Information ethics and use of social media in higher education: faculty members' perspectives

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Information ethics and use of social media in higher education: faculty members’ perspectives

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Abstract

Issues on information ethics have assumed an important role in higher education as different types of information and communications technologies (ICTs) permeate the learning environment. An understanding of such issues by faculty members would enhance learning strategies and processes that use ICTs. To this effect, this study was conducted to establish factors that influence faculty members when applying information ethics to the use of social media for academic work. The population was faculty members in departments that offered information-related programmes. The study was conducted at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) in two phases, based on an exploratory-descriptive design. The preliminary phase sought to establish how faculty members used social media tools in academic practice and the ethical frameworks that influenced their use of the tools. Respondents were identified through convenience sampling. The ethical frameworks that emerged in the preliminary phase: the rights, the common good and virtue perspectives, were factored into a Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) in the second phase. Every faculty member in the departments that were studied was a respondent during the second phase. The main findings were that faculty members were influenced mostly by control beliefs, followed by ethical predispositions and lastly, by normative beliefs when applying information ethics in the use of social media in academic practice.
Introduction

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have become a predominant feature in all sectors of the society, with new ICT products continually being developed. It is, however, the advent of social media tools which has attracted considerable interest in the higher education sector because of the tools’ functional attributes that foster and promote opportunities for social interaction and collaboration among their users. These attributes are due to the fact that social media are Web 2.0-based second generation internet technologies that allow users to generate and share content. Social media tools include social networks, blogs, micro-blogging, wikis, podcasts, forums and content communities (Mayfield 2008). As Web 2.0 technologies, social media tools are highly accessible (Gaffar, Singh and Thomas 2011:131). This means that they are easy to use compared to Web 1.0 and older technologies that require specialist HTML expertise. Web 2.0 technologies are supported by a range of applications which can be personalised to suit individual tastes, and some of them can be downloaded at no cost from the internet. The technologies are supported by mobile and wireless devices, which make some of them relatively affordable; and, also easy to move around using them.

These characteristics make social media tools appealing to a wide range of users including students in institutions of higher education. These students have been described as ‘born digitals’ who are adept at using technology because they were born in the digital era (Skiba and Barton 2006; Prensky 2001a). They are seen as possessing textured literacy, which is “the ability to comfortably use and combine print, spoken, visual, and digital processes in composing a piece of writing (Yancey 2004:38). Generally, they are said to be digitally literate, that is, they are able to manipulate digital text and its associated technologies (Oblinger and Oblinger 2005). This adeptness with digital technology among students has attracted use of social media tools in learning so as to empower the pedagogy.

The attraction of social media tools in higher education has also been attributed to the affordances that the tools offer. The affordances allow their users to “write their own content (creating their “about me” pages and composing blogs, for example), appropriating others’ content (uploading images, videos, and music found elsewhere online), and remixing content” (Vie 2008:20). These affordances have led to calls for a paradigm shift in education, so that faculty members can capitalise on the opportunities associated with the use of social media. Proposals have been made for the adoption of an Education 2.0 model
Maisiri and Hikwa: Information ethics and use of social media .... 45

(Keats and Schmidt 2007; Rodriguez 2011). In the Education 2.0 model, Web 2.0 technologies enhance the traditional educational approaches by incorporating social mechanisms through fostering interactivity and collaboration; thus, making it possible to apply the concept of social learning in online environments, where social media would be the context within which learning takes place (Oluwafisayo 2010; Yu et al 2010; ASTD 2011:5; Lindquist and Long 2011; Smith and Campbell 2012:274; Davis et al 2012:3; Chen and Byrer 2012).

Social learning is premised on the learner-centredness approach in which the student is directly and actively involved in information and knowledge seeking by engaging multiple sources and making critical decisions. The processes involved empower the student to become an independent learner compared to the traditional unidirectional mode of teaching. When social learning mechanisms are used in an online environment, social media tools afford their users opportunity to be “active developers of ideas [who] . . . can question and critique concepts”, allows individualised learning and learner-centred tutoring (Gaffar, Singh and Thomas 2011:129).

Use of social media in higher education has been the subject of a number of studies. Most of these studies have focused on teaching and learning by both faculty members and students than on other academic activities undertaken by faculty members that include research and community engagement. Guy (2012) conducted a review of literature of such studies and Gaffar, Singh and Thomas (2011) were among the few authors who focused on the developing world. Almost all such studies are premised on the view that students currently in institutions of higher learning are more adept at using information technologies than faculty members because of a generation gap (Prensky 2001a, 2001b). However, inspire of assertions of students’ ability to use social media, Chen and Bryer (2012) cite the 2009 and 2010 EDUCASE Center for Applied Research reports that show that less than 30% of the students surveyed used social media tools for education related activities.

In a number of instances, students felt that the tools were more suitable for socialising and informal communication than academic work (McCarthy 2010:731; McNeill et al 2011:7). Observations on the low levels of social media use for educational purposes were also made in the 2010 Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) survey which found that 80% of the 4 600 faculty members from 50 universities and colleges contacted in 2009 did not know about or had never used social media (Chen and Bryer 2012). Faculty members in a study by Margaryan and LittleJohn (2008) considered social media as
transient because of the fast developments in technology, and therefore not worth integrating into education. However, the 2012 Pearson survey on faculty members’ use of social media showed an upward trend in the adoption rates. It found that 94.4% of faculty members used social media for personal use, 33.8% used it for teaching and 88% used online videos in the classroom (Moran, Seaman and Tinti-Kane 2012).

Research studies have also been directed at establishing the types of social media tools used by faculty and students in academic work. The findings have shown Facebook, LinkedIn, Bebo, MSN, Skype, Google Scholar, YouTube, Pinterest, Twitter, blogs, wikis, content communities, podcasts as well as emails and text messages to be the main social media tools used (Margaryan and Littlejohn 2008; C4LPT 2009; McNeill et al 2011:11; Obrien 2012). The tools were used largely to network with other faculty members worldwide to share information on academic issues and in teaching. Enquiries into the impact of using the technologies has also been carried out. Observations have revealed mixed responses. For example, Petrović et al (2012) and Gaffar, Singh and Thomas (2011) reported an increase in students’ knowledge after working with Facebook as the online environment. However, faculty members have also complained that social media tend to distract students from studying (Bart 2011).

Suggestions have been put forward on how social media could be incorporated into higher education. In this vein, some authors have called for the blending of social media with face-to-face classes (Skiba and Barton 2006; McCarthy 2010:732-734; Chen and Bryer 2012; Hrastinki and Aghae 2012:456). These authors suggested the inclusion of social media tools like video and case materials into instructional materials and the use of interactive web-based components to complement face-to-face instruction and tutoring based on Learning Content Management Systems (LCMS). Most LCMS lack facilities that enable interactivity. Other authors have proposed incorporating social media by limiting its use to educational activities of a social nature like the orientation of new students (Yu et al 2010; Barnes and Lescault 2012; Davis et al 2012:16) and marketing of the university as well as communicating with students (McCarthy et al 2010:730; Pidaparthly 2011).

Activities have also been undertaken to promote use of social media in research. For example, the Open University has a handbook on the use of social media for researchers (Minocha and Petre 2009). Research Information Network has issued a guide for researchers on how to use social media (Gray 2011). However, there seems to be a dearth of literature on empirical research on the
impact of using social media in research by faculty members or other people. Some authors have commented on the weaknesses of using social media in research. Shapiro and Ossorio (2013) pointed out that although social media is “a rich data source for academic research studies” and practice, “ethical guidelines governing how researchers should obtain and use” data from social media sites is “seriously lacking”. In the absence of guidelines, which may act as quality frameworks, use of social media gets fraught with ethical dilemmas (Johal 2011), which invariably affect the extent of its adoption, especially for academic work.

Conceptual analysis

The affordances of social media tools are rooted in their nature, that is, their ability to permit use by even people without technical expertise. However, it is because of these affordances that social media tools are highly susceptible to misuse and abuse because of the openness of the internet, which places responsibility on the proper use of the tools in the hands of the person using the tools. The extent to which people who use the tools act responsibly has thus become an issue of concern. Selwyn (2012) showed this when she pointed out that “the controversies and tensions concerning the use of social media in higher education have little to do with the technology itself [but are] ... essentially ethical”. Ethics are “norms for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour” (Resnik 2011), which, according to Buchanan and Henderson (2009:9), are based on a “system of rules, principles and values that could be cultural, professional, religious, or social”; they are a foundation of morality; and can be explicit or implicit (Algoe 2012). The application of ethics in information manipulation, that is, its creation, recording, distribution and use, is a subject matter of information ethics.

Applying ethics in decision making is a cognitive process influenced by a particular frame of mind or ethical predisposition that is formed on the bases of the system of rules, principles and values mentioned above by Buchanan and Henderson (2009:9). Ethical predispositions fall into five perspective groups: utilitarian, rights, fairness, common good and virtue perspectives (Velasquez et al 2009). The utilitarian perspective is consequence based. It says that an ethical act is one whose effect optimises the good and reduces the harm to subjects involved, directly or indirectly. The rights perspective promotes the observation of moral rights of individuals. It is based on the principle that a human being, by nature, is bestowed with an inalienable privilege that makes them deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Some of the rights that are associated with this
perspective include rights to make own choices, to privacy, to be told the truth and not to be injured. The fairness or justice perspective dictates that people who are equal with respect to a measure under consideration should get the same treatment. When the situation does not permit equality of treatment, fairness should be exercised based on a defensible standard. The common good perspective is grounded on the understanding that ethical relationships by members of a community should lead to the advancement of the whole community, that is, benefits that accrue from such relationships should be enjoyed by everyone in the community. Thus, an ethical act is one that promotes human welfare and is cognisant of the needs of vulnerable members in the community. The virtue perspective is based on ideal human character traits which are central in the full development of human potential, like integrity, honesty, tolerance, self control and trustworthiness. An ethical act would be one that exhibits such a virtue.

Ethical perspectives act as frameworks around which ethical predispositions that underlie particular ethical choices and the resultant action can be understood. It should, however, be noted that the application of these perspectives in real life may not necessarily be that straightforward because some issues impinge on more than one perspective at the same time. For example, an issue can be ethical with respect to one perspective and unethical when viewed from another angle, at the same time. The other difficulty in the application of the perspectives arises from the fact that people tend to change their ethical standpoints depending on the situation they are in at a particular point in time (Mathiesen 2004; Ocholla 2009:80).

Ethical issues that predominate when using information in a digital environment include privacy, accuracy, property and access issues (Mason 1986). Issues on privacy pertain to conditions under which information about a person is revealed to others; accuracy issues focus on circumstances that surround the authenticity of information that has been posted online; property issues centre on rights of ownership as well as use of intellectual property and access issues centre on conditions that foster or hinder one from obtaining information. These ethical issues and their aspects have been of concern to a number of authors writing on social media use in higher education. The authors have tended to approach their analysis from two angles. One group of authors assessed the ethical issues and their aspects directly, while the other group focused on the attitudes and perceptions that underlie technology adoption behaviour.

All ethical issues mentioned by Mason (1986) should be of concern to faculty members in all their academic work. This is because ethical dilemmas can arise
when faculty members engage social media tools in conducting research or when creating content for distribution to students and fellow faculty members, and indirectly, when they assume responsibility for the behaviour of the students whom they will be teaching using social media tools. In teaching, it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that the context, which includes infrastructure and the modalities of using the infrastructure, are conducive for effective learning.

Ethical issues and aspects that influence decisions made in resolving an ethical dilemma were the focus of a number of studies. Chen and Bryer (2012) found privacy and security issues to be central for faculty members in deciding whether to use social media tools for teaching or not, in their study. Focusing on the same issues, Rodriguez (2011) and Obrien (2012) pointed out that total privacy cannot be guaranteed when working on the internet because the internet tended to archive information long after it had been deleted. This led to a possibility of the deleted information resurfacing somewhere, which threatened the privacy of faculty members and their students using the tools. Also on archiving of social media content, Rodriguez (2011) saw restricted access to a platform as a risk factor to privacy in that anyone with the right of access could archive content about someone else and could possibly release it later to a ‘wrong’ audience.

Privacy was also threatened by the fact that content on a social media tool was in the public domain, and thus open to anyone including potential employers, school administrators and law enforcement agencies who could access and use information about someone, which that person may not have wanted the authorities to know (Bart 2011:13; Obrien 2012). Rodriguez (2011) also added another possible effect of subscribing to a public site by pointing out that a person subscribing to a social media site ran the risk of having his or her privacy rights violated in instances where profile data submitted to hosting services is sold to third parties for marketing or any other purposes, or even misused, without the knowledge of the subscribing public.

Identity theft and cyber-bullying were also mentioned as some of the aspects that threatened privacy and security (McCarthy (2010:732; Obrien 2012). Chen and Byer (2012) found that both faculty members and students were concerned about security and identity theft especially on social network sites like Facebook. Some of the respondents in the study reported limiting their associates in LinkedIn to only trusted contacts. Expounding on these concerns, Velestanos and Kimmons (2012:7) pointed out that faculty members engage with social media in a way that fit its professional culture and personal ideals,
which may not necessarily tally with a platforms ideology. To cater for the
differences, they called upon technology designers to develop technologies in a
way that allows users to “manage their participation and identity”. This would
empower faculty members to choose the manner in which they would interact
with different types of online colleagues; for example, using real names in one
instance and pseudo names in another.

Another issue of concern for faculty members was on marginalisation of some
students. This happened in cases where faculty members established online
friendship with some students and not others (Chen and Bryer 2012).

On property issues, Rodriguez (2011) noted that these issues in an academic
environment centred on the ownership of intellectual property rights of not only
tangible assets, “but the intellectual concepts, ideas or processes behind the
creative work or property”. He went on to say that the use of social media had
brought about difficulties in the apportionment of rights for works produced
collaboratively using social media. This is largely because the creative work of
a student that is produced after getting input from other students as well as the
teacher, using social media, is strictly speaking, not a property of the student
alone. This then makes it difficult to give credit to the student for that piece of
work, but the student may be wanting to make that piece part of his portfolio.

Another issue under property is copyright. Rodriguez (2011) observed that
faculty members could possibly face copyright ownership problems should an
organisation hosting a social media tool that they were using for class work
decide to claim ownership of creative works on its site. He said this was
possible because such organisations can bestow themselves the rights of
ownership in their service agreements. Many users of social media tools are
likely to fall prey because most do not read the service terms nor take the terms
seriously because of the ‘informalness’ of social media tools. Rodriguez (2011)
also pointed out that the aspect of fair use of copyrighted online material was an
issue of concern for faculty members. This is because, he noted, by its nature,
social media is constructed by using other peoples’ content and promotes such
behaviour. However, this makes it difficult to implement fair use policy as is
done when dealing with hard copies. Typical examples of such social media
tools include Mashups like Google maps and file sharing services.

Mashups operate by ‘mixing and matching’ content available from multiple
social media sites to create new enriched digital content. A solution developed
to address this issue is the provision of Creative Commons Licences which spell
out the terms of use of copyrighted content. On file sharing, Minocha and Petre
Maisiri and Hikwa: Information ethics and use of social media

(2009) raised concerns about the security of that data in cloud computing. They questioned the extent to which people who man the databases could be trusted, and extent to which confidentiality and security would be assured to people who deposit their documents for storage.

Plagiarism and lack of academic integrity by students were also identified as ethical issues of concern to faculty members because plagiarism violates the intellectual property rights of the content creator (Kennedy et al. 2008:490). Faculty members who responded to the 2012 Pearson survey highlighted that “the integrity of student submissions” was an issue of concern (Moran, Seaman and Tinti-Kane 2012). The informal nature of social media may, likely, encourage this kind of behaviour. Closely related to the issue of plagiarism is the issue of authenticity.

Posting inauthentic material was likely when the person was attempting to promote himself or herself (Obrien 2012). In such a case, the act could be deliberate. However, it might also happen that the lack of authenticity in materials posted might not be deliberate. This is because social media is prone to “encourage shallow thinking in students” (Obrien 2012). Chen and Bryer (2012) also noted that authenticity could suffer due to students posting inappropriate content. This would likely happen since it has been said that students did not see social media tools as learning tools, but as entertainment tools.

Access issues were also reported to be of concern. These relate largely to provision of infrastructure and its support mechanisms that facilitate the use of social media, within and outside institutions of higher education (Kennedy et al. 2008:490). The absence or unavailability, inaccessibility, unreliability and instability of such infrastructure affects the extent to which social media can be used in academic work by both the learner and faculty member (Rodriguez 2011). Such infrastructural issues seem to be a problem in developing countries (Gaffar, Singh and Thomas 2011:130). Illustrating the concern, Hussain, Gulrez and Tahrkheli (2012:192) mentioned lack of computers and laptops in (72%), electricity outages affected (93%) and low bandwidth (77%) of respondents in their study. The unavailability of assistive technology for users with disabilities has also been seen as another aspect that affects access issues with respect to people with disability (Rodriguez 2011).

Stability issues included the extent to which social media sites managed to maintain their presence on the web, and also the extent to which social media sites changed their service agreement terms without notifying users of their
sites. Through this stability, users ran the risk of losing their content which would have been posted on the site; and in situations where the terms of service are changed without notice, users would operate under terms which they had not agreed to.

Another access issues of concern found to contribute to the extent of use of social media by both faculty members and students was the ability to use the social media and the digital content and digital literacy (Chen and Bryer 2012; Gaffar, Singh and Thomas 2011:142). Access was also curtailed by the absence of guidelines on how to use social media tools (Shapiro and Ossorio 2013). Guidelines act as an empowering tool to social media users because they spell out the proper way of how one can use social media as well as explain the nature of rights that a user would have when he or she uses social media.

Studies that sought to establish the effect of ethical attitudes and perspectives on the use of social media have largely been deductive, based on theories on adoption and acceptance of innovation. According to Usue1 and Mazman (2009), these theories fall into three main groups. The first group consists of theories grounded on social cognitive issues that focus on internal decision making processes at the individual level; the second group consists of theories that are based on the attributes of the innovation and the diffusion of the innovation in social systems; and, the third group is of theories that combine selections of constructs from the first and second groups.

Among the authors that focused on attitudes and perspectives are Chiang and Lee (2008) who studied the information ethics of teenage users when using information technology. They used the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). The ethical dimensions they focused on were egoism and altruism. They concluded by calling for ethics education so that students develop “self-beliefs [for] rejecting illegal use in the digital world” (Chiang and Lee 2008:14).

Foltz, Schwager and Anderson (2008:709) studied factors that influenced students’ behaviour to read computer usage policies that outlined the legal, security and rights issues that pertained to the proper use of computers. The study was based on the TPB and the variables were social trust and apathy. The findings were that positive opinion of the policy was more likely to result in reading of the policy and apathy reduced the likelihood of reading the policy, that is, individual internal factors more than the subjective norms, opinion of others, affected the behavioural intention. The study did not support the influence of perceived behavioural control on intention and behaviour as is proposed by the TPB.
The thrust of studies on attitudes and perspectives was to show the factors that underlie behavioural intentions and the subsequent behaviour. Their premise was that behaviour is dependent on the belief structure, which includes information ethical beliefs. This study was modelled along these premises.

**Purpose and significance of the study**

There is very little, if any, literature on information ethical factors that influence intention to use social media in academic practice by faculty members. This paper is an endeavour to fill this gap. A study of this nature would foster an understanding of the possible relationships among the variables at play in resolving ethical dilemmas that arise when faculty members incorporate the use of social media in teaching, research or community and outreach work. With respect to teaching, success in implementing any learning strategy depends to a large extent on the behaviour of faculty members towards adopting the strategies, including the requisite components of the strategies. The centrality of the role of faculty members in adopting social media tools in education was noted by Margaryan and LittleJohn (2008) when they pointed out that students are looking up to faculty members to lead the way in the adoption of new technologies, and by Selwyn (2012) who observed that educators are “expected to catch up with this world of social media applications”.

Cognisance and awareness of information ethical issues surrounding use of social media tools in education is of essence if faculty members are to lead in the adoption of the tools. However, in the preliminary phase of this study, faculty members in the information-related departments at NUST indicated that they had not been conscious that they were making ethical choices when they used social media tools for academic work, that is, their actions were non-volitional. Yet, these departments ran courses that included components on information ethics in the theory and/or practical aspects of the courses (NUST 2011, 2012). The practical aspects entailed teaching students about the university’s ICT use policy and applying it.

Against this background, this study was conducted to establish factors that influenced faculty members’ intention to apply information ethics when using social media in academic practice at NUST. Academic practice is defined to include teaching, researching and providing community service to the institution, profession and community at large (University of Oxford, CETL 2007).
The objectives were:

1. To find out the ethical predispositions which had the greatest influence on faculty members’ intention to apply information ethics to the use of social media in academic practice;
2. To find out the effect of normative beliefs on faculty members’ intention to apply information ethics in the use of social media in academic practice; and,
3. To find out the effect of control beliefs on faculty members’ intention to apply information ethics in the use of social media in academic practice.

Methodology

The study was carried out in two phases and in both instances the population was made up of faculty members in the departments that offered information-related programmes in the Faculty of Communication and Information Sciences (Department of Library and Information Science, Department of Records and Archives Management, Department of Journalism and Media Studies and Department of Publishing Studies) and the Faculty of Applied Sciences (Department of Computer Science) at NUST. It was based on an exploratory-descriptive design whose characteristics include flexibility which enables the assessment of all aspects of a problem under study, focusing on creating new knowledge as well as indicating leads for future research (Uys and Basson 1991 cited in Mbambo 2009:38).

The preliminary phase was conducted in July 2012. Its aim was to establish the extent of use of social media tools for academic work by faculty members and the ethical perspectives that underlay such use. Social media tools embedded in eLearning platforms were not part of the scope of the study. The population consisted of nineteen (19) respondents, identified through convenience sampling. The findings are shown in Figure 2.

In the second phase of the study, the variables were based on constructs from the TPB. The attitude variable was constituted from the ethical perspectives that emerged from the preliminary phase. The choice of TPB-based constructs was because the study focused on the assessment of non-volitional behaviour which is influenced by tacit and intrinsic ethical knowledge. TPB’s strength lies in its ability to explain non-volitional behaviour; and has been used in studies on ethical behaviour (Chiang and Lee 2008; Cronan and Douglas 2006).
TPB was proposed by Ajzen in 1985. According to this theory, the decision to engage in a particular behaviour is a psychological process determined by an individual's behavioural intentions to perform that particular behaviour. The intentions are determined by a set of three predictor variables that are influenced by a set of belief composites towards that behaviour. The first set consists of an individual's attitude towards the behaviour. This attitude is formed from a variety of influences, which are antecedent to the attitude, termed behavioural beliefs. In this study, the behavioural beliefs are the ethical predispositions of the respondents that were obtained in the preliminary phase of the study.

The second set of variables consists of subjective norms, which are the normative beliefs of an individual's perception of the behaviour that other people important to him expect of him. In this study, the normative beliefs consist of perceptions of behavioural expectations by a faculty member of his institution, students, fellow faculty members and members in his community of practice. The third set of variables is the perceived behavioural control factors which are influenced by control beliefs, that include an individual's opinion of his ability to perform the behaviour intended and conditions that facilitate his performance of the behaviour. This section includes items on perceptions of conditions that facilitate ethical behaviour in the use of social media for academic work and self confidence in one's ability to use information ethics to facilitate use of social media for academic work. The study variables are shown in a research framework adapted from the TPB model shown in Figure 1.

The constructs were measured directly. A questionnaire survey was used to gather data. The questionnaire consisted of forty-five (45) seven-point Likert type items with scores ranging from agree strongly = 7 to disagree strongly = 1. Fifteen questions were negatively polarised to control for response-set bias. The questionnaires were delivered to all fifty-three (53) faculty members in the target departments. Three of the questionnaires were discarded at data analysis stage because they had not been completed. The response rate, which was about 89%, is shown in Table 1.

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A document analysis was conducted to establish the institutional position on ethical issues that pertain to the use of information technology by faculty members.

Figure 1: Research framework adapted from the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 2006)

Data analysis and results

The data is presented and discussed within the phases from which it was obtained.

Preliminary phase

Findings from the preliminary phase summarised in Figure 2 show that all respondents used social networking tools to communicate, with friends largely and, not to share academic content with students.
All the other tools were used for accessing information for research work. Forums (47%) and wikis (50%) were used to co-create content with colleagues within and outside the institution on joint projects and research. Blogs (57%) and content communities (37%) were maintained for ongoing research work, and students were referred to the sites. Microblogs (16%), largely Twitter, was used to follow specific topics, both for academic and non academic work.

One respondent did not complete the questionnaire saying that he did not use social media tools for academic work. On the whole, no teaching or community work was carried out using social media tools, except in some cases where members said that they downloaded videos from YouTube which they used in tutoring.

On a question on eLearning, the respondents said that most of the online teaching took place on the two main eLearning platforms: Moodle and Sakai, that were being used in the institution. They did not see why they needed other pieces of information technology besides the LCMSs. One part-time lecturer used Google groups for some of his lessons. These results tally with the findings of the 2010 FSSE survey which showed that over 80% of the 4 600 faculty respondents in the survey had never used social media tools for teaching (Chen and Bryer 2012).

Results on ethical perspectives held by faculty members showed that all respondents except one, were not aware that they were involved in making
ethical decisions when they used social media platforms. The one respondent that showed awareness said that misuse of a platform could lead to one’s ‘account being blocked or blacklisted’. Additionally, all respondents thought that ethical considerations should be towards people who created content which was posted on the media and that it was not necessary to have ethical considerations for the social platform itself. On a question on the nature of content that the respondents shared on social networks, it was said that they shared only general information and not private or confidential information. The ethical perspectives that predominated were the rights, common good and virtue perspectives.

**Second phase**

In the second phase, data analysis was performed using the SPSS. Reliability of the data was confirmed using the Cronbach’s Alpha test which had a score of 0.741. Details on the responses are summarised in Figure 3. However, on the whole, faculty members showed that their ethical predispositions did influence the extent of their choices and use of social media in academic practice.
Responses on the constructs were as follows:

**Ethical disposition: rights perspective**

The highest number of respondents (80%) was interested in the legal aspects that pertain to the use of social media, followed by 77% who indicated that intellectual rights should be observed. This means that property issues would play an important role in the faculty members’ decision to engage a social media tools. These responses did not logically tally with the respondents’ response on the necessity to read the copyright clause each time someone signed-up on a social media platform, where only 30% said it was necessary to read copyright clauses, 33% slightly agreed, 28% were undecided and 10% thought it was not necessary to do so. This anomaly could be explained by the fact that the response on reading was addressing the current behaviour and not intentions. It can be assumed that faculty members were not bothering themselves with the ‘small print’ because of time constraints (Guy 2012). It was observed that faculty members indicated pressure of time as one of the aspects that stopped them from using social media tools; or it could be that they did not view social media tools as an important platform of serious academic practice because of their informal nature (Davis III 2012:16-17).

Answering a question on raising students’ awareness of ethical issues, 70% felt that it was the faculty members’ responsibility while 35% thought that this should be carried out in the information technology classes that the students attended.

On whether the presence of a code of ethics would deter misuse of social media, 43% said they did not think so and 45% said they thought that the presence of a code of ethics would deter misuse of a social media tool.

On plagiarism, 77% said that the issue of plagiarism should be taken seriously when using social media.

**Ethical disposition: common good perspective**

The most important issue in this category was the fact that social media gave the respondents an opportunity to publish (80%) so as to share their knowledge, 10% did not think so. This can be an indication that most of the respondents were aware or had used the user content creation functionality in social media tools for academic work. However, 55% of respondents, said that they had
doubts about the authenticity of everything that is posted on social media sites, 27% were undecided and 18% believed that people would post authentic information on social media sites; and 77% said they would validate content that they obtained from a social media site before using it. On whether the faculty members, their colleagues and their students would likely post unauthentic content, 75% said that this was not likely and 13% said that there was that possibility. On whether the use of social media tools would foster responsibility and promote social learning, 70% thought this would happen and 15% had doubts.

Ethical disposition: virtue perspective

Eighty three percent (83%) said that they acknowledged the use of content which they would have obtained from a social media platform. This was followed by an issue of integrity, where 38% said that they would be duty bound to ensure that their students did not misuse social media sites by sharing inappropriate content, and 63% said that they would always, irrespective of circumstances, dutifully cross check content that they upload to a social media site for class use, 17% said that this may not be possible and 20% were not decided.

On self promotion using social media, 72% denied that they would self promote by not telling their students where they would have obtained information that they would be using in class. However, faculty members abrogated their responsibility for student online behaviour; 60% compared to 30% said that students were responsible for their behaviour online and that faculty members were not duty bound to ensure that students behaved properly when working online. This response contrasts with what faculty members said about the responsibility of raising students’ awareness about ethical issues, where 70% felt that it was their responsibility while 35% thought otherwise. This standpoint can be compared to what happens in teaching, where the teacher is duty bound to make sure that the student gets all the necessary information for their course, but would not be responsible when the student fails examinations.

Normative beliefs: primary group

The primary group for the respondents were students and fellow faculty members in other institutions. Forty percent (40%) said that they would be worried about what the primary group thought about their ethical knowledge on using social media, 33% did not mind about what the primary group thought
and 27% were undecided; 52% said the primary group expected them to observe intellectual property rights issues while 42% did not think so.

On whether the primary group expected faculty members to know the terms and conditions of service of platforms that they would be using, 37.5% said yes to the expectation, another 37.5% said no and 25% were not decided. On whether the faculty members would go out of their way to authenticate what they posted on social network sites to meet expectations of their primary group, 60% said this would not be the case and 27% said they would.

The highest score on primary group expectations was on a question on whether the group expected faculty members to act professionally, even on social networks, 83% said yes. This confirms the observation by Chen and Bryer (2012) that faculty members want to protect their professional reputation. However, the distribution of marks under this variable can be translated to mean that faculty members would not really go out of their way to meet the expectations of their students and fellow faculty members, and that independence of thought predominates with respect to the influence of the primary group.

Normative beliefs: secondary group

The secondary group was NUST. Generally, faculty members were concerned about the expectation of their institution: 73% said they were expected to know the legal rights pertaining to the use of social media, 72% said their institution expected them to observe the rights of use by other people, 60% thought that they were expected to behave professionally when using social media, 78% said that their institution gave them the discretion to decide on the authenticity of materials they got for academic use from social media sites and 75% said that they were expected to bibliographically reference the work that they posted on social media sites for class work.

However, there were mixed responses on the institution's position with respect to the use of social media materials for academic work by faculty members since the materials would not have gone through the peer review process in most cases. Forty five percent (45%) said that they thought that their institution expected them to use the social media tools while 30% said they were not expected to and 25% were undecided. Another question that produced mixed reactions was on whether faculty members were worried about their institution's position on the ethical perspectives held by faculty members with respect to use
of social media tools in academic work. In response, 42.5% said they were worried, 37.5% were not worried and 20% were undecided.

**Control beliefs: self efficacy**

The highest number of respondents, 83% felt that the ignorance of where to get redress should one’s content on a social media site gets plagiarised was a limiting factor to the extent of control that they could have over using social media. These were followed by 70% who said that knowledge of intellectual property rights would enhance the strength of their control factor. Sixty percent (60%) wanted knowledge about security issues and another 60% wanted knowledge about legal instruments that governed the use of social media to enhance control factors.

Aspects on self efficacy are affected to a large extent by the availability of guidelines on how one can use social media tools. The high percentages in all the response categories can be taken to indicate the importance that faculty members place on the provision of guidelines. However, as hinted by Shapiro and Ossorio (2013), ethical guidelines on the use of social media are not readily available.

**Control beliefs: facilitating conditions**

Fifty-eight percent (58%) felt that access to ethical information on the use of social media would enhance their capacity to use the information that they obtained from social media tools; and 71%, cumulatively, felt that behaving in a professional manner was a necessary condition for using information ethically.

**Conclusion and future research directions**

On the whole, respondents agreed that information ethics is an important issue when using social media in academic practice. The undecided category seemed to have had higher scores in the primary category. This shows that only part of the subjective norm had some influence on intention. This is contrary to TPB which postulates a relationship between the subjective norm and the intention.

Issues that seemed to cut across categories include professional behaviour, acknowledging the use of other people’s content and rights-related issues. This may indicate the importance attached to the issues by the respondents.
The consistently high response rates under control conditions: self efficacy and facilitating conditions categories, are noteworthy; and, may require further enquiry. The high score indicates an absence in the issues that were under probe, which makes the category the most ideal point for intervention should there be efforts to foster behaviour change.

In conclusion, it can be said that the research results have shown the importance that faculty members placed on information ethics when using social media tools in academic practice. Further research is recommended in a different environment, since ethical issues can be situational; also, with all faculty members in the different departments on campus since they are involved in the implementation of learning strategies. Additionally, correlational studies are also recommended because they would be able to show the strengths of relationships among the different constructs.

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Faculty focus special report


*The authors acknowledge assistance on statistical analysis from Mr E Chiyaka, Department of Applied Mathematics, NUST*