarou – Papaconstantinou, 2015). Simply explained, currently, businesses are conducting international meetings via video conference. This remarkable breakthrough enables individuals to personally interact with associates on a different continent, without a physical presence.

According to the Oxford dictionary, computers were invented to "compute, i.e. to solve complex mathematical problems. The Information Age, however, has furnished computers with numerous other functions such as data retrieval and storage, processing information and generating and manipulating information. The computer has played a critical role in this transformation, whilst also enhancing the manner in which information is conveyed (Ceruzzi, 2003).

Technology has had a major impact on society as well as organisations. Technology has resulted in increased productivity, reduced the number of key staff required as well as solved various problems, which otherwise would have utilised time and resources. It has also increased the availability of information by enabling search engines as well as intranets (Stair & Reynolds, 2006). A further positive is the ability for disabled employees to work normally. This has facilitated people who would not normally have been employable to actively pursue careers (Rainer Jr. & Turban, 2009). Technology has evolved greatly over time as indicated in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1: Evolution of technology (Marchand and Davenport, 2000)

Era	Description
1940s	1. The 1940s saw the advent of the first computers. 2. John Mauchly and J. Presper Eckert built the Electronic Numerical Integrator and Calculator in 1943 – 1946. 3. It weighed 30 tonnes, had 70 000 resistors and 18 000 vacuum tubes. 4. Stemming from this creation, in 1951 Mauchly and Eckert developed Univac, the 1st commercial computer.
1950s–1960s	1. The 1950s–1960s saw the dawn of the mainframe and the invention of basic applications. 2. In 1961, the information technology industry was led by mainframe computers with 6 000 units universally. 3. In the 1950s and 1960s, applications were developed to reduce labour costs. 4. Applications were elementary in nature as sophisticated applications did not exist.
1970s–1980s	1. The 1970s demarcated the appearance of microprocessors, which were preceded by smaller computers. 2. The dawn of the 1980s saw terminals which were linked to mainframes being replaced by personal computers. 3. The 1980s further earmarked improved processing capacity and power, as well as the development of more complex applications. 4. The advancement of applications was so imminent that in the absence of these applications, the assigned tasks were humanly impossible to execute.

Era	Description
1980s–1990s	1. This era saw the personal computer market develop and grow very rapidly, with enhanced processing power and lower prices. 2. The increased sophistication enabled the processing of large volumes of data, whilst further allowing customisation as per client needs. 3. Technical support widened, which facilitated a wider range of business functions. 4. Dependency on computers increased, which profoundly impacted globalisation. 5. A new skillset developed, which further led to the advent of the World Wide Web.

2.5 THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD WIDE WEB

In 1989, Tim Berners-Lee, a software engineer at a large physics laboratory in Geneva, Switzerland invented the World Wide Web. The idea emanated from his observation of colleagues and their need to share data and information, but they experienced difficulties doing so. Tim Berners-Lee understood the potential for the connection of millions of computers worldwide, and the convenience it would create therefrom. In 1991, people outside his organisation joined the World Wide Web. By 1993, an announcement was made, declaring that the World Wide Web was available for anyone to use, without royalties being imposed (Ceruzzi, 2012).

Since 1993, the World Wide Web has continuously evolved with the advent of Web 2.0 and later Web 3.0. This revolutionary change has impacted the lives of billions of people globally. The prolific impact has been astronomical as it has affected even the most basic daily routines. From a business perspective, entities could publish information in the form of catalogues and brochures (Aghaei, S., Nematbakhsh, M.A. & Farsani, H.K., 2012). This information which was updated on a regular basis was available to any user who had

access to the internet to peruse it (Hendler, 2009). Brief evaluation of the leap from Web 2.0 to Web 3.0 reveals the iconic changes that are shaping and redefining the business world. It also provides a glimpse of what can be anticipated in terms of advancements, and offers insight into the direction in which business may be heading.

2.5.1 Web 2.0

Web 1.0 can be described as one-directional, as it enabled a large number of users to view a comparatively small number of sites. The new and improved Web 2.0 came to be illustrated as bi-directional (Goodchild, 2007). Web 2.0, also referred to as the "social revolution", can be described as an era which encouraged online collaboration and the sharing of information (Lassila & Hendler, 2007). Further descriptions have been provided such as people-centric web, read-write web, wisdom web and participative web. This development has been instrumental in the advancement of business as it enabled entities as well as individuals to build applications and forgo online interactions. It further enabled entities to gather collective intelligence. Blogs, wikis and social media are some of the features that emanated from Web 2.0 (Aghaei et al., 2012). Further progression led to the advent of Web 3.0 which saw an explosion of pioneer sites which remain firmly anchored in many patrons' everyday lives.

2.5.2 Web 3.0

Web 3.0 can be described as an advancement of Web 2.0, whereby data and information can be shared and integrated into different domains such that it can be reused and challenged. Web 3.0 has the ability to interpret and understand data in a significant way. It utilises artificial intelligence to streamline searches as well as create a more realistic web experience (Kibrell, 2013). It has been created such that the web is readable by machines as well as humans. This advancement in Web technology can be comprehended by examining the mechanics of Google, whereby key words are input and within seconds the appropriate web pages are located. This has increased functionality, whilst remaining user friendly. Web 3.0, commonly referred to as the "semantic web", has seen the introduction of certain niche sites such as eBay and Amazon (online marketplaces), as well as Google and Yahoo! These sites, which initially seemed improbable, have grown and manifested in

ways in which the IT community never perceived possible (van Dam & van de Velden, 2015).

The internet has enabled users to create websites, blogs and various other avenues which has not only created awareness, but also bridged the gap between consumer and supplier. The internet has further provided a platform through which the era of social media began (Arca, 2012).

2.6 DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media can be defined as an internet-based tool for sharing and collaborating in creating information (Cox, 2012). It is a means of networking and relationship building, with trust being the predominant characteristic. Any website which enables users to communicate, interact and share content and information can be classified as social media (Neti, 2011).

Social media can be further defined as a web-based service that enables people to create profiles, connect with other users and view their list of connections within a common network (Kang, 2011).

2.7 THE ORIGIN OR SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media originated from the culmination of two words: "social" being the collaboration of individuals within a community, and "media" referring to the transmission of information via channels. Hence, the birth of the term "social media," which refers to the communication of information via a specific medium. Social media can vary in form, from podcasts and blogs to videos and forums. It utilises web-based applications to encourage association amongst communities. Social media employs highly accessible, low cost tools to encourage association amongst communities, affordability, accessibility and ease of use. More popular social media sites include Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (Neti, 2011). Social media originated in the late 1950s and has grown rapidly over the years.

2.8 THE HISTORY OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In around 1959, Bruce and Susan Abelson established "open diary," an online social networking site, which could only be described as a community for online diary users. This era also saw the origination of the term 'weblog'. Around 1979, Duke University's Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis created "Usenet," an online discussion system which enabled global users to post public messages. The increasing availability of internet access saw increased popularity in social media sites, with the origin of MySpace in 2003 and Facebook in 2004. The escalating prominence of social media sites has seen the formation of a multitude of other sites such as Twitter, Instagram and more recently LinkdIn, which has claimed heightened importance in the daily lives of users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

2.9 SOCIAL MEDIA'S PREVALENCE IN DAILY LIVES

Social media amplifies sharing, collaborating and participation. It has evolved to the degree that the social media community is able to share views and opinions so that others are able to make better informed choices in literally any facet of life. It can range from religious, social and economic to political aspects, or any other. This has proved especially useful to consumers, as it facilitates open and honest communication. Online communities, created with the aim of achieving a common objective, also provide a sense of security for like-minded people (Asur & Huberman, 2010). This is due to the ease with which members are able to share attitudes and beliefs. It has also beneficially altered many lives, creating convenience, bringing people and communities together and encouraging collaboration (Arca, 2012).

Loenardi et al. (2013) claimed that social media is utilised in two primary ways. It is predominantly used for communication with external parties, such as consumers, vendors and potential customers. Social media is also used internally to efficiently communicate within an organisation. This enables participants to relay messages safely and speedily. A multitude of social media channels have come into existence over the past decade or so, as depicted in Figure 2.1. This has enabled individuals to immerse themselves in activities such as blogging, networking, tweeting and engaging in forums. A further benefit is that social media can be and is often utilised as a recruitment tool.
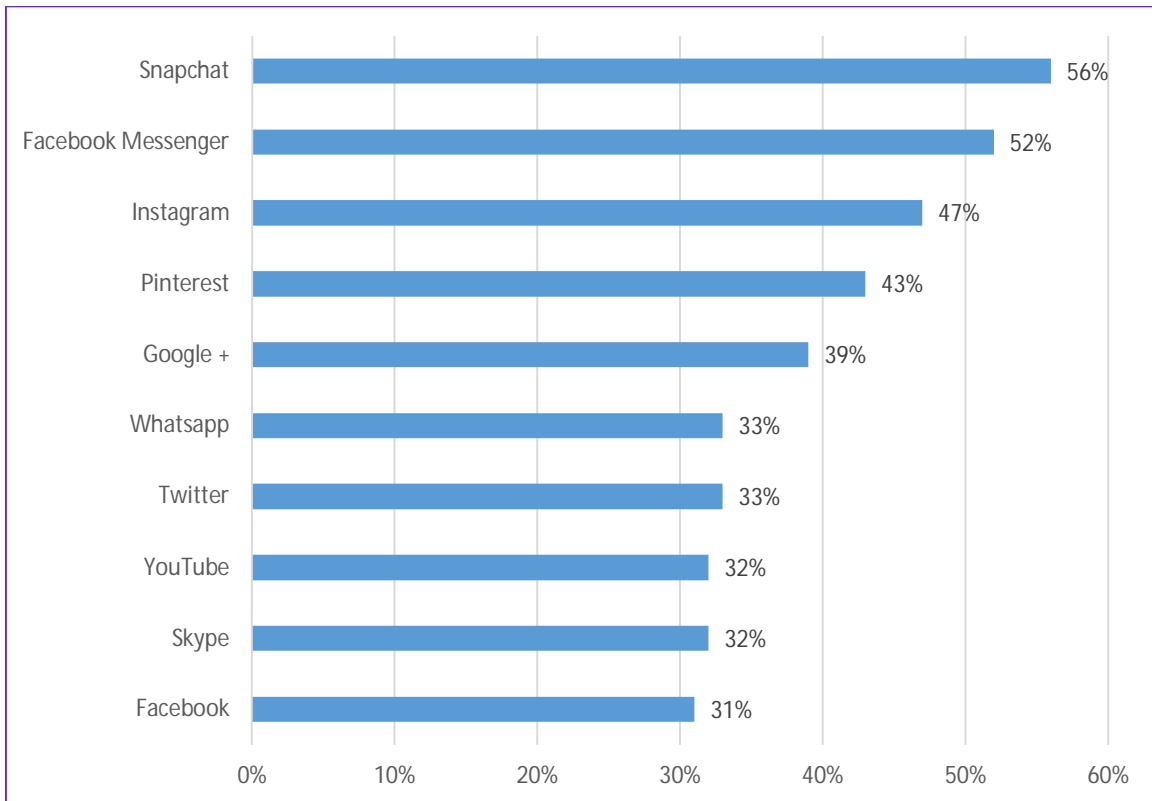
Figure 2.1: Social and messaging apps : Growth in six months

Source : Adapted from Jones, J.B. 2014. 8 Useful social media statistics for 2015. Our social times (online). Available : http://oursocialtimes.com/8-useful-social-media-statistics-for-2015/

It is evident from Figure 2.1 that popularity with social media sites and apps is on a steady rise, with increased patronage of almost 60% in a mere six months. As more and more people gain access to the internet, social media patronage increases accordingly. It is thus evident that awareness of any form can be effectively maximised by the utilisation of these mediums. Social media is viewed as a form of collective wisdom, with an unbelievably extensive database. Despite the frequent usage, it remains generally untapped (Asur & Huberman, 2010).   This thus reiterates the enormous potential that still remains unchartered. Over the recent years, there has been an explosion in social media channels. Figure 2.2 depicts the various mediums available to businesses.

Figure 2.2: Social media platforms for business

Source : Adapted from Arca, C. 2012. Social media marketing for businesses. Masters in International Marketing. Aalborg University Denmark.

It is evident that there are a multitude of social media channels available for companies. Figure 2.2 also clearly distinguishes the different facets of social media. Businesses are thus tasked with discovering, through research and observation, which social media mediums are most popular with their intended community. A channel such as LinkdIn serves as a social networking site for businesses and individuals, whilst Facebook can be viewed as a mixture of business and pleasure (Arca, 2012). Research shows that there isn't sufficient data to measure the effectiveness of social media. Nevertheless, industry giants have embraced the phenomenon and incorporated the use of social networks as part of their daily activities (Ach, 2013). Statistics, such as those depicted in Figure 2.1 have thus far been favourable, hence strongly indicating that the trend will remain indefinitely (Gerrikagoitia et al., 2015). Figure 2.3 depicts the most commonly used social media channels.
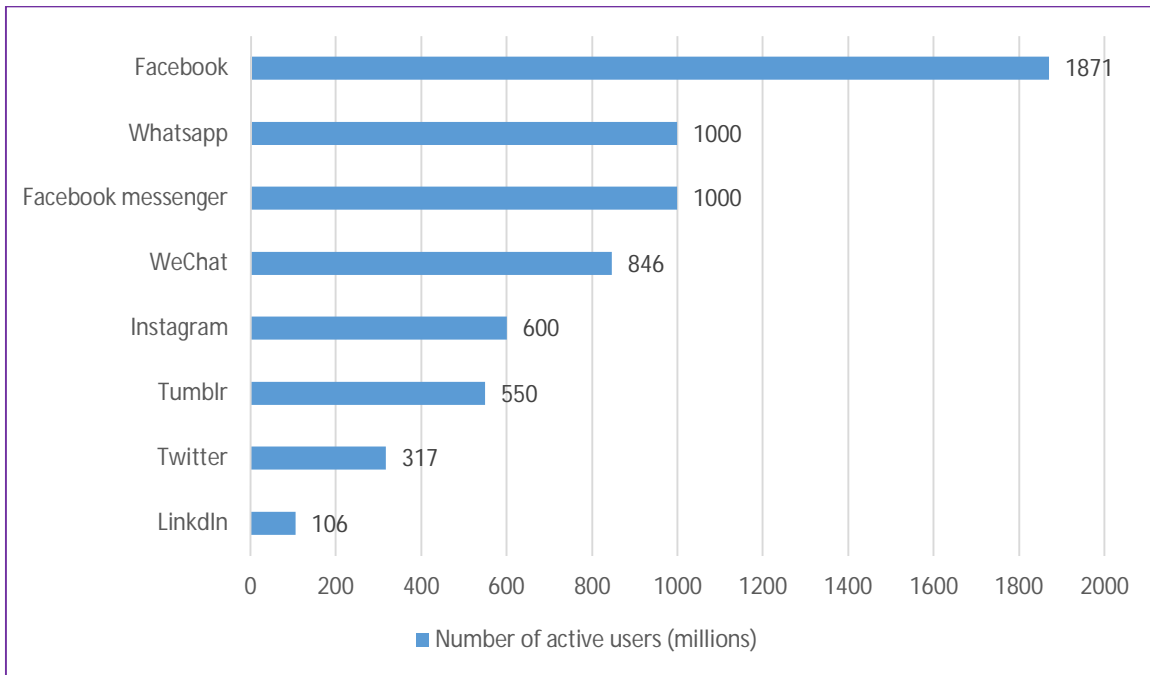
Figure 2.3: Number of active users of popular social network sites

Source : Adapted from Smart Insights. Social network sites worldwide ranked by number of active users (in millions as of January 2017). Available online: http://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/

It is abundantly clear from Figure 2.3, that Facebook is the social media of choice, boasting just under two billion users. This is due to the site's ability to bypass geographical, social and political boundaries. In addition, Facebook is available in multiple languages, hence eliminating the language barrier as well (Chaffey, 2017).

LinkdIn, despite being relatively new, has made an enormous impact on the social media scene (Stone, 2012). Blogs have also gained popularity, due to their content and versatility. Sites such as Instagram and Tumblr have captured a significant piece of the social media market. This is due to the content richness as well as diversity of these sites (Arca, 2012). Social media has undoubtedly captured a massive and highly engaged following, and can prove to be extremely beneficial if integrated into business. Patrons have realised the benefits and ease of use of social media, and have thus capitalised on this (Gerrikagoitia et al., 2015).

2.10 ADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In present times, social media is widely used due to it being an extremely cost-effective overall solution and as a result of the enormous benefit that can be derived, as portrayed in Figure 2.4. The principal aims of the use of social media are intensification of word of mouth, generation of ideas, product development, public relations, consumer communication and customer service (Arca, 2012). Social media has the potential to drastically increase brand awareness, improve web traffic, induce customer loyalty and ensure the successful launch of a new product or service. It utilises ingenuity, community and relationships to achieve its objectives (Ach, 2013). This has to an extent levelled the playing field, by allowing smaller counterparts to create a footprint and thus compete with the industry giants.
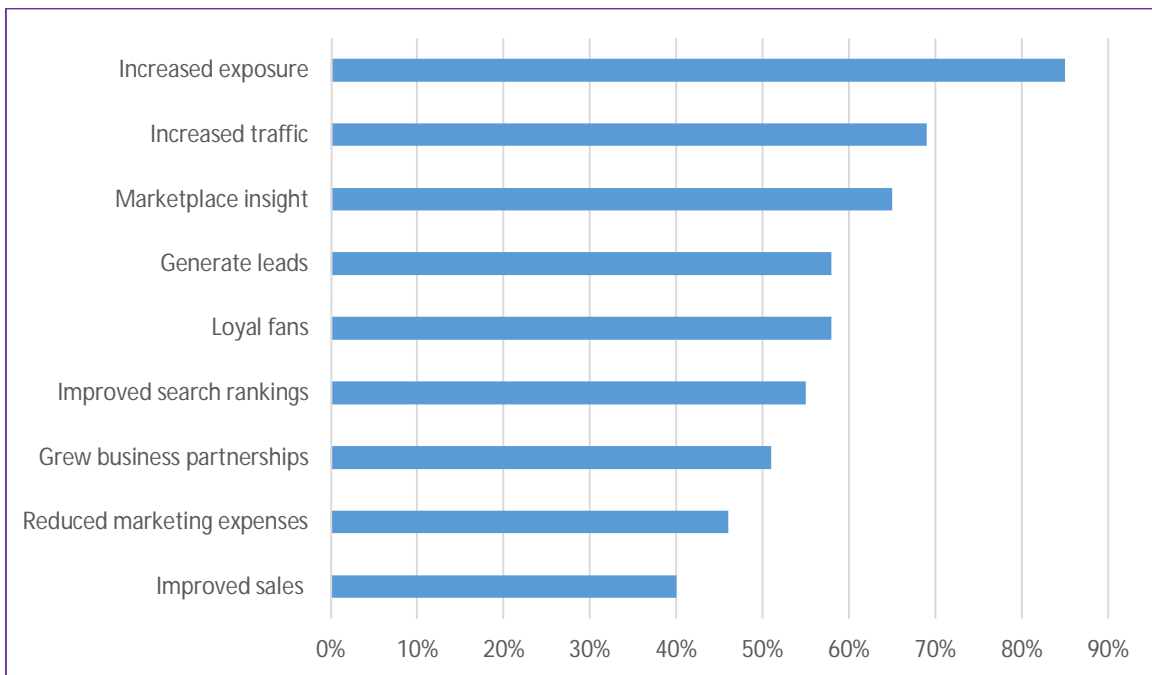
Figure 2.4: Benefits of social media

Source : Adapted from Arca, 2012. Social media marketing benefits for business. Masters in International Marketing. Aarlborg University of Denmark

The literature above has also provided insight into the various ways in which social media can provide benefit to an organisation. Social media can be viewed as an unconventional method of attaining conventional results. Consumers generally lack the requisite knowledge and experience to evaluate a service/product prior to engagement. Social

media bridges that gap, and provides the reassurance required in order to take that leap (Chen et al., 2011). The predominant feature of social media is increased exposure as represented in Figure 2.4. Increased traffic is a major benefit, as this leads to limitless opportunities for growth. This illustrates the impact that social media sites are capable of. There are further benefits of social media worth mentioning such as increased visibility and heightened recognition in terms of accolades (Arca, 2012).

Social media also facilitates efficient reputation management in addition to indirectly employing powers of persuasion to prospective consumers (Neti, 2011). Social media is amplified by trust. Consumers tend to gravitate towards companies that are well liked (Kaplan, 2012). This can be realised by building trustworthy relationships with consumers, who will thus vouch for a firm's credibility. One of the greatest advantages of social media is the capability to target consumers based on their interests. This is performed by storing and accessing personal information such as age, location, gender and interests. This information enables interested parties to liaise directly with potential consumers (Arca, 2012). Social media also makes companies "real", i.e. formulates an identity with consumers by reaching out and engaging with them directly.

A further advantage is that search engines are designed such that they prioritise social media in their results. This alone can provide a radical increase in web traffic. Arca (2012) stated that solicitors have confirmed that the reason for usage of social media is as a result of them targeting the younger generation. Most youngsters are avid social media patrons and are thus inclined to visit pages where they see value. Solicitors are therefore tasked with creating a page/profile of worth, with the aim of capturing and retaining patrons' attention. Social media further enables one to spy on competitors; a necessity in order to remain competitive. This enables competitive benchmarking, which equips entities with the knowledge to evaluate their own goals and objectives. Social media also enables users to speedily evaluate their efforts by requesting feedback from consumers. This feature can prove cost effective as users will be able to adjust efforts accordingly, and eliminate further unnecessary expenditure (Arca, 2012).

Social media can also be utilised as a means for associating individuals with colleagues/peers who are servicing the same target market (Neti, 2011). An added advantage is that social media platforms can be intertwined in the sense that entrepreneurs

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may utilise Twitter to broadcast a link to their webpage, and forward their Twitter messages automatically to their Facebook page (Fischer & Reuber, 2011). Whilst social media can provide paramount benefits to any entity, there are many inherent limitations which need to be considered.

2.11 DISADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

As discussed above, social media offers businesses numerous benefits. However, challenges and risks do exist. Social media efforts are demanding and time consuming. It also requires human capital and constant time commitment in order to manage an entity's social media footprint. Depending on the magnitude of an entity's social media presence, a dedicated employee or even an entire team is required for efficient management thereof. Feedback and customer service should preferably be real time, hence reiterating the requirement for dedicated personnel for these purposes (Arca, 2012). This creates a sense of importance for the consumer, and portrays the entity in a positive light. These personnel should be highly trained and qualified in the art of social media as well as customer service, as they are required to be on the lookout for and swiftly dispel any negative publicity and comments before these reach a stage of uncontrollability (Howard, et al., 2014).

Social media accounts have to continuously be refreshed with fresh, appealing and eye-catching content that will retain their target audience and lure potential web traffic. Creative teams are required for these purposes, and this can prove costly. Certain social media channels might be more effective than others. This is rather difficult to measure, and can lead to wasted resources on the less effective channels. A further disadvantage is the perception that social media channels create of a product / service, as products / services can be presented to the consumer in a manner that is considered to be in bad taste (Arca, 2012). This can create immediate reputational damage. Thus, it can be stated that the online image created has to be carefully researched and executed, which can once again prove very costly. Employees play an instrumental role in the image of a company. Online profiles and unorthodox comments by a firm's employees can create negative perceptions about a company (Charoensukmongkol, 2014). Employees may also unintentionally disclose sensitive company information. This can prevent current and potential consumers from being associated with the firm (Howard et al., 2014).

Of great importance is the legal aspect involved. A requisite for the social media team is the understanding of law governing information technology, prior to the creation of a social media legal strategy. Monitoring employees' use of social media can create legal implications (Everett, 2010). In addition, potential legal dangers may also arise from reviewing social media accounts of potential employees, and thus rejecting them based on information obtained. Social media sites also carry threats such as spyware, malware and viruses which automatically downloads, and thus infiltrates an entity's information technology system (Arca, 2012). Also, links received from legitimate online connections may contain malware and infection. Intellectual property risks also exist concerning customer reviews, and protection of personal information. Despite these potential challenges, social media is still an extremely viable tool and accounting firms can reap ample benefit therefrom. In order to eliminate or mitigate risks, companies should adopt the necessary precautions and protect themselves from possible negative situations (Peters, K., Yubo, C., Kaplan, A.M., Ongibeni, B. & Pauwels, K., 2013). A selection of the most pertinent social media channels is further discussed.

2.12 SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

2.12.1 Facebook

Mark Zuckerburg founded Facebook in 2004, whilst attending Harvard University. Zuckerburg, an avid computer programmer, had already successfully developed and introduced many social networking websites for students. In February 2004, Zuckerburg introduced "The facebook," which the world later came to know as Facebook. Within 24 hours, 1 200 Harvard students had signed up, and within a month, the site featured membership of half of the undergraduate population. Shortly thereafter, the network spread to neighbouring universities, and then high schools. As of September 2006, the network extended beyond educational institutions to anyone with an email address (Phillips, 2007). The site currently has approximately 1,871 billion users. Of these users, 76% (1,421 billion) users utilise the site on a daily basis. The implication is that in just over a decade, Facebook has become one of the world's largest user bases (Chaffey, 2017). The graph in Figure 2.5 depicts the steady increase in Facebook users from 2011 to 2016.

Figure 2.5: Average number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide per annum

Source : Adapted from Statista. 2017. Number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide as at 4th quarter 2016 (in millions) [online]. The Statistics Portal. Available online: https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/

Figure 2.5 reveals a steady increase in Facebook usage over the years. The perpetual increase indicates that Facebook patronage will continue to escalate as more and more people gain access to the internet. Also, the need to socialise and keep in touch solidifies the need for Facebook. Facebook provides timely updates regarding friends' activities as well as provides a medium for forums and discussions. It is thus an excellent means by which messages and views can be portrayed (Hanna, et al., 2011). Facebook has various distinguishable characteristics, which attracts members. These include the ability to create personalised user profiles, which can be tailored in terms of information displayed. Users may also adjust their privacy settings in accordance with who they prefer to view their profiles. They may join groups in accordance with their beliefs and interest, as well as share pertinent information. There is also the added advantage of perceived credibility; which implies that the more "likes" a Facebook page receives, the more positive an impression it leaves on a potential client (Arca, 2012). One would generally tend to

consider the popularity of an impending product-/-service prior to engagement (Ach, 2013).

Entities may utilise Facebook for networking purposes. They can create pages which highlight services offered, as well as formulate a discussion board for anyone who might require clarification. This will assist in forging and honing relationships as well as trust amongst the Facebook community, and thus lead to additional clientele as well as referrals. Links to the company's website will ensure increased online traffic (Arca, 2012).

2.12.2 Twitter

Twitter emanated from a need to reinvent a failing company. On 21 March 2006, founders, Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams and Biz Stone, who were programmers at a podcasting company in California began a radical craze which transformed into an addictive trend. Twitter, which captures one's message in 140 characters, rapidly gained popularity. The micro blogging tool has swiftly become the focal point of various discussions ranging from social and political to environmental and entertainment (Arca, 2012). Twitter is also the point of departure for numerous groundbreaking stories, with politicians and celebrities choosing to tweet their experiences. Twitter has also had an overpowering impact on businesses due to the ease of use and esteem of the network. Marketing agents use Twitter to reach their target market, share news and promotions, attend to customer issues and much more (Johnson, 2013). It strengthens relationships between consumers and suppliers by enabling real-time engagement, and thus facilitating prompt response (Ach, 2013).

In less than a decade, Twitter has gained more than 270 million users, with over 15 billion tweets exchanged daily. The explosion of Twitter has led to a convenient, easily accessible service, which can be accessed via mobile devices as well as desktop computers (Kwon, et al., 2014). Figure 2.6 reveals the steady increase in users from 2012 to 2016 by quarter. The constant increase, paired with the promising statistics, reiterates the fact that Twitter will continue to grow in years to come. Twitter can be viewed as a quick, concise tool that can perform an array of functions, such as exchange messages and post links to pictures, videos and music. All content shared on Twitter is public domain and hence news spreads

rather rapidly when utilising this tool. It can thus be seen why Twitter is the preferred means of communicating news (Kwon, et al., 2014).
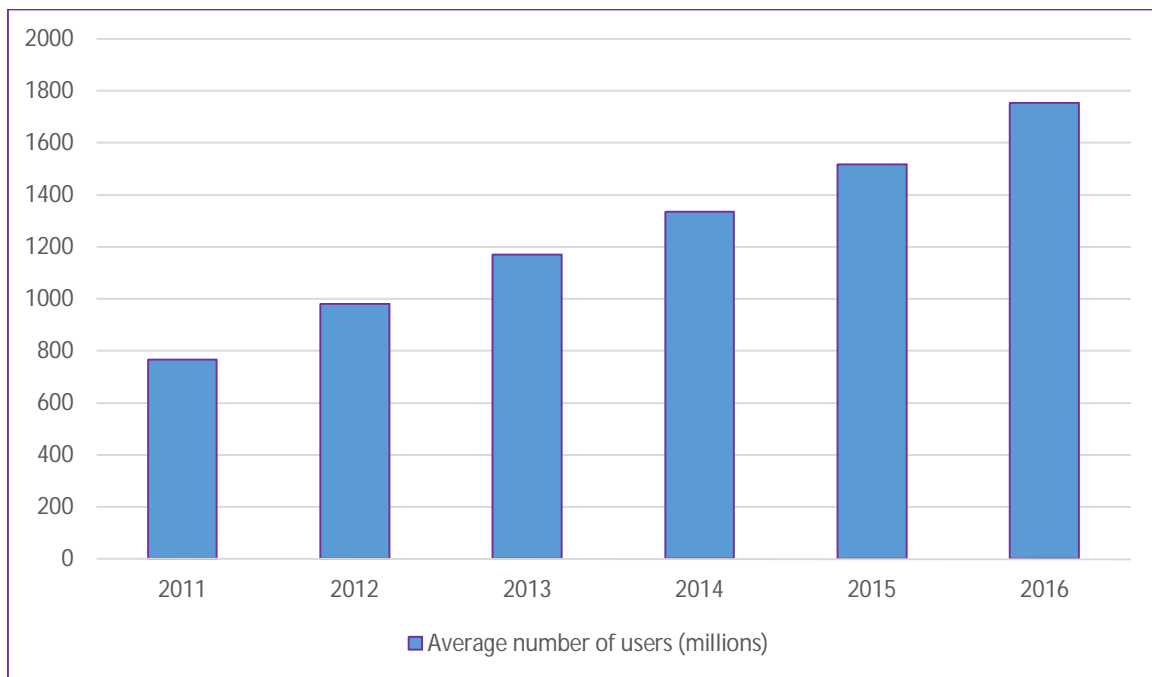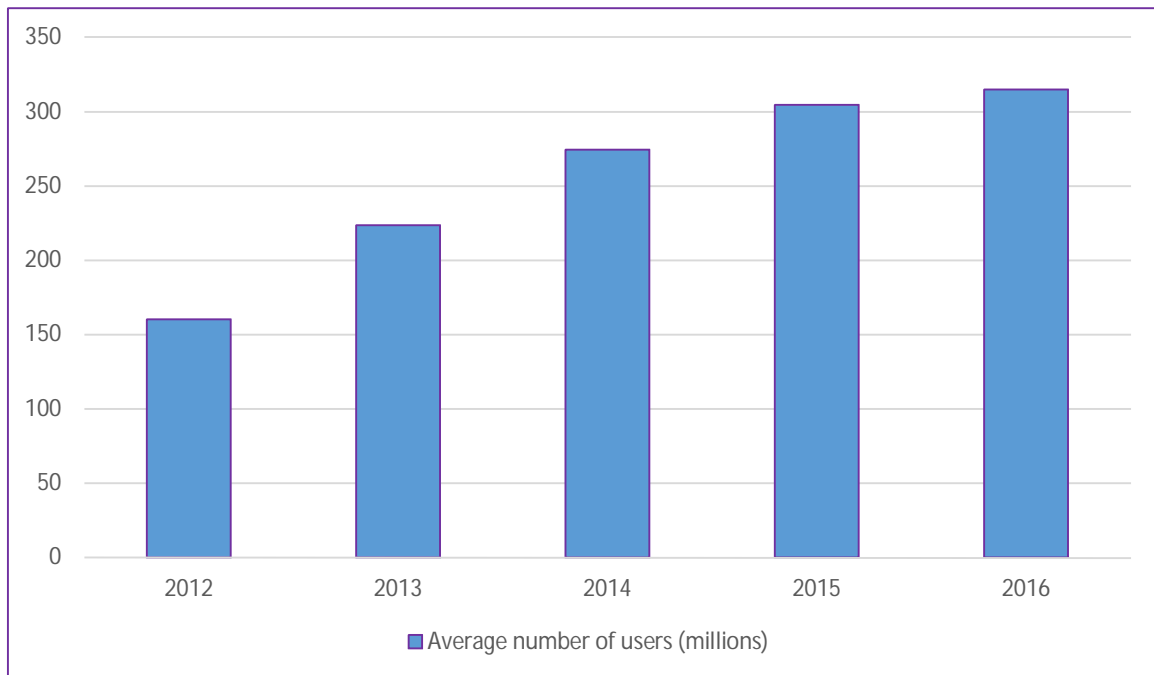

Figure 2.6: Number of monthly active Twitter users worldwide per annum

Source : Adapted from Statista. 2017. Number of Monthly Active Twitter Users from 1st Quarter 2010 to 4th Quarter 2016 (in millions) [online]. The Statistics Portal. Available online: https://www.statista.com/statistics/282087/number-of-monthly-active-twitter-users/

Figure 2.6 portrays the staggering growth of a tool which emanated purely as a means of social communication, but later transformed into an extremely powerful networking medium, which rapidly became a very efficient way of disseminating information (Arca, 2012). Messages conveyed on Twitter are brief and short-lived, thus effective in the sense that they create a buzz when required to and can disintegrate just as quickly. Twitter can be effectively used as a customer service platform, which assists with damage control whilst promoting transparency and forging trust from consumers (Cox, 2012).

2.12.3 LinkedIn

Reid Hoffman, a Stanford graduate, founded LinkedIn in late 2002. He envisioned the need to build and network, and thus created a networking tool which facilitated this

requisite. Launched on 05 May 2003, it rapidly became a renowned professional networking site as can be interpreted from Figure 2.6, with sales soaring as it gained recognition and credibility (Lee, 2009). After a mere month of operation, LinkedIn had gained 4 500 members, and continued to grow at such a swift pace, featuring approximately 315 million global users currently. The social networking site has grown substantially, claiming a footprint in over 200 countries worldwide (Potter, 2014).

LinkedIn effectively captures the dynamic of their empire with their slogan "Relationships Matter". The objective of LinkedIn is to enable users to create and maintain a list of people that they are acquainted with, thus creating a professional relational network. People within this network are called "connections," and can be utilised as a medium to network with other professionals associated with them (Arca, 2012). This type of secondary networking can result in the discovery of jobs and career opportunities, news sharing as well as transparency regarding the search for services, products and companies (Alexander & Gentry, 2014).

LinkedIn enhances networking capabilities and expedites access to key people in niche areas of specialisation. Users can build and strengthen their professional networks by strategically associating themselves with influential connections. From a recruitment perspective, a potential employee's LinkedIn account can serve as verification of the validity of a CV.

Many have realised the benefits of utilising these channels for business purposes. Several firms even have dedicated staff members for social media accounts such as LinkedIn. Social media in general is of high importance in any profession. A review of past as well as current marketing practices in the accounting profession will assist in gaining an understanding of the market.

2.12 MARKETING IN THE ACCOUNTING PROFESSION

Prior to 1978, Accounting practices were banned from advertising. Tensions from the Federal Trade Commission forced the ban to be lifted, thus permitting Accounting practices to advertise freely. This encouraged open competition amongst Accounting firms, which thus resulted in increased rivalry and lower fees (Winston, W.J., 1995). Older

Accountants feel that the lifting of the ban has resulted in a loss of credibility and exclusiveness to the profession. It is believed that previously clients were referred based on reputation, whereas in the present day, one does not necessarily have to be qualified to render a service. Further, clients have subsequently adopted the notion of "shopping around" and attaining quotes, as opposed to engaging a firm based on their credentials (Pitt & Nel, 2001). Present day further sees advertising in Accounting firms becoming more and more popular. Studies reveal that younger Accountants are more inclined towards advertising than their older colleagues. Some preferred methods of advertising include seminars, brochures and media releases. Accountants have also become more market – orientated in terms advertising, with specific focus on quality, as opposed to being product driven (Hay & Knechel, 2010). The advent of social media has created an entirely new dimension to advertising within the Accounting profession and will be further elaborated upon.

2.13 SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE ACCOUNTING PROFESSION

Social media has transformed the internet from being a platform of information to a platform of influence. Due to rapid global growth of social media, companies currently view social media as an integral element in their daily regime (Hanna, et al., 2011). Social media has as a result gained increased importance in organisations' media mixes (Peters, et al., 2013). As can be deduced from Figure 2.2, there are various types of platforms available to accountants to utilise as they wish.

Accountants can benefit immeasurably from LinkedIn. It may be wise to connect to their controlling bodies as well as ancillary institutions, such that profiles are linked in the event that a search in that particular institute is executed. Accountants can also utilise Twitter to their benefit by developing and promoting their service, interacting with their target market, as well as monitoring comments concerning their service. It enables quicker damage control, thus aiding in salvaging the firm's reputation. In addition, they can create hype around upcoming events (Arca, 2012). LinkedIn is thus a necessary tool for accountants for creating general awareness, and Twitter for when it comes to time sensitive issues.

Facebook is a further platform that due to its popularity, can prove very beneficial to accountants. Accountants may also post updates regarding deadlines on their Facebook page, which will serve as a reminder to all their followers. This assists in creating awareness amongst users, as well as reiterate the availability of their services (Kwon, et al., 2014). This feature assists with economic regulation in addition to creating the impression that the accounting firm is highly proficient, in terms of regulations and deadlines. It can thus be stated that a Facebook page is imperative for any accountant who hopes to continue in practice, as well as compete with their larger counterparts (Michaelidou, et al., 2014).

An analysis of the literature on social media has largely been in the integration of digital technology into our everyday interactions, more specifically in terms of interpersonal communication and more recently into marketing. Further, the analysis has comprised how digital media and social integration into disciplinary work like accounting are receiving increased attention especially in the context of teaching and learning in educational settings. This integration can possibly extend into the cultural practices of disciplines like accounting and this study alludes to such integration.

2.14 SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE ACCOUNTING PROFESSION FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Social media has speedily acquired prominence in society since inception, with the number of available platforms rapidly growing by the day. Social media has made its way into all types of industries and professions, including the Accounting profession. Studies reveal that social media has long surpassed traditional forms of marketing in terms of effectiveness (Oyza & Edwin, 2015). Prior studies show that globally, larger Accounting firms utilize social media very extensively. This is evident from the constant content posted, as well as the calibre of content shared. Photos, videos and graphics posted are of a high standard and in good taste. Further, larger firms dedicate trained professionals to source and post such content. This re – iterates the importance that social media has commanded in business (Lodhia, Stone & Parker, 2016). An analysis of social media within the South African accounting domain will further be discussed.

2.15 SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE ACCOUNTING PROFESSION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Social media has been recorded to be the fastest technological change in the world's history. Research shows that it took radio 38 years and the internet seven years to reach an audience of 50 million. Social media can instantly make this happen. Social networking sites that were initially created purely for communication purposes have altered the manner in which business is being conducted in the 21st century. The larger firms have already embraced the phenomenon and have expanded their service offerings to include social media consulting (Abdullah, 2013).

Statistics reveal that a quarter (13 million) of South Africans have a Facebook account. This reiterates the number of South Africans that have access to social media. Smaller South African accounting firms have also implemented social media as part of their daily operations. Many firms post pertinent updates or relevant links on these platforms. This ensures that important news reaches their target audience. Surveys show that LinkedIn is the dominant social media platform for accountants due to the nature of the site (McHatton, 2016).

2.16 SUMMARY

This chapter presented an evaluation of the social media landscape, including a review of a selection of social media channels available. The intrinsic benefits and weaknesses of the implementation of social media in an entity were explored. The history and the evolution of the World Wide Web were also considered, as this technological advancement led to the creation of this new tool. Social media has paved the way for new entrants and strengthened competition, giving all participants opportunities to thrive in any given marketspace. An electronic platform in itself has many associated benefits, including creating awareness and enhanced versatility in terms of anticipating consumer needs. The social media franchise is also continuously evolving, with existing channels constantly reinventing themselves and new channels regularly being formed, thus offering more and more valuable tools. It can thus be concluded that social media is an important tool in any solicitor's toolbox, and the implementation thereof reaps profound benefits. Statistical comparisons were not included as there is no prior research on the topic. Research and academic insight into this topic is required in order to evaluate the benefits of employing

social media in accounting practices specifically, the methodology of which for this study is described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature review in the previous chapter underlined the origins as well as the concept of social media, and provided an understanding of a selection of relevant platforms available to businesses. It also provided an analysis of the benefits and downfalls of utilising such channels. Research pertaining to accountant's use of social media proved to be scarce, hence the necessity for this study.

This chapter focuses on the methodological decisions taken in acquiring the data for the study. It includes an explanation of the research design, data collection steps as well as statistical methods employed to analyse the results. A justification for the research options utilised by the researcher are provided. Ethical considerations and constraints are also presented to show how ethical issues were dealt with in producing the data.

3.2 DEFINITION OF RESEARCH

Cothari (2004) defined research as a logical and precise search for appropriate information on a particular subject. He further defined research as a calculated enquiry undertaken in pursuit of new knowledge.

Sekaran and Bougie (2013) described research as a methodical, unbiased examination into a given topic, embarked upon with the intention of attaining a result. The objective of research is to acquire the necessary information in order to make educated decisions to effectively deal with issues. The information in question can either be acquired first hand or derived from existing data such as company archives, industry reports or popular media.

In this qualitative study, the process began with a research proposal that was reviewed and accepted by a review committee. The proposal presented a detailed explanation of the research intention, focus and design for producing the data, including the process issues of engaging the participants.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design can be viewed as the rationality of the research that focuses on how the study is to ensue (Cothari, 2004). It elaborates on how all major components, i.e. participants, treatments, measures, etc. collaborate in order to address the research questions. The aim of the research design is to formulate, configure and implement the research in order to amplify the authenticity of the findings (Rowley, 2014). Decisions also have to be arrived upon regarding sample design, measurement and data analysis. The entire research process as depicted in Figure 3.1 must be undertaken.

Figure 3.1: The research process

Source : Adapted from Sekaran, U. & Bougie, R. 2013. Research methods for business. 6th Edition. John Wiley & Sons Ltd

Figure 3.1 depicts the general research process, which must be followed in order to ensure validity of the research. The structure provides a comprehensive guided process which the researcher may follow to ensure that the appropriate steps have been taken. The research

process commences with identification of the research topic, which then delves into the data collection process. The research problem is subsequently identified and research process formulated. Hypotheses are generated and the literature review drafted. Data analysis and interpretation then commences, preceding which the research question is answered. A report is composed, hence concluding the research process. The quality of the research will largely depend on the appropriateness of the design alternatives, taking into consideration its sole purpose. The more detailed the research design is, the greater the associated costs will be. It is thus questionable as to whether the benefits that will accrue therefrom are justifiable in terms of resources outlaid (Greener, 2008).

The focus of this research was to explore the use of, nature of and extent to which social media is used within the accounting industry. The reason for this is that social media studies are scarce, despite their increasing popularity (Charoensukmongkol, 2014). It was deemed that the most appropriate research design for this study would be a qualitative research design, the details of which are presented below.

3.4   RESEARCH APPROACH

The use of social media suggests human interaction between persons and technology. The most appropriate research approach, therefore, would be a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research, according to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), may entail repeated sampling, gathering of data and analysis thereof. Hence, analysis of data may only commence once data has been collected. It is noted that qualitative data analysis consists of the following three steps : reduction of data, display of data and finally deriving of conclusions.

Arca (2012) described qualitative research as an attempt to explore and uncover problems and issues on hand as there is minimal knowledge on the issue. Arca (2012) further stated that uncertainty exists regarding dimensions of the problem and 'rich' data is assimilated from this approach. This approach is designed to assist researchers to understand people and their social and cultural conventions.

As interviews were the selected form of data collection and analysis, it meant that a qualitative approach would be the most appropriate approach to get a sense of the preferred

kinds of social media used, how they are used and what benefits they derive for the persons as well as for the accounting industry.

3.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed in this study was an interview schedule. Interviews are known to describe and explain phenomena (Cothari, 2004). Sekaran and Bougie (2013) defined research as a technique for collection of information from participants to describe, depict and enlighten researchers on their understanding, outlook and conduct. The research process as depicted in Figure 3.2 highlights the steps a researcher would follow in order to achieve the end result.
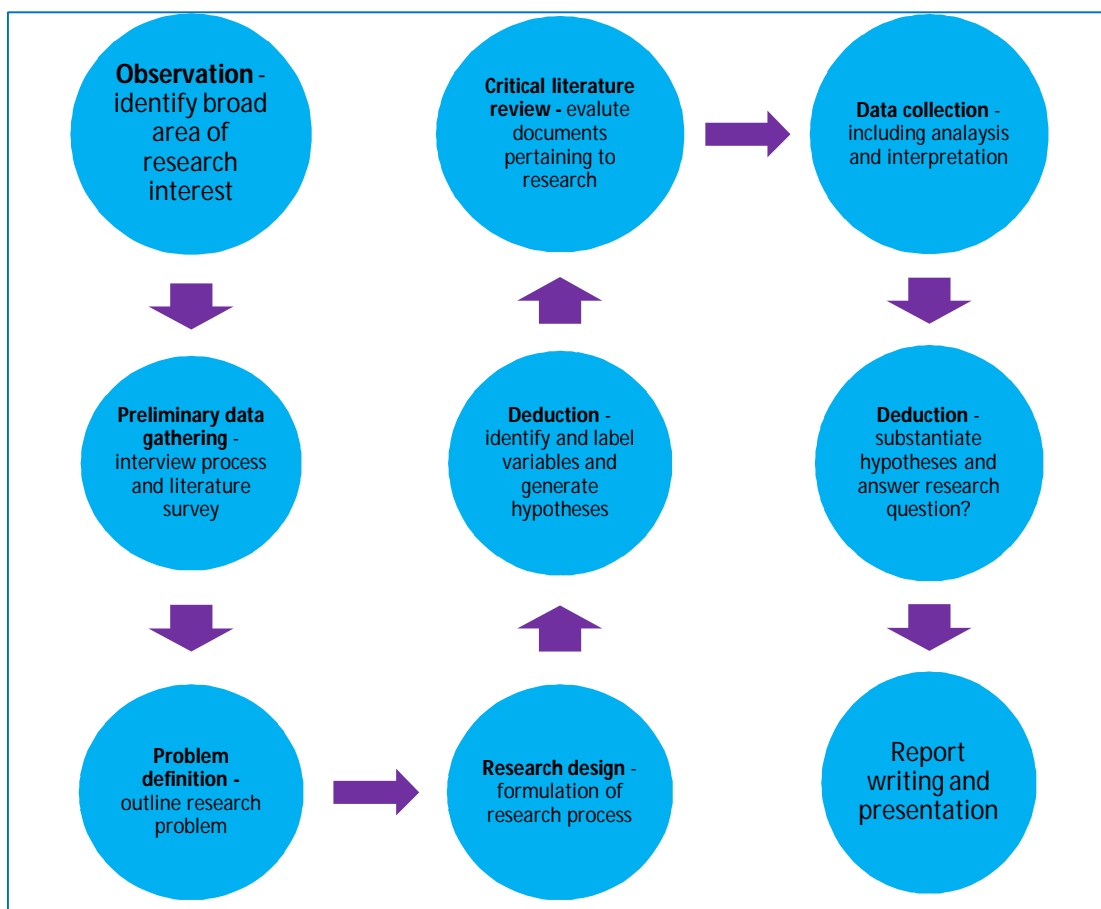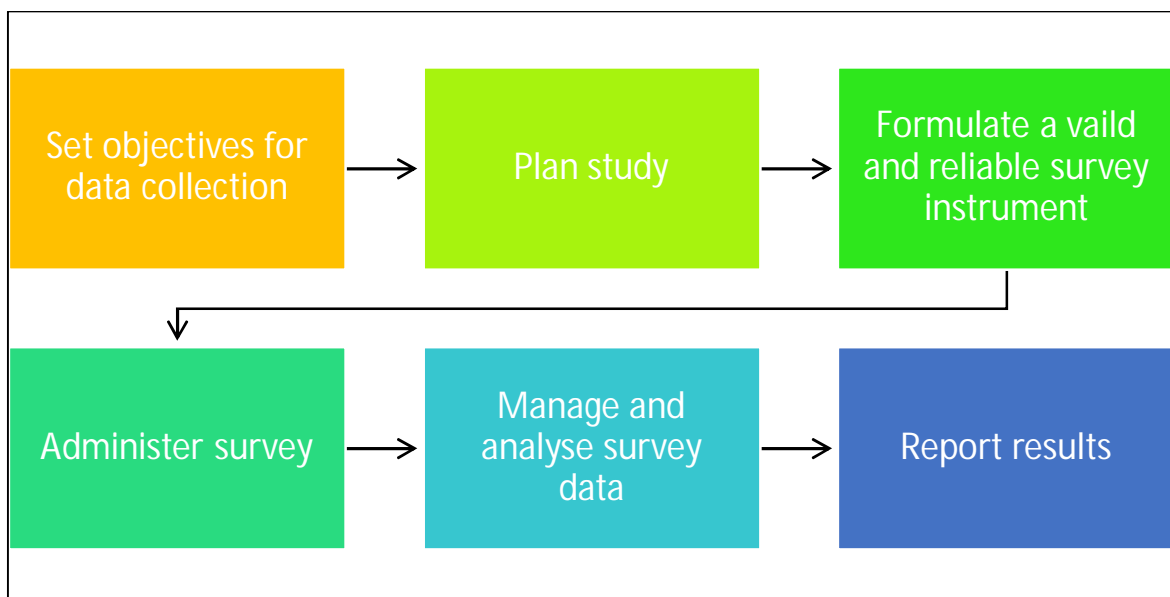

Figure 3.2: The survey system

Source : Adapted from Sekaran, U. & Bougie, R. 2013. Research methods for business. 6th Edition. John Wiley & Sons Ltd

This study entailed surveying medium to small accounting firms to explore the use of social media in their work environment. The critical steps as portrayed in Figure 3.2 were undertaken by the researcher. The interview schedule allowed the researcher to describe what kinds of social media are used, how they are used and what benefits could be derived from such use.

One hundred small to medium accounting firms in the Durban geographic area were contacted to participate in this study. Of the 100 attempts, only six (6%) accounting firms responded in the affirmative to participate in this research. In qualitative research, the number of participants may not be a major concern as depth of information and meaning making are the central rationale. Hence the six respondents from the six accounting firms provided sufficient in-depth information on the use of social media within their work environment. Further, a qualitative study does not require large samples (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

3.6   PARTICIPANTS FOR THE STUDY

From each of the participating accounting firms, the partners/managing directors were the main respondents. The researcher contacted the participants and provided a detailed explanation of the nature of the study. Only once the participants had agreed, did the researcher continue with the study. A gatekeeper's letter was then requested from all participants in order to commence with the study. Once this had been obtained, permission had to be sought in the form of an ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Only upon approval of the study, was the researcher able to conduct the interviews.

All participants were interviewed in person. The researcher emailed the interview questions to all participants prior to the interview. Also, prior to conducting the interview, a copy of the interview questions was handed to all participants for retention. Further, all participants were requested to sign an informed consent form. This entailed allowing the researcher to conduct the interview as well as record the session.

3.7   INSTRUMENTS USED IN THE PRODUCTION OF DATA

Semi-structured interviews were used as the main data collection method. Semi-structured interviews, according to Stephen, et al. (1999), is the combination of an unstructured, open-ended interview and the focus and intent of the survey instrument to produce resolute, qualitative data in the study. The questions are pre-developed, but the answers are open ended. A set of guiding questions were developed for this study. These questions formed the main questions asked to all six participants. In addition, probing questions were asked to participants during the interview process. The probing questions served to obtain deeper insight into what they were saying and to get further clarity on some issues.

The semi-structured interview schedule was pilot tested on a small number of accountants prior to the conducting of the interviews. The pilot test revealed that the responses received answered most of the research questions, hence the interviewer could commence with the actual interviews once the interview schedule was improved upon.

As mentioned previously, the interviews were conducted in person. The researcher requested a 15 minute time slot from each interviewee. Each interview, depending on the responses, took approximately 15 minutes. The interview schedule consisted of 16 questions, some of which were leading. The reason for leading questions was to obtain clarification into the reasoning behind some of the methods employed.

Interviewees were assured of anonymity. The researcher also assured interviewees of the nature of the study; that the study was merely for research purposes and that there would be no implications for the interviewees. In addition, no reference was to be made to any of the participants.

3.8 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Sekaran and Bougie (2013) defined validity as an assessment of how well a particular instrument, which has been formulated, measures the intended concept.

Golafshani (2003) further described validity as a measure of the truthfulness of the research results. It is also noted that researchers establish validity by asking a series of questions and often seek answers from other research.

Validity in qualitative research means suitability of the data, processes and tools. It is necessary to determine whether the research question is valid for the intended outcome, the research design is valid for the methodology, the sampling and data analysis appropriate and whether the results obtained and conclusions reached valid for the context and sample. When assessing validity of a qualitative study, the choice of methodology must ensure detection of findings in the applicable context in order for it to be valid (Leung, 2015). The researcher ensured the validity of the research by approaching and interviewing participants that were directly involved in social media. Furthermore, the choice of

participants from the accounting field and the use of questions and interviews ensured that appropriate data was collected to ensure the objectives of the study were met.

Sekaran and Bougie (2013) defined reliability as an assessment of how constantly the measuring instrument measures the intended concept.

Reliability in qualitative research is a bit more challenging. The basis of reliability is embedded in consistency. Minimal variation of results is permitted, provided that the data is ontologically similar but differs in ambiance and richness within the same paradigm (Leung, 2015). The researcher ensured reliability by pilot testing the questionnaire within the accounting field. A private enterprise was selected for the pilot test and two participants who were not part of the main study were used. The analysis for the pilot study suggested that some questions needed to be revised both in the sequencing as well as the context. Overall, the instrument was deemed reliable to produce information for the study.

Validity and reliability are extremely important concepts in any research process. They provide some assurance on the degree of legitimacy of the results Golafshani (2003) denoted that a study should provide clarity on a concept/situation that would otherwise be confusing or uncertain. In order to ensure validity and reliability, the researcher pilot tested the study prior to conducting it. This ensured that all questions were clear and facilitated the desired responses. Further, it gave the researcher an idea of the type of responses to expect. In addition, all interviews were voice recorded and transcribed to ensure that raw data was utilised. This reiterates the notion that data should not only be valid, but also reliable.

The advantages of voice recording and transcribing the interviews are as follows:

1. Demonstrates a clear decision trail and ensures that interpretation of data was transparent and consistent.
2. Provides clarity in terms of thought processes in respect of data analysis.
3. It eliminates any misunderstandings.
4. As certain questions were open-ended, the interviewer was able to probe the respondents for further detail.

5. It allows for flexibility during questioning (Leung, 2015).

To summarise, it is extremely important that all qualitative researchers integrate strategies that augment the credibility of the study.

3.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Data collection is a pertinent part of the research process. Problems researched within the appropriate paradigm enhance the value of the research. As mentioned previously, data collection was assumed by means of semi-structured interviews. The principal purpose of this type of data collection is to probe into factors if the need arises (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

As all interviews were conducted within the Durban Metropolitan region, they were carried out face to face. The main disadvantage of –face-to-face interviewing is that respondents may feel uneasy and exposed. Even though anonymity was assured, interviewees were still hesitant to reveal sensitive information.

3.10 CONCLUSION

An analysis of the research process and the various facets of said process were detailed in this chapter. A description and motivation were provided in terms of the rationality of the study, the location of the study, the sample size, the choice of research methods utilised as well as the manner in which data collection ensued. The pertinent ethical requirements were also detailed in this chapter. The next chapter provides the analysis, presentation and examination of results.

CHAPTER FOUR
PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The data for this study was collected as described in Chapter 3. All participants consented to the recording of interviews. The interviews were transcribed and arranged in a manner that enabled them to be analysed and presented coherently. The data is presented in this chapter by elaborating on the themes that were extracted from the interviewees' responses. Thereafter, the researcher interprets the findings and concludes accordingly based on the themes.

4.2 DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The calibre of participants is imperative in a qualitative study as it is an indication of the quality of the data collected. Further, the findings will contribute to the body of knowledge that educate us in areas that were previously unchartered (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Due to the poor language of the responses received, the researcher paraphrased the responses and utilised verbatim quotes only where necessary. Being senior executives, the participants spoke very colloquially and used a large amount of jargon.

A total of six respondents participated in the study. It is significant that the participants included four partners and two senior managers. All respondents were the most knowledgeable from a regional perspective and hence were the most suitable candidates to interview for the study. Despite a selection of the participants' Accounting firms having a dedicated social media team member, these were the nominated individuals who were delegated the task of the interview. This is due to the social media expert being in a different province, hence regionally the elected interviewees were adequately proficient in terms of knowledge. As all participants were senior officers, they were in a position to comment as they were directly affiliated with the social media platforms and the usage thereof. Also, they were able to provide rich data as they had all been in the accounting profession prior to the advent of social media. This enabled them to provide responses based on experience pre and post social media implementation.

It can be deduced from the description of the participants above that they were adequately experienced and hence were in the best position to provide insightful data that contributed greatly to the quality of the study.

4.3 STUDY FINDINGS

The data collected was analysed and themes extracted in accordance with the aims and objectives of the study. The data was then categorised based on the themes and elaborated on. Direct quotations from respondents were used in presenting the results, as this enhanced the credibility of the data collected. It further provided clarity and assisted the researcher in presenting the results. Each objective has been stated and the relevant questions and themes follow. The researcher created word clouds with the aid of the Nvivo program. The word clouds were derived from the data assimilated. Word clouds were utilised as they provide a snapshot of the responses received, and hence the researcher was able to extract the relevant themes therefrom.

4.3.1 Objective one – Social media adoption

Objective one sought to determine if accounting firms have implemented the usage of social media. It further sought to determine why social media has been employed. All six respondents (100%) confirmed that they have adopted social media in their companies.

4.3.1.1 *Question 1 – Company usage of social media*

Table 4.1 summarises which companies have implemented social media.

Table 4.1: Companies which have adopted social media

	Yes	No
Company 1	X	
Company 2	X	
Company 3	X	
Company 4	X	
Company 5	X	
Company 6	X	

As can be seen from Table, 4.1, of the six respondents, all confirmed that they employed at least one social media channel. Respondent 1, however, misinterpreted the question, and stated that his company did not employ social media. He did confirm that the usage of social media is employed at head office level.

4.3.1.2 Question 2 – Reasons why companies do not use social media

As all respondents answered in the affirmative to question one, this question was not posed.

4.3.1.3 Question 3 – Reasons for using social media platforms

Figure 4.1 highlights the prevalent responses that emerged from the interviews.
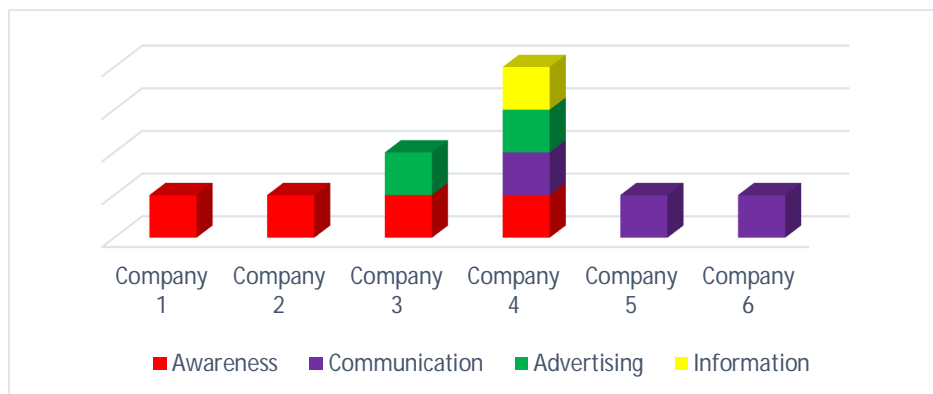
Figure 4.1: Reasons for usage of social media platforms

It is evident from Figure 4.1 that awareness and communication are the main purposes for the implementation of social media, according to the respondents. To a certain extent, advertising and information sharing are intended, but essentially, it was discovered that social media was employed to create awareness and communicate with stakeholders. Lou, et al. (2013) confirmed that social media has the potential to offer more opportunities, such as branding and awareness, marketing, fund raising and acquiring new customers.

4.3.1.4   Discussion of objective one

Objective one established whether accounting firms have implemented social media and the reasons why. Figure 4.2 provides an illustration of the prevalent themes that emerged from the data collected, which are awareness, communication and information.

Figure 4.2: Word cloud overview of purpose of social media usage

Figure 4.2 identifies the motivation for the implementation of social media. The responses confirmed that social media is mainly implemented for awareness and communication. This is evidenced by Respondent 2's comment through which he confirmed that social media was implemented for awareness purposes. It is a means of informing current and potential clients about updates, special functions and if the firm has done anything newsworthy.

Respondent 3 had a different view. He confirmed that their reason for social media usage was to attract trainees. This company identified that in order to attract young blood, social media was imperative. Further, it was utilised as a means of advertising. Respondent 3 recognised that the reach that one would gain from social media supersedes traditional forms of advertising, as illustrated in Figure 2.4, which stipulates some of the numerous benefits that social media can have for a business. Saravanakumar and Suganthalakshmi (2012) stated that the global reach that social media provides is nothing short of amazing, and that if Facebook was a country, it would be the 3rd largest in the world.

"For us it is two-fold, one is advertising, to get our name out there. The other side is that we found it increasingly difficult to get trainees in so using social media as a platform to create awareness with the young guys, to get our name there and hopefully entice them to come to us for training contracts."

Brand identity

Respondent 4's company was a lot more involved in social media. This interviewee's job description was that of marketing manager and hence he was able to provide a very elaborate overview of the company's intention as well as what they hope to gain from social media. As highlighted below, he confirmed that social media, apart from being implemented for advertising purposes, is a means of communication with current and potential clients.

"I think from our perspective; we have a two - fold approach. One is definitely to bring in the leads as stated from a sales perspective and marketing perspective, and the other is to sort of gauge and educate prospective clients that will be coming through and signing up with the firm just to give them an understanding, like for example we see something that SARS is going to be doing. We can actually inform the public about it . . . we would actually give that information out, talk about it on social media with our followers and in doing so, hope that they would come to us and actually require the service."

Communication

Respondent 5 reiterated the intention of using social media as a means of communication. He further stated that traditional means are not always the most effective, hence the necessity of social media.

Information

Respondent 6 found that different media platforms serve different purposes, i.e. each platform has its strengths. Further, social media is a means by which messages are conveyed to a target audience. What may be included on a company's Facebook page, will differ from what may be included on a company's LinkdIn profile, for example. Hence, depending on the needs of the individual company, the appropriate platform can be selected.

Respondent 1, as per his response below, highlighted the fact that with the new generation (millennials especially), social media usage is much more evident than with their more mature counterparts. Therefore, in order to attract new talent, social media usage is imperative. Further, he underlined a rather valid point, namely that the reach that one can achieve with social media is significantly larger than one can hope to gain with traditional forms of media. Figure 2.4 further encapsulates this, as it depicts the benefits of social media.

" . . . the main reason for it is that in terms of the advances in technology, the coverage that you can get using social media platforms is much more vast than traditional forms of media, for example newspapers. You also need to take into account the fact that the new generation utilizes social media much more than the older generation . . ."

4.3.1.5   Summary

The responses as set out above prove that social media can be a rather beneficial tool. The various responses, although diverse, centred on a few common themes, i.e. that social media is an excellent means of creating awareness and also a very helpful means of communicating with clients. Some of the dominant themes that emerged, even though they were not depicted in Figure 4.2, were 'education and awareness' and 'brand identity'.

Ach (2013) supported this by stipulating that social networks are a means of directly interacting with a target audience and promoting brand loyalty by efficiently responding to complaints as well as directly addressing concerns and queries.

Saravanakumar and Suganthalakshmi (2012) further stated that social media has a huge impact on corporations as they have realised that without an effective social media plan and strategy, they will be unable to compete in the digital economy. Arca (2012) reiterated that the implementation of social media strategies results directly in increased exposure. This increases the company's visibility and popularity. It has been further noted that vital information can easily be shared, regardless of the recipient's geographical location (Kaplan, 2012).

4.3.2   Objective two – Social media platforms preferred by accountants

The aim of objective two was to determine which of the social media platforms accountants utilise and how effective they have found them to be. Further, it sought to determine who is responsible for the management thereof.

4.3.2.1   *Question 4 – Social media platforms used by each company*

Figure 4.3 provides an illustration of accountants' preferred platforms, as well as reasoning regarding choice of platform.

Figure 4.3: Word cloud overview of social media platforms used

It is evident from Figure 4.3 that Facebook is the favoured platform, as it appears to be the platform of choice for most. Saravanakumar and Suganthalakshmi (2012) endorsed this statement by stating that all companies should utilise the power of Facebook to influence consumers/clients. Figure 4.4 provides an overview of platforms that each of the respondents utilised.
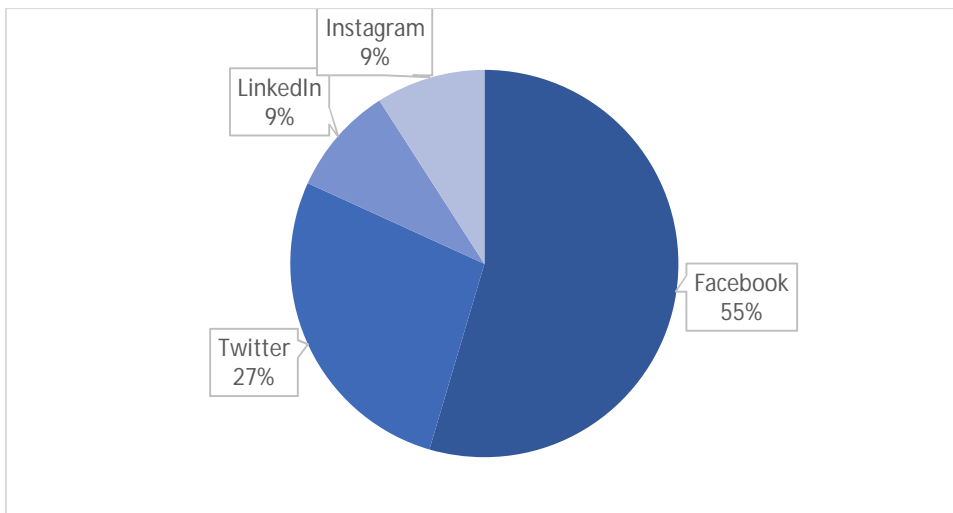
Figure 4.4: Social media platforms used

Figure 4.4 provides a depiction of the platforms utilised by the respondents. Facebook has claimed the majority, followed closely by Twitter. There is, however, a multitude of social media platforms available as evidenced by Figure 2.2, which also denotes the various

categories of social media available, such as wikis, blogs and forums. Each platform has its own merits. Further, most platforms can be viewed as being unique to a specific genre. For example, LinkedIn would be the preferred platform for any professional person, whereas Facebook and Twitter can be viewed as a general platform that provides coverage to any sector. Themes that emerged included communication and interaction.

4.3.2.2   Question 5 – Effectiveness of these platforms

Arca (2012) stated that effectiveness of social media platforms is extremely difficult to measure due to social media being a relatively new domain. She further confirmed that academic insight into social media is lacking, and material available on the topic mostly includes manuals and guides on social media implementation, not the effectiveness thereof. Each company, however, measures effectiveness differently. Figure 4.5 reflects the essential themes that emerged from the responses received. Key words such as Facebook, and effective are some of the terms utilised.

Figure 4.5: Word cloud overview of effectiveness of social media platforms used

Figure 4.5, which is derived from the data collected, reveals that Facebook is prevalent in any discussion regarding social media. This can be confirmed by referring to Figure 2.4 which provides an illustration of the rate at which Facebook has grown over a period of six

years. This depicts the extent of the popularity of the site, and the rate at which it is growing.

4.3.2.3 Question 6 – Persons responsible for the management of social media

Figure 4.4 provides a snapshot of who is responsible for the management of these social media platforms.
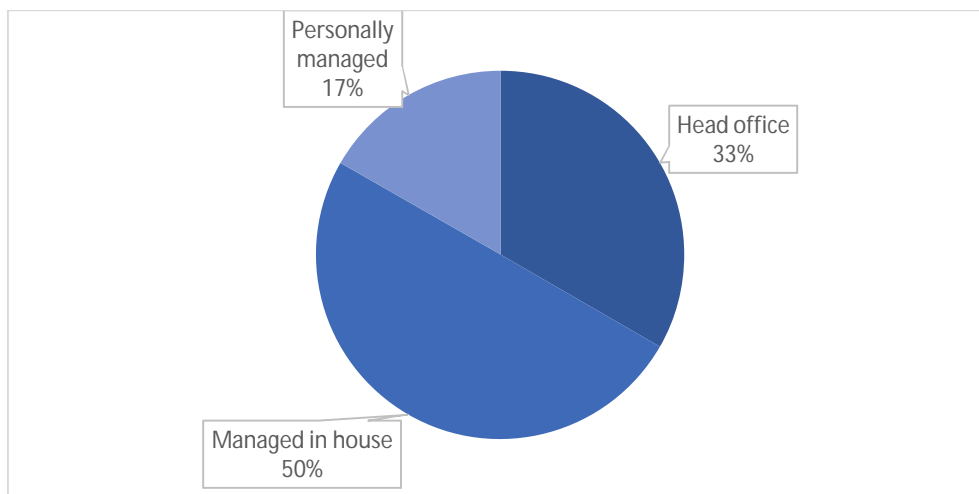
Figure 4.6: Areas responsible for the management of social media platforms

Figure 4.6 portrays the areas where people are responsible for the management of the companies' social media platforms. As evidenced from Figure 4.6, platforms are either managed by head office (33%), in house (50%) or personally (17%). It is apparent that the management of social media depend on the size of the entity, i.e. national firms employ dedicated social media teams, larger regional firms employ in-house specialists, and their smaller counterparts manage these platforms themselves.

4.3.2.4 Discussion of objective two

Objective two sought to determine which social media platforms are favoured by each company, and why. It further sought to establish how effective the respondents found these platforms to be. Essentially, the responses below reveal the preferred platforms, the

reasons behind the implementation thereof, and how effective the platforms are viewed to be. The responses also shed light on the extent to which social media have been found to be useful. Further, objective two sought to determine who these social media platforms are managed by.

Awareness and reach

Respondent 1 indicated that his company employs a Facebook account as well as a Twitter handle. The justification for this is that they found that they could attain more reach from these platforms. Respondent 1 stated that he is impressed with the power of Twitter. Further, it enables one to see exactly how rapidly news can spread via social media. He justified his statement by referring to the annual Johannesburg conference that his firm holds. It was documented that updates are constantly being provided on Twitter. He noticed the interest being generated, as well as the comments and interaction of the general public. This made him to realise the effectiveness of Twitter as an extremely popular means by which people stay in touch. This company's social media platforms are managed by their Johannesburg head office.

The company where Respondent 2 works has a Facebook page. He indicated that Twitter is being considered, but that at this point in time, Facebook is the sole platform employed and that the company's Facebook page is quite effective. It was established that clients and acquaintances are aware of activities that happen within the firm, which provides a sense of importance. Further, it motivates the company to provide regular updates, as they appreciate the interest being generated therefrom. When questioned about the management of the platform, Respondent 2 confirmed that this responsibility was previously outsourced, but is currently being administered in house.

According to Respondent 3, his firm utilises Facebook, Twitter and LinkdIn. However, the Facebook account appears to be the most popular channel, and views have been increasing over time. He was however very apprehensive regarding effectiveness of social media. He indicated that he feels social media does not deliver the expected results, but did mention that interest being generated for his company is a positive. With regards to the management of these accounts, Respondent 3 verified that a dedicated staff member at head office level is employed for this specific purpose.

"Facebook, LinkdIn and Twitter. We just started using them, I would say about a year, year and a half, where we have created a Facebook profile, which is being used quite often. We have noticed that the pages are being viewed a lot more, we seem to be getting more traffic and mileage in terms of the Facebook account. Twitter, we have started very recently, and LinkdIn, there is an account . . . It's effective in getting our name out there . . . there is a lot of viewing of pages and creating awareness of the brand."

Respondent 4 indicated that his company utilises Facebook and Twitter as these appear to be the platforms that are more inclined towards accountants. He further mentioned that these platforms have been beneficial to the firm in terms of acquiring new business. In his opinion, social media is effective, but the effectiveness cannot be measured or gauged. He believes that social media is a phenomenon that the accounting profession needs to embrace. He further stated that accountants should follow the lead of the Big 4, who internationally, are four of the largest accounting firms. These firms have very active social media accounts. Respondent 4 mentioned that he and his dedicated team are ultimately responsible for the management of these platforms.

"We use Facebook and Twitter. . . In terms of Facebook and Twitter, we use paid campaigns obviously for lead acquisitions . . . So using different new generation techniques and different types of paid advertising, we managed to grow the Facebook following quite substantially and actually bring in new business from most platforms as well . . . I would say they are fairly effective from a communications view point. Being able to talk to a fan base or following base is quite important . . . I wouldn't be able to give an exact number of how many people have managed to come through Facebook, but I feel that they are effective in the sense that they grow your brand . . . when you start to think of your Big 4, they are massive, everyone knows them, but if you look at them, they are super, super active online as well as engaging. . ."

Respondent 5's company utilises Facebook and Instagram as he feels that these platforms are the most beneficial. He also stated that he finds effectiveness difficult to measure, but mentioned that there has been a positive improvement in terms of awareness. A dedicated in-house team of specialists are employed for the management of these platforms.

"Facebook and Instagram. I think they are the most mainstream for the moment. We feel that we get the best reach out of these platforms . . . It's hard to measure effectiveness, it's more about the awareness that being present on these social media platforms gives us. Direct translation into business or leads is very hard to really measure, but we do feel the effectiveness and the awareness."

Respondent 6, who has a Facebook page, indicated that she finds social media to be a very effective tool for keeping in touch as well as for information sharing. She stated that it provides a simple, yet efficient solution in terms of communicating with current clients as well as interested parties. It further assists with compliance as messages regarding deadlines are dispatched and received rather effortlessly. Respondent 6 revealed that she is responsible for the management of the Facebook page.

"We find the Facebook platform very effective in keeping in touch with our clients and followers. We have used our messages to inform people about causes that we support, looming deadlines, special offers and for information sharing."

The responses discussed above as well as the results of the study as illustrated by Figure 4.4 have revealed that Facebook and Twitter are perceived to be the most utilised platforms. Also, all respondents were in consensus that the implementation of social media heightens awareness and reach to their respective companies, which were the themes identified. Ach (2013) further confirmed that each social medium has the potential to benefit businesses in a different way. It can also be deduced that social media is a tool which can help to achieve positive results, as some companies actually employ specialists whose sole purpose is to administer social media platforms, as confirmed by 33% of the respondents. This proves that social media has been beneficial to such an extent that it has warranted dedicated staff (Kaplan, 2012).

4.3.3 Objective three – Social media usage

Objective three sought to determine how the benefits of social media usage are measured. It also intended to determine how involved each of the companies is in terms of social

media usage. It further sought to determine which platforms are perceived to be the most effective.

4.3.3.1   Question 7 – Measurement of benefits of social media usage

Respondent 1 confirmed that the benefits of social media cannot be easily measured. However, he did state that the number of responses that a company receives can be an indicator of the reach obtained.

Respondent 2 also felt that the benefits cannot be quantified. He did however state that through interaction with stakeholders, he noticed that social media has been favourable as mention is constantly being made in this regard.

Respondent 3 confirmed that there has been a huge increase in the number of views on their Facebook page. Ach (2013) confirmed that social media is a means of attaining viral visibility and hence gaining the requisite amount of web traffic in order to rank highly in search engines.

" . . . we do get circulation of the views and these types of things . . . it's more like a five to six hundred percent increase."

Respondent 4, however, stated that the aim of social media is all about reach and engagement rates. He further commented that the number of clients engaging their services as a consequence of social media serves as a means of measurement, i.e. higher engagement rates equate to greater effectiveness of the platforms.

"In the old days, it used to be how many fans do you have, but now it's all about engagement rates. If we can get an average of twenty – five percent engagement, which is basically the number of clicks or interactions versus the number of impressions or reach that the process has made, we consider that that is a really good sort of engagement rate, and then if we reach a thousand people, and two hundred and fifty see it and four sign up, that's still quite a good conversion. That's how we would measure."

Respondent 5 reiterated that social media is mainly implemented for awareness purposes, with a focus on current and potential clients being able to locate a particular firm on social media. Respondent 6, like Respondent 3 indicated that she relies on statistics provided by Facebook in order to gauge effectiveness of social media.

4.3.3.2 Question 8 – The extent of each company's involvement in social media usage

Respondent 1 as well as Respondent 3 confirmed that their companies are not very involved in social media usage. However, it was previously noted that social media is implemented at head office level.

Both Respondent 2 and Respondent 6 claimed that they would like to be more involved. Respondent 2 further stated that they are looking to implement more platforms, as the world is becoming more and more dependent on technology. Also, the younger generation is extremely 'tech savvy' and hence the necessity for social media. Further, this respondent mentioned that the company had started with a Facebook account and that Twitter will be the next step. Respondent 6 confirmed that they do have a social media presence. However, despite encouraging their staff to become more actively involved; social media is not as widely used as they hoped it would be.

Respondent 4 and Respondent 5 indicated that their companies are actively involved in the social media process. As per the responses below, it can be concluded that for these companies, social media is a priority, and every effort has been made to maximise the usage thereof.

Respondent 4 : *"Pretty active, so at least five to six processes a week across the different platforms, and then with the basic spend each month to try and promote a sort of following and fan base as well."*

Respondent 5 : *"Extremely involved, everyone is on their own and the common company social media platforms all the time."*

4.3.3.3   Question 9 – Social media platforms perceived to be most effective

Figure 4.7 provides an overview of the platforms that each respondent perceived to be the most effective.
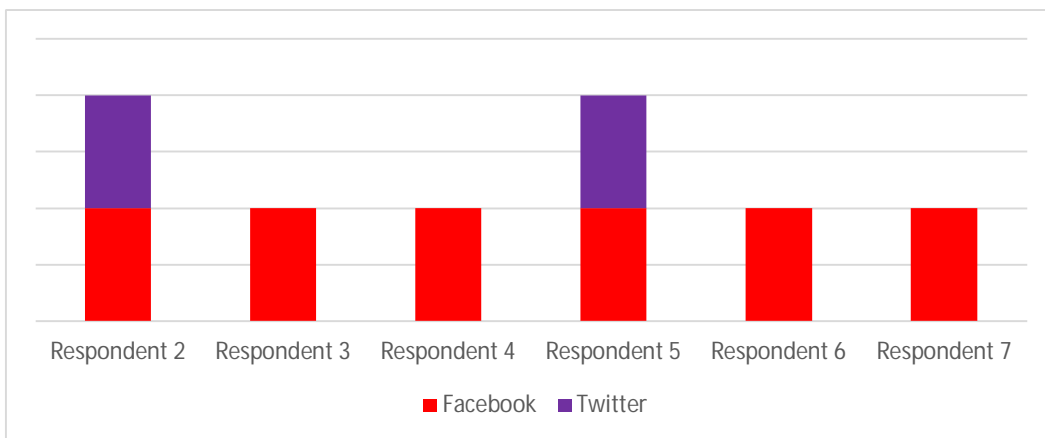
Figure 4.7: Social media platforms deemed to be most effective

Figure 4.7 provides a snapshot of the platforms that were perceived to be the most effective. All of the respondents were in agreement that Facebook is the most effective platform available. Two of the six respondents (33%) found Twitter to be a rather useful platform. Respondent 2, however, confirmed that Twitter is definitely a platform that they are intending to implement in the future as it appears to be rather useful. Cox (2012) confirmed that Facebook and Twitter are the preferred platforms for marketers, no matter which stage of implementation they were at. Respondent 1 did however point out that social platforms are seasonal. Any bad publicity leads to users moving away from a particular platform, and positive media results in more users signing up.

4.3.3.4   Discussion of objective three

The aim of objective three was to determine how the benefits of social media usage are measured, the extent of involvement in social media usage as well as which platforms the respondents consider to be most effective.

Awareness and reach

Social media usage has become increasingly prevalent over time as depicted by Figure 2.1, which portrayed the increase in social media usage over a period of six months. The ensuing result is that social media usage has grown by a staggering 60% in a mere six months. Figure 2.4 further highlights some of the benefits that may be derived from the implementation of social media, with the more predominant ones being increased exposure, increased traffic and improved sales. The respondents stated that they do feel the benefits of social media usage cannot be quantified, but they have experienced a positive difference from having an online presence. It can be deduced from the responses that the respondents have observed an increase in web traffic and also an increase in new clientele as a result of their online presence.

Arca (2012) further noted that social media provides an extremely cost-effective marketing solution. It has the potential to promote customer loyalty, promote brand and product awareness and even ensure the success of new product launches. Social media, however, demands a lot of hard work and effort before any notable success can be derived. Companies often have to commit a fair amount of time and resources to social media with the expectation that it will be beneficial to the company. Frequent social media involvement is thus imperative if an entity has any hope of achieving a positive result. This is consistent with the responses received in Section 4.3.3.3, which revealed that the larger companies have dedicated employees whose sole function is to manage the respective companies' online presence.

Influence on consumer behaviour

Mangold and Faulds (2009) also mentioned that social media has had a profound impact on consumer behaviour, bestowing power onto consumers that did not exist before. This new found power has the ability to influence discussions and hence influence performance goals. Social media is however a fast-paced and extremely active domain. It is thus

necessary for every company to have a set of guidelines in order to navigate the waters of social media. This will include the extent of social media involvement. The key to social media is participation and activity; therefore the level of involvement is linked to the success of the implementation of social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Figure 4.7 depicts the platforms that each accounting firm has found to be most effective and it is clear that Facebook is the preferred social media platform. Twitter has also been found to be beneficial. Each platform, however, has its strengths. Neti (2011) confirmed this by stating that Facebook can be viewed as a general platform, which provides current and potential clients with a holistic view of a particular organisation. It also provides pertinent information regarding any issues or deadlines within a given industry, whereas Twitter provides an efficient means of informing stakeholders of any important news. It can thus be concluded that the firm's needs will determine the appropriate platform to use.

4.3.4 Objective four – Limitations of social media

The aim of objective four was to determine if any limitations associated with social media have been experienced.

4.3.4.1 Question 10 – Limitations associated with social media

The question aimed to determine if any limitations have been experienced in association with social media. All of the respondents answered in the negative. Figure 4.8 portrays the prevalent themes that emerged from the responses obtained from the participants.
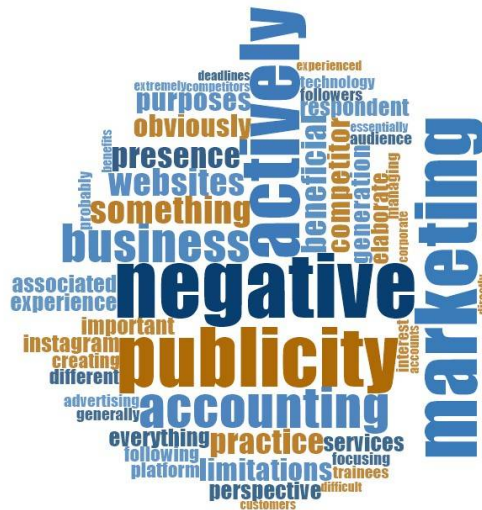
Figure 4.8: Word cloud of limitations experienced

Figure 4.8 provides a diagrammatic representation of the themes that emerged based on the responses received. Words such as 'actively', 'negative' and 'publicity' indicate that the respondents' companies do have an active social media presence through which they communicate with stakeholders. Further, they have embraced the change from traditional marketing methods to an online presence. They are also well aware of any negative publicity that may ensue.

4.3.4.2 Discussion of objective four

.The aim of objective four was to determine if the participants have experienced any limitations with social media and the measures that have been taken to combat them.

Risk and exposure

Even though none of the respondents had any negative encounters with social media, they did mention that they were aware of the extent of damage that social media can cause. Respondents 1, 2, 3 and 5 were all in agreement that there is a definite risk associated with social media; as once something has been published, it's virtually impossible to reverse the process. Arca (2012) further stipulated that there are operational, situational and legal risks inherent, which need to be considered and combatted if necessary. The respondents did state that they are extremely careful with what is being published, as it may unintentionally have negative connotations and thus adverse repercussions. Further, once a statement has been published, it cannot be reversed.

Turnaround strategy

Respondents 4 and 5 further claimed that one must be very selective of what is being posted. Also, that if publicity, good or bad, is actively managed, it can be turned around in favour of the company. Cox (2012) reiterated that companies are restricted by the level of control they have over the substance and dissemination of information. Also, that companies must be able to monitor and react to critique, be it positive or negative. Respondent 4, however, was adamant that all publicity is good publicity, as can be seen from the response below. It is further noted that one must also remain neutral with posts, i.e. Respondent 4 affirmed that religious posts, controversial posts, etc. are not allowed in their company.

Respondent 4 : " . . . *I'm a born and bred marketer, so I think all publicity is good publicity, it's just the way that you turn it around. So if we get a negative comment, it's quite good to actively engage that person online . . .* "

Respondent 5 : " . . . *With any good, there is also bad . . . I must say is that it has to be actively managed and a lot of these negative perceptions can actually be turned around fairly quickly from actively managing the process . . .* "

Cox (2012) stated that a company may not have the power to control what is being discussed, but they do have the capacity to influence a conversation in a particular direction, which may be advantageous to the company.

4.3.5   Objective five – Benefits and necessity of social media

Objective five aimed to determine if the respondents visit competitor pages, as well as the reason why and frequency thereof. It further aimed to gauge if the respondents felt that social media has been beneficial to their respective companies and whether in their opinion every accounting firm should have a social media presence.

4.3.5.1   Question 11 – Visiting of competitor pages

All six respondents (100%) confirmed that they do visit competitor pages. However, the frequency and reasons varied – as depicted by Figure 4.9.
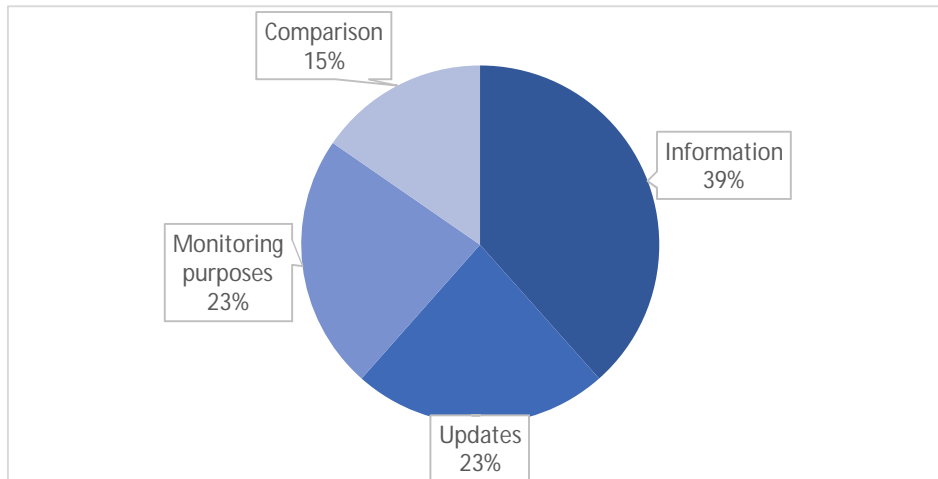
Figure 4.9: Reasons for visiting competitor pages

Figure 4.9 provides an overview of the main reasons the respondents provided as to why they visit competitor pages. The prevalent themes that emerged were information, updates, monitoring purposes and comparison.

Information

As can be seen by Figure 4.9, the predominant reason for visiting competitor pages is to gather information. As per the responses, much can be gleaned from social pages. Respondent 1 stated that the intention was not really to try and gather strategic information, but rather information that is pertinent and relevant. Respondent 2 stated that the reason for visiting competitor pages is to gather information regarding fellow accountants they meet with, and to educate themselves concerning their specialties. Respondent 3 had a similar view, as they visit competitor websites when taking over or handing over a client. They further added that they like to prepare themselves by obtaining information about those they will be dealing with. Respondent 5 stated that their reasons are mainly to gather information regarding what competitors are doing and whether it is something that they should consider.

Updates

Another theme that stood out is that of updates. Respondents 2, 4 and 6 confirmed that they visit competitor pages as they like to stay informed regarding any pertinent deadlines, any events in the accounting environment and any general news that might be important.

Monitoring purposes

Respondents 2, 4 and 5 claimed that they also visit social pages for monitoring purposes. Respondent 4 stated that they actually have a platform implemented that monitors competitor pages. This allows them to gauge which pages are popular, or not, which further enables them to enhance their service offering.

Comparison

Respondents 4 and 5 confirmed that they visit competitor pages in order to compare service offerings. This enables them to assess whether or not their own service offerings are relevant and current. It also enables them to remain competitive.

Figure 4.10 provides a snapshot of the frequency with which respondents visit competitor pages.
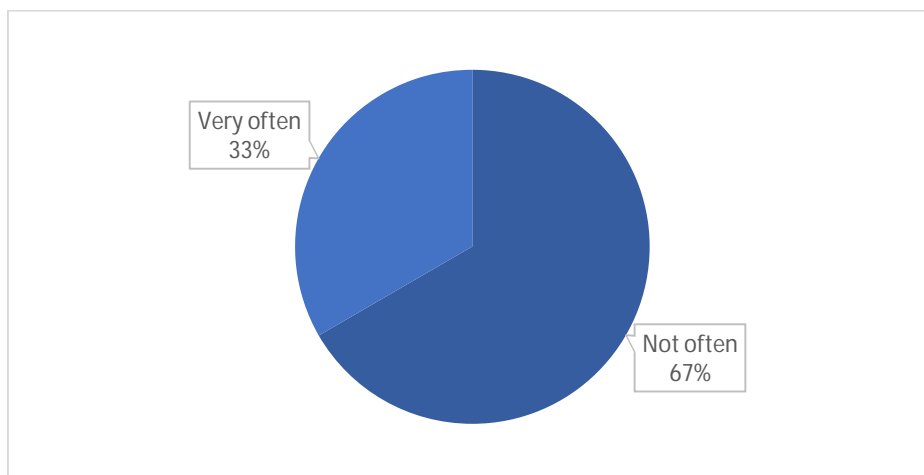
Figure 4.10: Frequency with which respondents view competitors' pages

As can be seen from Figure 4.10, two of the six (33%) of respondents' view competitor pages on a regular basis, whilst four of the six (67%) visit these pages only when necessary. This is an indication of the importance that social media has on an organisation as browsing can be rather time consuming, and the majority of the respondents actually take the time to browse and gather information.

4.3.5.2   Question 12 – Benefits of social media

Figure 4.11 provides a snapshot of the responses received from the participants.
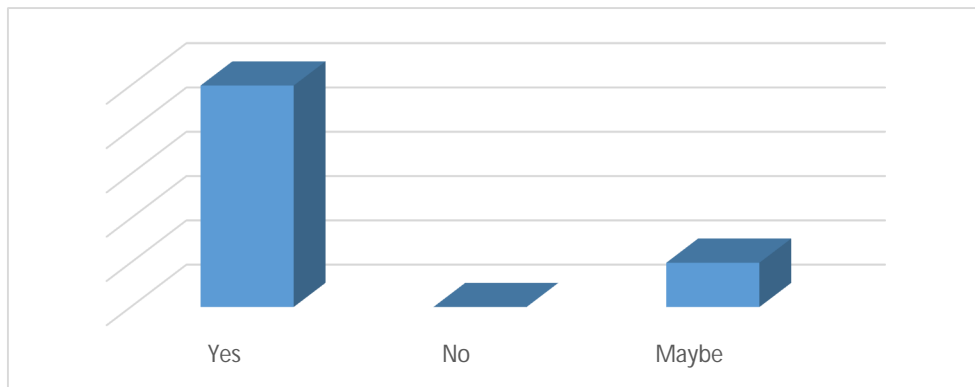
Figure 4.11: Participants' responses to whether social media has been beneficial to their companies

Based on the responses received, five of the six of participants found that social media has in fact made a positive difference to their respective companies, whereas one participant responded that it has had a partial impact.

4.3.5.3   Question 13 – Need for social media presence

Figure 4.12 depicts the responses provided by the participants when posed with this question.
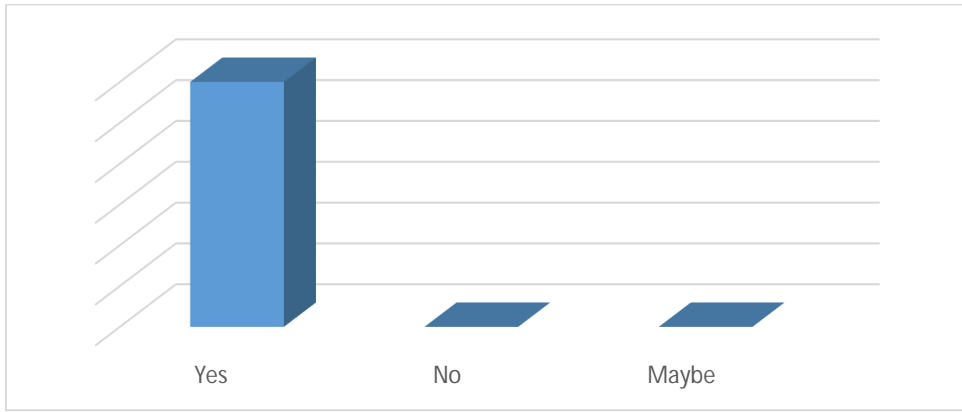
Figure 4.12: Participants' responses to whether every accounting firm should have a social media presence

Based on the responses received from participants of the study, Figure 4.12 provides an overview of the above question. All six (100%) of the participants felt that social media is a necessity.

When asked to justify, the responses varied in nature. Respondent 1 felt that it's completely necessary due to the mileage that one can obtain with social media in terms of branding and marketing. Respondents 2, 3 and 6 felt that social media is imperative due to the fast changing landscape of the modern world. These three respondents further stated that in order to attract the right people as well as successfully interact, social media is fundamental. Respondent 3 also mentioned that traditional methods of advertising are no longer effective, and if one wants to attract a younger crowd, social media is absolutely crucial. Respondent 6 further stated that it is imperative that accounting practices harness the benefits of social media. Respondent 4 mentioned that social media is all about creating a following. He stated that accounting firms' main form of advertising is word-of-mouth, and this is exactly what social media is all about. He further commented that even a LinkedIn page is sufficient for smaller firms, as long as they have some sort of social presence. Respondent 5 stated that accounting firms are ultimately businesses, and all businesses should have a social media presence.

4.3.5.4   Discussion of objective five

The aim of objective five was to determine whether the respondents visit competitor pages, as well as the reason why and frequency thereof. It further aimed to establish whether the respondents felt that social media has been beneficial to their respective companies and if in their opinion every accounting firm should have a social media presence. Figure 4.13 provides a snapshot of the prevalent themes that emerged based on the responses received from the participants.

Figure 4.13: Word cloud benefits and necessity of social media

Figure 4.13 provides a synopsis of the themes that materialised. Words such as 'communicating' and 'changing' were highlighted.

Communicating

Arca (2012) asserted that communication fosters relationships between companies and customers. Also, social media enhances the communication channels between these parties, enabling them to effectively communicate and thus promotes understanding between them. This is beneficial as it leads to customer satisfaction, and hence benefiting the company due to the ongoing patronage from the client/customer. Further, social media enables a particular firm to assess whether they are meeting the requirements of the consumer based on feedback, comments, surveys, etc. A remark received from Respondent 4 is relevant, as he stipulated that Durban specifically is synonymous for

referrals, and that is exactly what social media is – people referring and socially communicating across the communities.

The fundamental focus here is the promotion of communication. This forges better relations as well as enables companies to timeously react in the event of any negative publicity. Further, the interactive manner promoted by social media enhances a company's credibility and authenticity, which fosters consumer loyalty and trust (Arca, 2012). Cox (2012) further stated that social media facilitates engagement between consumers and suppliers in a direct, timeous and, most importantly, cost-effective manner. This makes social media befitting to not only larger organisations, but to their small and medium sized counterparts as well.

Changing

Cox (2012) indicated that the tools and approaches adopted by companies for liaising and dealing with consumers has changed. Whereas traditional forms of advertising encompassed straightforward initiatives, social media embodies community building, website monitoring and active initiatives to increase web traffic, to name a few. Respondent 2 stated that the world is changing drastically, and if companies want to attract staff, they should keep up with the social media space.

Mangold and Faulds (2009) identified the following elements which inadvertently changed from the traditional to new communications paradigm:

1. The flow of knowledge within the communications paradigm previously entailed word-of-mouth and face-to-face communication, which previously had minimal impact on a particular organisation. In the social media era, control over the coverage of media is non-existent. Further, the content of information has changed, as it is now based on user reviews.

2. Traditional forms of advertising such as radio, newspapers and television have changed.

3. Traditional forms of media dictated that consumers' buying decisions were influenced by adverts, whereas current purchasing decisions are influenced by other consumers' experiences.

4.3.6 Objective six – Social media for marketing

Objective six sought to determine if the respondents' firms use social media for marketing purposes, to what extent it has been used and how effective it has been for the organisation.

4.3.6.1 Question 14 – Use of social media for marketing purposes.

All six (100%) of participants confirmed that they do utilise social media for marketing purposes. When faced with the question, the respondents' interpretation of marketing varied in nature, as can be judged by the responses.

Respondent 2 stated that social media was implemented for creating awareness – in order to inform current and potential clients of their presence. Further, it serves as a platform for advertising job openings, as well as new service lines being offered. Respondent 5 also mentioned that social media was implemented for awareness purposes. He validated that social media is effective as long as people can find you, no matter which channel is chosen. That is the most important aspect of social media, i.e. being able to be found. Respondent 6 further substantiated that social media is necessary to showcase one's business and services to the world.

Saravanakumar and Suganthalakshmi (2012) proclaimed that the marketing landscape is constantly changing its rules in accordance with the developments and needs surrounding it. They further stated that the role of marketing is consistent, but the manner in which it executed is ever-changing. Previously, marketers charged a fee. This has changed drastically, as marketing via social media is mostly free and the reach that a company can obtain with social media far surpasses the reach that was previously attained from traditional marketing methods. As can be seen from the responses, the participants view marketing as not only educating current and potential consumers regarding their service offerings, but also creating awareness concerning job opportunities.

4.3.6.2 Question 15 – Extent of social media for marketing

The reaction to this question was mixed. Respondent 1 and Respondent 2 confirmed that social media for marketing is not very widely used by their companies. Respondents 3, 4, 5 and 6 all mentioned that social media is employed for various reasons by their companies. Respondent 2 mentioned that the aim is to get to the stage where it is used frequently, as the implementation is still in its infancy stage. Respondent 3 declared that there was a massive drive in terms of social media at their company in the past six months. A dedicated social media expert was employed to take care of the social media aspect, and hence measures were implemented to attract patrons to the company webpages and encourage new clientele. Respondent 4 revealed that they actually utilise deadlines in the accounting profession to market themselves, as can be derived from his response below. Respondent 5 stated that they employ social media marketing to create awareness, whereas Respondent 6 confirmed that they have implemented it to advertise job openings, new service offerings and to post pertinent and relevant information.

"We use it to promote, as I said earlier, the PAIA for example . . . We can actually push that out. We could market certain products or services, or with tax season recently closing as well, we did a whole lot of posts about how important it is for you to submit via E - filing before they close otherwise they are going to get penalised. So we use it to market products and services."

4.3.6.3   Question 16 – Effectiveness of social media marketing

When posed with this question, a mixture of responses was received. Respondent 1 said that it has definitely been advantageous to his firm. He is of the view, however, that social media cannot exist in isolation and that it is beneficial when implemented in conjunction with other marketing methods.

" . . . It's not an exclusive use, but it's a nice add on. So you would technically have your adverts running, etcetera and this sort of piggybacks off that to say that you are into social media and that you are generating the interest out there. I think that there is quite a potential for social media to be used very, very effectively going forward."

Respondent 2 rated social media marketing 7/10. He elaborated on his rating by stating that social media has the potential to be very beneficial, but one has to look at the cost-benefit analysis. He further stated that social media can be extremely time consuming, as it demands constant focus and attention.

According to Respondent 3, social media marketing has its advantages and disadvantages. Respondent 3 and Respondent 5 noted that social media marketing has created awareness. Respondent 3 found that social media marketing has not been beneficial in terms of new clientele, but stated that he is positive that it might happen in time to come. Respondent 5 further commented that even though social media was introduced mainly for awareness purposes, it has become an integral component of their practice.

Respondent 4 and Respondent 6 found social media marketing to be effective. Customer growth as well as more engagements on the pages have been observed by both respondents. Respondent 6 further added that social media has led to a global clientele.

4.3.6.4   Discussion of objective six

Objective six sought to determine if the respective companies utilise social media for marketing purposes, the extent to which it has been used as well as how effective it is deemed to be for the organisation in question. Figure 4.14 provides a depiction of the prevalent themes that emerged from the responses received from participants in the study.

Figure 4.14: Word cloud of social media for marketing

Based on the responses received, Figure 4.14 provides a snapshot of the relevant themes that emerged. Words such as 'communicating' and 'Facebook' prevailed.

Communicating

Tsitsi Chikandiwa, et al. (2013) stated that social media marketing can be described as a system that enables marketers to engage and collaborate marketing elements with social media elements in order to create solid and lasting relationships. This is in keeping with Respondent 4's statement, that social media is all about people socially communicating with each other. Oeldorf-Hirsh and Sundar (2015) further stated that the manner in which stakeholders communicate has changed drastically. Previously, people were limited in their forms of communication, whereas currently there is a multitude of avenues available, to suit every convenience.

Facebook

Facebook, although not really a word, is a rather distinguished theme that emerged. The reason for this is that Facebook is synonymous with social media, as it is by far the most popular channel. One immediately associates Facebook with social media. van Dam and van de Velden (2015) supported this hypothesis by further claiming that Facebook is the medium through which current and potential consumers identify with a particular brand by "liking" it on Facebook. It was further noted that this gives marketers leverage in terms of what consumers prefer, and enables them to utilise this knowledge to their advantage.

Further, based on the responses received, all six respondents (100%) own a Facebook page. Also, two of the six respondents (67%) only make use of a Facebook page. They both confirmed that they would look into other platforms in the future but Facebook is sufficient at the moment. Oeldorf-Hirsh and Sundar (2015) also stated that two thirds of internet users are part of social networking sites, with Facebook being the most popular. Further, Facebook is becoming an increasingly important news source for many web patrons, as links to trusted news networks are available on Facebook.

4.4 SUMMARY

The data collected from the six respondents were presented in this chapter. Graphs, tables and word clouds, in conjunction with excerpts from the participants' responses were utilised in presenting the results. Pertinent themes were identified and elaborated upon. These culminated in a discussion as well as drawing of conclusions of the objectives. Chapter Five, concludes provides the conclusion of the study presents the recommendations for consideration by the various shareholders in the accountancy profession in terms of social media.

CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Social media has fast become an integral component of modern society. New social media channels are being introduced on an ongoing basis. The number of social media users are rapidly increasing on a daily basis, with more and more reliance being placed on social media for a multitude of functions. Businesses have realised the reach that social media has as opposed to regular marketing mediums and have thus embraced the phenomenon. Each social media channel is constantly evolving, offering more and more value to businesses of all sizes and industries. The study aimed to explore the usage of social media within the accounting profession. The objectives were designed such that they answered the fundamental questions posed as well as provided insight into the mind-set of accountants concerning their attitude to social media. The data for the study was gathered from accounting firms within the Durban area, most of which employ at least one social media channel as part of their strategy. This chapter provides a summary of the research findings and conclusions arrived at. It further provides recommendations for further research as well as limitations of the study.

5.2 KEY FINDINGS

The insight provided by the data collected in respect of accounting firms' use of social media enabled many conclusions to be drawn. Although these conclusions are based on the findings from a small group of experts in the field, the data collected has provided key insights into the capabilities and shortcomings that encompass accountants' use of social media. Table 5.1 provides a summary of the objectives of the study, along with the key findings in this regard.

Table 5.1: Summary of key findings

	Objective	Key findings
1	To establish if accounting firms implement social media.	Accounting firms do employ social media for the following purposes: awareness, brand awareness, communication and information.
2	To determine which social media platforms accounting firms prefer.	Facebook and Twitter emerged as the most popular social media sites preferred by accountants. Further, the larger firms employ dedicated staff to handle social platforms, whilst the smaller firms deal with it in house.
3	To determine how each company measures the benefits of social media.	It was established from the majority of the responses that the benefits of social media cannot easily be quantified; however, one respondent confirmed that engagement rates and reach serve as a means of measurement. Facebook and Twitter materialised as the most effective social media platforms.
4	To determine if any limitations with social media have been experienced by any of the participants.	The responses revealed that whilst none of the participants have experienced any adverse effects of social media, they are all well aware of potential negative consequences, and are all thus extremely careful of what is publicised.
5	To determine if respondents visit competitor pages, why and how often.	Social media pages are visited by all participants occasionally, for the purposes of gathering information, monitoring, acquiring updates as well as for comparison. The majority of the participants felt that social media has been beneficial to their respective firms and that every accounting practice should have a social media footprint.

	Objective	Key findings
6	To determine if social media has been used for marketing purposes.	Social media had been employed for marketing purposes, for various reasons such as attracting new clientele and advertising vacancies. Respondents felt that effectiveness is difficult to measure, but social media has had a positive impact in terms of marketing.

The findings as displayed in Table 5.1 facilitated the following conclusions to be derived. Social media, despite being a relatively new concept, has been employed by the majority of the companies that participated in this study. The main reasons for implementation included, but were not limited to awareness, communication, advertising and information. Respondents confirmed that social media provides a means of effectively communicating with current and potential stakeholders, in addition to conveying pertinent information to parties concerned. Social media further provides an effective platform for addressing concerns and enquiries in an efficient manner.

Facebook emerged as the platform of choice across all responses. This is due to the diversity and complexity that the site has to offer. Twitter surfaced as another popular social media platform, followed by LinkedIn and Instagram. It was established that each platform has its merits, and can be suited to specific industries. For example, LinkedIn serves as a platform for professionals to engage and relate to each other. Facebook and Twitter can be viewed as universal social media platforms, which can be tailored and adapted to any industry. Effectiveness of social media platforms is not easily measurable, due to social media being a relatively new domain.

It was established that the benefits of social media usage cannot be quantified, as no available yardstick is available for this. It was however noted that social media has been beneficial in the sense that stakeholders are constantly reminded of a specific accounting firm's presence, which equates to potential referrals and hence new clientele. In terms of social media usage, it was established that some accounting firms seriously pursue the use of social media, whilst others have implemented it without a clear plan in place. It was

further established that accounting firms find social media to be useful in distributing information regarding deadlines as well as valuable information regarding any statutory changes.

Social media, despite being a useful tool, has the potential to be very dangerous. Respondents confirmed that they are extremely careful of the content that they release on their social channels because once it is out on the web, it is impossible to reverse. Also, it was established that social media can be lethal to an organisation due to the speed at which news spreads. Further, it was determined that content posted on social channels has to be politically and religiously neutral and in good taste. Due to this, monitoring of social channels is crucial. This enables one to mitigate the damage caused and also implement turnaround strategies if necessary.

Respondents stated that they visit competitor pages for a multitude of reasons. The most popular reasons being information gathering, monitoring of updates and comparison of service offerings. It was established that social media has a positive impact on most companies. It was also established that social media is a beneficial tool and should be implemented in every accounting firm. Further, the reach that one can obtain with social media far surpasses traditional forms of marketing. It was further established that in order to attract young, vibrant employees, social media is imperative. Also, all accounting firms should aim to create some sort of online following, which can be achieved by social media.

Social media has fast become an effective marketing tool. This trend has even been adopted by accountants, who have found that social media provides a simple, cost-effective solution to marketing. Also, social media enables companies to publish deadlines, i.e. make current and potential clients aware of upcoming closing dates, in addition to their service offerings, which encourages web traffic, and thus new clientele. Social media, however, is still in its infancy stage, and it not very extensively used for marketing purposes. Social media for marketing still has to be properly established, and has a long way to go.

5.3   RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON FINDINGS

The recommendations presented below are based on the key findings of the objectives and conclusions derived therefrom. It is a proposal to instil structures and strategies in order to encourage accounting firms to implement the usage of social media.

5.3.1 Keeping abreast with social media development

Noting that social media is fast paced, it is recommended that companies keep abreast with innovations and changes. This will make them more adaptable and keep the agility with moving trends in a fast-paced world. It is evident from the study that the majority of the participants do not have much of a social media strategy in place. Although most of the participants have implemented social media, they are not clear on what they hope to achieve. Accounting firms should aim to devise a plan/strategy on exactly what they hope to accomplish over a period of time, such as increased exposure or more clientele. By doing so, they can aim to overcome one hurdle at a time and eventually achieve their ultimate goals.

5.3.2 Create a social team

This may fall under a long-term plan, but accounting firms should aim to eventually boast a dedicated team of social media experts, whose ultimate objective is to accomplish the goals and objectives of the company. Accounting firms should aim to have dedicated personnel that track, monitor and upload information on the social media platforms. This serves to keep clients aware of latest developments, promotions and all other pertinent accounting-related incidents. The team will further need to deal with potential risks inherent in social media. These risks relate to negative publicity which the dedicated team will need to identify and be able to prevent further harm to the company by providing instantaneous responses to any negative publicity.

5.3.3 Set guidelines

Firms should aim to post content that is valuable and informative and most importantly in keeping with the firm's image and mission. A set of predetermined guidelines should be constructed, and each member of the social team should familiarise themselves therewith.

Content posted should appeal to consumers and should also be consistent and in good taste. Also, legal issues synonymous with social media may arise. The company personnel must thus be aware of the repercussions of hate speech, for example. The company needs to provide guidelines so that employees utilise social media in a responsible and beneficial manner. Ethical considerations must be taken into account in order to prevent harm from coming to the company.

5.3.4 Identify the target audience

Companies should endeavour to identify exactly what type of clientele they hope to attract. They should then, through research, identify the needs of these clients, and thus create their online presence so that it appeals to this type of demographic. Since social media is fast-paced media, it is crucial to identify the intended audience to maximise coverage and prevent junk mail status. Relevant and important information will be guaranteed if the audience is controlled. Whilst the effectiveness and value of social media is not yet established, determining the scope of influence is possible. By identifying the target audience, the scope may be realised.

5.3.5 Exploit the most popular platforms

There are numerous platforms available for accounting firms to choose from. They should thus aim to exploit the most popular social media platforms. Further, they should engage more than one platform and link them in order to expand their reach.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

It is important to identify limitations of the study as it enables future research to be conducted in order to bridge the gaps. It further enables progress to be made in terms of social media implementation. A qualitative study is not all encompassing, but does lend a certain amount of credibility to the field as it is based on data extracted from industry professionals.

A major limitation of this study was lack of willing participants. Despite the researcher requesting a nominal amount of time to conduct the interview, many refused. In fact, over 100 accounting firms were approached, but only six participants consented to the study.

Also, the researcher was only able to interview smaller firms. Larger firms, who have active and structured social media presences, refused to be interviewed. This was detrimental to the study as the researcher was unable to make comparisons.

Due to social media being a relatively new concept, the researcher found it extremely difficult to extract credible content to utilise in the research. There was no prior research available for comparison purposes.

Further, interviewees were extremely apprehensive about revealing sensitive information, despite anonymity being assured, and the study being of low risk.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

The recommendations for future studies in terms of accounting firms' use of social media are as follows:

1. Future researchers may conduct a similar study with the aid of the larger, more established accounting firms who have an active and well-managed social media presence. This will enable the researcher to ascertain exactly how a successful online presence is implemented and run.
2. A further research option is to study and analyse accounting firms who have had limited success with social media (Cox, 2012). This will provide insight into what should not be executed in terms of social media and serve as a learning curve.
3. Finally, a future researcher can conduct a study into the leading social media sites and their relevance to a particular industry (Ach, 2013). This will provide a yardstick for accounting firms who wish to implement social media in their practices, but are hesitant to do so.

5.6 CONCLUSION

The aims and objectives of the study have been met. However, it is evident that social media, due to it being a new tool in the accounting profession, has much to be developed and established. It is also evident that social media has the potential to transform any industry, but in order to do so, much research and development need to take place. Accounting firms can stand to benefit immensely from social media but in order to do so, they need to develop clear, concise and effective plans which must be implemented in order to achieve the goals and objectives of the firm.

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Introductory letter

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP

MBA Research Project

Researcher: Rashika Dundraj (031) 271 3333

Supervisor: Professor Anesh Maniraj Singh (031) 260 7061

Research Office: Ms M Snyman (031) 260 8350

I, **Rashika Dundraj** an MBA student, at the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, of the University of KwaZulu Natal. You are invited to participate in a research project entitled **Accounting Firms Use of Social Media Platforms**. The aim of this study is to establish the importance of social media to South African accounting firms.

Through your participation I hope to understand how social media impacts accounting firms. The results of the focus group are intended to contribute to the body of knowledge on social media.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time with no negative consequence. There will be no monetary gain from participating in this survey/focus group. Confidentiality and anonymity of records identifying you as a participant will be maintained by the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, UKZN.

If you have any questions or concerns about completing the questionnaire or about participating in this study, you may contact me or my supervisor at the numbers listed above.

The survey should take you about 20 minutes to complete. Please be advised that all interviews will be done in person or telephonically. **Also, please note that all interviews will be recorded**. I hope you will take the time to complete this survey.

Sincerely

Investigator's signature_____ Date_____

Consent Letter

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP

MBA Research Project

Researcher: Rashika Dundraj (031) 271 3333

Supervisor: Professor Anesh Maniraj Singh (031) 260 7061

Research Office: Ms M Snyman (031) 260 8350

CONSENT

I …………………………………………………………………… (full names of participant) representing …………………………………………………..(company name) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

Furthermore, I hereby grant / do not grant permission for a voice recorder to be used to record the interview.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

……………………………………………………   ……………..………………

Signature of Participant   Date

Interview Schedule

ACCOUNTING FIRMS USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS – QUESTIONNAIRE FOR QUALITATIVE PURPOSES

RASHIKA DUNDRAJ – 200303099

1. Does your company utilize social media platforms?
2. If no, why not?
3. If yes, why are social media platforms used?
4. Which social media platforms are utilized by your company and why?
5. How effective are these platforms?
6. Who manages these platforms?
7. How do you measure the benefits of the usage of social media?
8. How involved is your company in terms of social media usage?
9. Which social media platforms have you found to be most effective? Please explain.
10. Have you experienced any limitations associated with social media? If so, please elaborate.
11. Do you visit competitor pages / websites? If so, why and how often?
12. Do you feel that social media has been beneficial to your company?
13. Do you feel that every accounting practice should have a social media presence? If so, why?
14. Does your company use Social Media for marketing purposes?
15. If yes to Q14 to what extent is it used?
16. How effective has SMM been for your organisation?

APPENDIX 4

UNIVERSITY OF ™ KWAZULU-NATAL

INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

1 December 2017

Ms Rashika Dunraj 200303099
Graduate School of Business and Leadership
Westville Campus

Dear Ms Dunraj

Protocol reference number: HSS/0863/015M
New Project Title: Accounting firms' use of social media platforms

Approval notification – Amendment Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application for an amendment dated 30 November 2017 has now been granted **Full Approval** as follows:
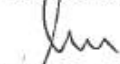
- Change in Title

Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study must be reviewed and approved through an amendment /modification prior to its implementation.   In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

Cc Supervisor: Professor M Singh
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr Muhammad Hoque
Cc School Administrator: Ms Zarina Bullyraj

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APPENDIX 5

PROOF OF EDITING CERTIFICATE

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Language editing

I, Jeanne Enslin, acknowledge that I did the language editing of **Rashika Dundraj's** dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration.

The title of the dissertation is:

Accounting firms' use of social media.

If any significant text changes are made to the electronic document that I sent to Rashika Dundraj on 24 November 2017, I cannot be held responsible for any errors that are made. Alternatively, the document needs to be returned to me to check the language of the changes.
Detailed feedback about the work done has been provided to Rashika. As agreed with her, Rashika was responsible for the formatting of the dissertation and ensuring all in-text references and the reference list are correct.

The quality of the final document, in terms of language and technical aspects, remains the student's responsibility.

Jeanne Enslin
Language editor
082-6961224.

J H Enslin BA (US); STD (US); Hons Translation Studies (UNISA)