

***INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF THE USERS OF  
A SPECIAL COLLECTION LIBRARY OF AN ACADEMIC  
INSTITUTION, AND THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE  
PROVISION OF INFORMATION SERVICES TO USERS***

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## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

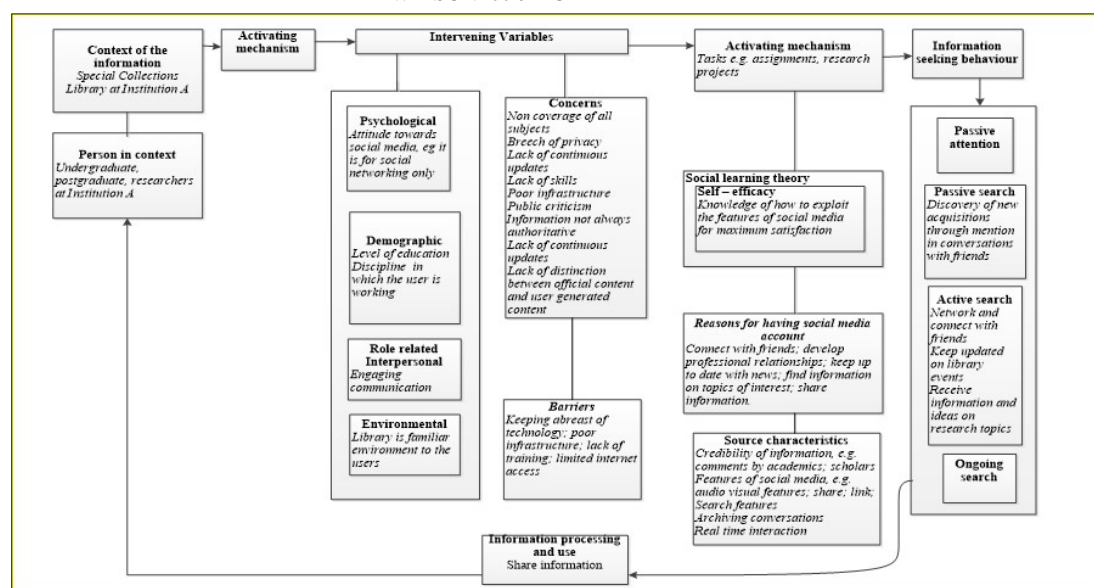
### RESEARCH QUESTION AND SUB-QUESTIONS

- This study was guided by the following question:
- *Based on the information seeking behaviour of the users of a special collection library of an academic institution, what role can social media play in the provision of information services to users?*
- **Sub-questions to be answered from the literature:**
- What has been reported on the use of social media in academic libraries?
- What has been reported on the use of social media in special collection libraries and related institutions (e.g. archives, museums)?
- **Sub-questions to be answered from the empirical component regarding the users of a special collection library of an academic institution:**
- What is the information seeking behaviour of the users regarding social media?
- What are the needs for library/information services that can be met by social media?

## FRAMEWORK

- The Wilson model 1996 was adapted and was able to serve as framework for this study to guide the data collection.
- Issues that were accommodated in the adapted model, that could not be accommodated in the original 1996 model of Wilson includes: intervening variables, such as barriers and concerns; activating mechanisms, such as reasons for having a social media account.
- The adapted model also considered the person in context, context of the information, passive/ongoing searches, active searches and the intervening variables and activating mechanisms that were included in the original 1996 model of Wilson such as environment and demographics.

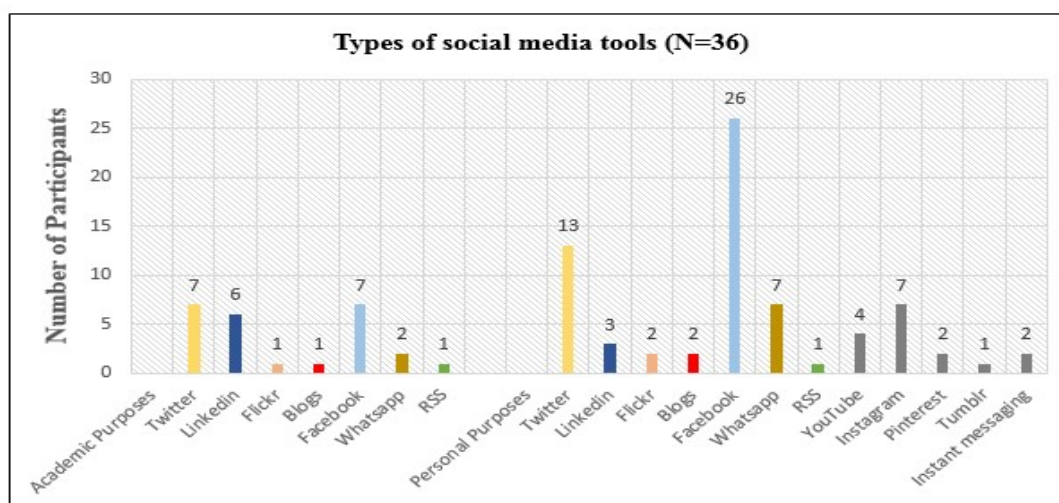
WILSON 1996 MODEL - ADAPTED



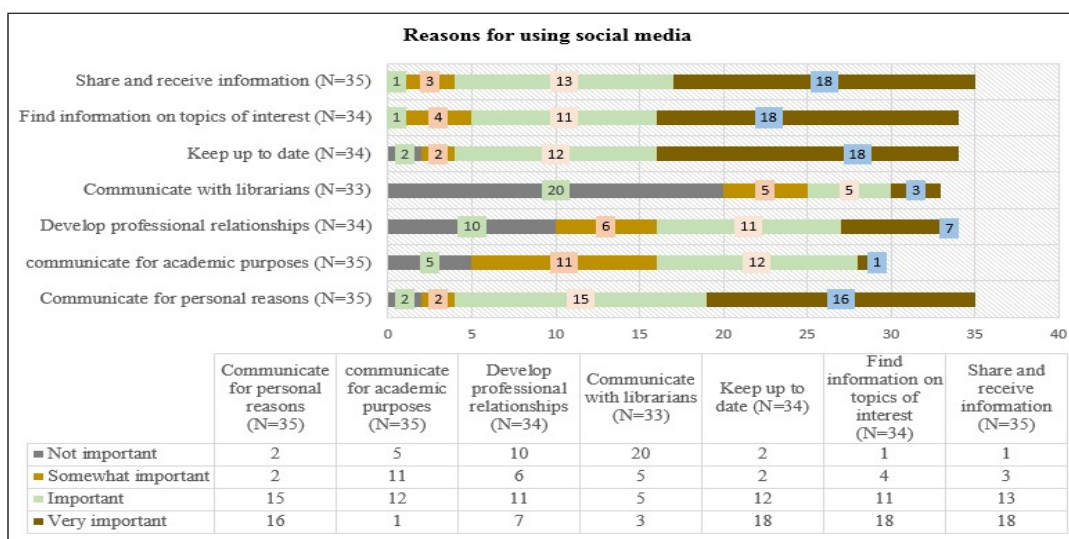
## Summary of the empirical component

Activity	Discussion
Literature review	<p>A literature review was conducted with the following headings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of social media by academic libraries in relation to library services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ International libraries</li> <li>○ African libraries</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Social media in special collection institutions</li> <li>• The use of social media by the users of academic libraries</li> </ul>
Research method	Case study
Research approach	Mixed methods approach
Ethical clearance	Permission to conduct this study was granted by the institution where the study was conducted.
Data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questionnaires were completed by 36 participants.</li> <li>• Semi-structured interviews were completed with 11 participants.</li> </ul> <p>Questionnaire to extract profile data from interview participants were completed by 11 participants.</p>
Participants	The participants included postgraduate and undergraduate students as well as academic staff and visiting researchers of the special collection library at Institution A.
Reliability	All the instruments were tested on a pilot group of participants to ensure expected understanding before being used for data collection.
validity	The questionnaires were based on the research questions and were formulated in close collaboration with the supervisor of the study. Validity errors reflect biases in the instrument design, in other words, the options provided in the questionnaires could reflect biases. To minimise this type of error, an option for "Other" was included in every question.

## USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ACADEMIC OR PERSONAL PURPOSES

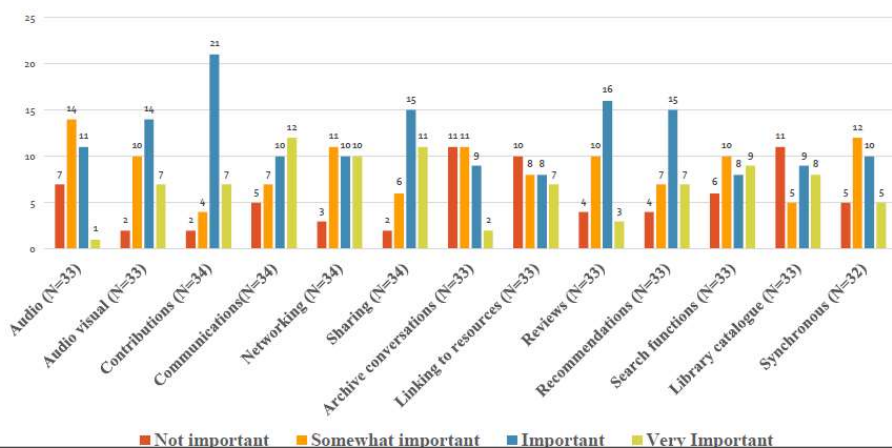


The participants were asked whether they use social media for academic and/or personal purposes and to indicate which social media tools they use for which purpose. This question provided an understanding of the preferred tools used for academic and personal purposes.



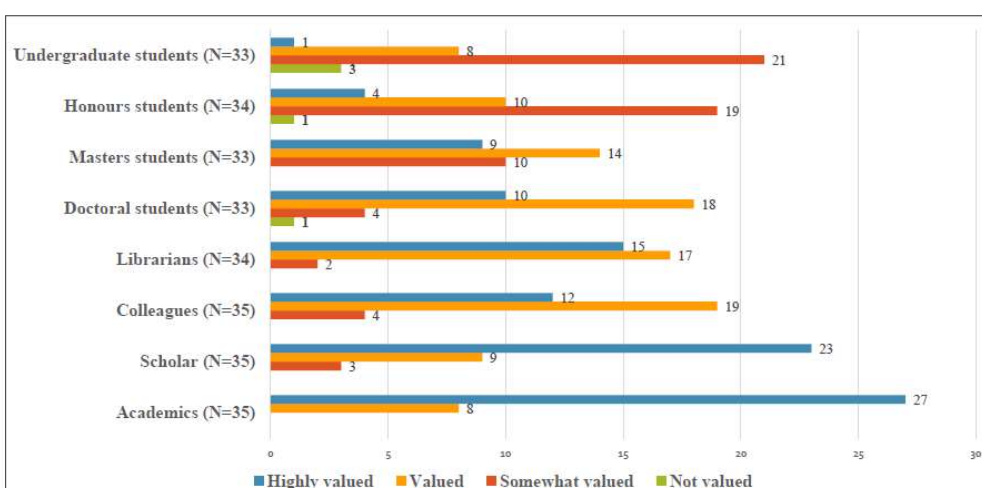
Participants were given a list of reasons to have a social media account and were asked to rate the importance of the reasons to them. This question provided an understanding of why users have social media accounts

### SOCIAL MEDIA FEATURES



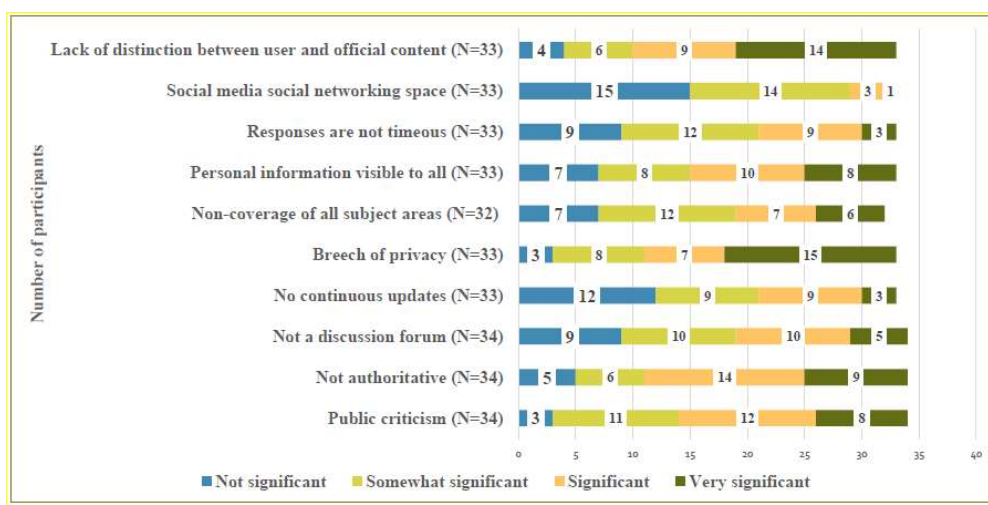
Participants were asked to rate the importance of the social media features included in a list. This question provided insight into which features of social media were important to users. Libraries can take into consideration these features when deciding which social media tools to employ for library services.

### VALUE OF INPUT FROM INSTITUTIONAL SOURCES



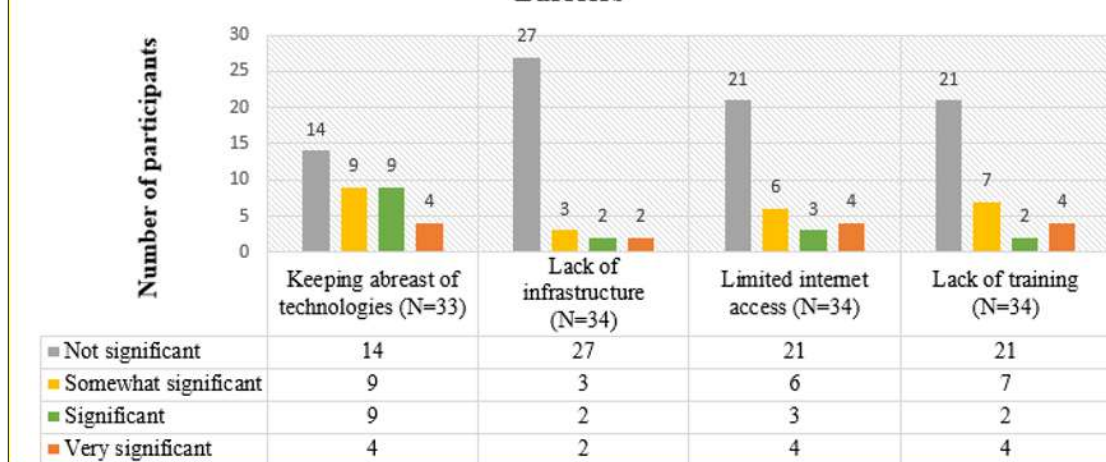
Participants were given a list of institutional sources and asked to rate the value of the source's input. This question provided information on which institutional source's input to include on social media.

## CONCERNS



Participants were asked to rate the significance of the listed concerns for them when using social media for academic reasons. This question provided information on concerns that users face that would need to be given consideration if social media was to play a role in providing library services in an academic library context.

## Barriers



Participants were asked to rate the significance of the listed barriers to using social media for academic reasons. This question provided information on barriers that deter or prevent users from using social media.

### CURRENT EXPERIENCE VS PREFERRED EXPERIENCE

Participants were asked what library services they used the tools for

Services (Participants could list more than one service)	Response rate (N=10)
Notifications (keep informed)	80%
Sharing information	70%
Discovering information	60%
Informative videos	30%
Study chat groups	30%
Posting queries	20%

Current experience

What type of information would participants prefer to discover

Theme (Participants expressed 1 theme)	Response rate (N=10)
Subject specific information	80%
Notifications	20%

Preferred experience

### TRIANGULATION OF THE STUDY

- The quantitative data and the qualitative data, as well as the literature review preceding the empirical component enabled the triangulation of data by various means. From the data collected the following were in agreement. Only the key issues will be discussed.
- Twitter emerged as the most popular social media tool used for academic purposes
- In terms of the most popular services that social media are used for, notifications or keeping up to date, discovering information and sharing information emerged as being most popular
- In terms of what motivates the participants to use social media, from the quantitative study, communication features that promote interactive engagement emerged as very important features in social media tools. From the qualitative study, engaging interaction was reported by the participants as being a motivation for using social media. This finding complements the literature that the library has a role to play in engaging their users in knowledge sharing around their collections.
- The concerns that emerged as being very significant using social media is breach of privacy
- The barriers that is experienced when using social media, that emerged as being most significant is insufficient skills and lack of training in keeping abreast of advancing social media technologies.



## PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following suggestions are made for practical implications in the special collection library where the study was conducted, as well as for other institutions hosting special collections:

- It must be ensured that the social media tool of the users preference (e.g. Twitter in this case) is used to raise awareness of the collections that are unique to the library.
- The library should also consider marketing/promotional strategies that foster participation with the user as content creator such as asking for the user to provide related information to their special collections. An example of this would be to post a photograph from the photographic collections on Twitter and ask for user input to help catalogue the photograph.
- In encouraging user engagement, the library should give greater support to diversity of expression of knowledge. Negative reactions from users such as "I don't like that photograph" also constitutes engagement.
- The library should also get more involved in the research interests of its users. A suggestion would be to sit in on a few of their user community's discussions to see what topics or assignments are discussed and perhaps work on starting study/chats around these topics, offering resources (manuscripts, rare maps) for the assignments/projects that are not discoverable on the catalogue or the electronic resources. Study group chats could be started on WhatsApp and suggestions referring users to special collections resources could be made. This would also mean that librarians would need to have a good knowledge of the special collections housed in the library so that they could suggest relevant special collections resources to their users.
- In addition to using social media such as Twitter for notifications, the library should explore using social media such as WhatsApp and Twitter to post subject specific information that covers all disciplines. An example of this would be to post a reference list related to a particular topic that refers users to the special collection resources such as manuscripts and artefacts, for instance, the Kirby Collection of rare musical instruments could serve as a valuable resource to researchers studying the history of southern African music.
- Training in how to use the different features in social media would need to be developed and provided for both librarians and users. Training would need to focus on those features that promote the display of special collections resources such as the uploading of photographs and maps.
- The job descriptions of the librarians do not presently provide for social media activity (such as providing instant responses to queries posted on social media). Therefore a suggestion would be to revisit the job descriptions of librarians to include functions for social media activity.

## CONCLUSION

- The purpose of this study was to investigate how users of a special collection library of an academic institution seek information and how social media can play a role in service provision.
- This study has shown that social media does have a role to play in advancing library services into a dynamic, interactive and collaborative interaction between the library and the user. The participants are looking for engaging communication around subject specific information. There are many collections, e.g. the rare maps in the special collection library that could serve as valuable resources for disciplines such as History. Geology and Environmental Studies.
- The participants preferred features that provided for engagement and collaboration.
- The barriers related to skills, would need to be addressed in providing library services using social media.
- This study has also provided insight into what library services are preferred by the participants on the different social media tools.
- The data collected reflects that social media does have a role to play in providing library services in a special collection library context.