A REPORT FOR THE SWAZILAND CHAPTER OF THE MEDIA INSTITUTE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA (MISA)

BY VUYISILE SIKELELA HLATSHWAYO

March 2014

Funded by UNESCO
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AEC</td>
<td>Africa Evangelical Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLAS</td>
<td>Family Life Association of Swaziland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information, Communication and Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JC</td>
<td>Junior Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MISA</td>
<td>Media Institute of Southern Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTN</td>
<td>Mobile Telephone Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YAM</td>
<td>Youth Action Movement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Abstract</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Aim of the Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Objectives</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Methodology</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.0 Survey</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Findings</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Age</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Gender</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Education</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 Social Networks</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5 Membership to Social Media</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6 Frequency</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7 Usage</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8 Information</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.9 Channel of Communication</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.10 Preferred Channel of Communication</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.11 Favorite Medium</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.12 Offensive Information</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.13 Focus Group Interviews</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.14 Advantages</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.15 Disadvantages</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Conclusion</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With the advent of social media in Swaziland, the young people have been afforded an opportunity to access, share and exchange information and ideas freely. This research project was spurred by the raging debate about the effects of social media on school performance, especially by the youth, ensued after the disastrous Swaziland Junior Certificate (JC) results in the beginning of 2012.

It examines the youth usage of the social media. It focuses mainly on the impact of the social media on their everyday lives. MISA Swaziland conducted a research to 100 young social media users aged between 10 and 24. They were drawn from the different four regions of the country. This study concludes that the young people use the social media for social networking and sharing information. This popular social activity among the youth has its own benefits and disadvantages. There is an urgent need to inculcate best practices of social media among the youth and teach them how to use it as a tool of learning.

2. Introduction

The emergence of social media in land-locked Swaziland can be aptly described as a mixed blessing. At one extreme, there is a group of people which claims to have nothing to do with the social media. They criticise it for promoting ‘immoral behaviour’ (Times of Swaziland, 26 January 2012). Yet, there is another group of young people, on the other extreme, which welcomes it as a beacon of hope. They claim that it offers them an opportunity ‘to produce, distribute and exchange information’ that is more relevant to their social lives (Rooney 2013). The social media has since awoken the sleeping giant – the young people – in the kingdom. Whether the information content is good or bad, that is immaterial to the progressive people who have finally found a voice in the unfettered social media.

According to Rooney (2013), Mthembu (2012) & Nxumalo (2011), many Swazi people use the social media nowadays. For instance, Nxumalo (2011) states that Facebook has become an alternative form of information exchange for many people, and that a ‘new community is being built via social media’. The Internet World Stats website reported 18.1 per cent of the Swazi population (251 448 people) were internet users in mid-year 2012 (Internet World Stats 2012). Most of these social media users are young people who have access through university and tertiary colleges’ internet connections, or in urban areas where internet is easily accessible and through internet connections in their schools. A total of 40 per cent of the Facebook users (24 866 users) are 18-24 year-olds; 24 per cent are aged 25-34 and 10 per cent are 16-17 (Social bakers 2012).

However the advent of social media has somehow raised serious concerns about its effects on the lives of the young social media users.
At the heart of this lies the niggling question of the influence that social media has on the lifestyle and behaviour of the younger generation in the community. The thorny issue has been whether the social media can be utilized as an empowering tool to mould the youth in all spheres of life; thus instilling acceptable societal norms and values.

In 2012, a hot debate ensued in Swaziland about the effects of social media on the young users. One section of the Swazi population attributed the ‘disastrous’ JC results to social media usage during learning hours in schools. Facebook, sex caused pupils to fail – Minister and Minister bans cellphones in schools, screamed the headlines of both editions of the Times of Swaziland and Swazi Observer published on 26 January 2012. Mahamba High School teachers, one of the oldest Methodist Mission schools, where 43 pupils out of 70 failed, blamed it on pupils found logging onto Facebook and surfing the internet during lessons (Swazi Observer, 26 January 2012). The then Minister of Education and Training Wilson Ntshangase banned mobile phone usage by both teachers and pupils in all the country’s schools (Times of Swaziland, 26 January 2012).

Bonkhe Masuku’s comment (Times of Swaziland, 21 January 2012) hit the nail on the head. A concerned parent, Masuku called on the Prime Minister to make sure that Facebook is censored in Swaziland to preserve the innocence of the children. He claimed that it promotes a lot of immoral behaviour. He stated that a large number of Swazis belong to ‘dirty’ groups. Some of these groups only discuss sex, wondering if these people have nothing better to do. Even civil servants and school-going children are members of these ‘dirty’ forums.

Another section held a completely different view on the impact of the social media. In 2013, the Times of Swaziland, the January 4, 2013 edition, ran a story headlined Social networks not the cause of failing. It was featuring Kgomotso Magagula (16), a young social media user, who had excelled in her JC exams scoring an aggregate of 91 per cent. This ran counter to the widely held perception that social networks cause pupils to attain poor academic results. Kgomotso has five social network accounts: Twitter, Facebook, Skype, Mxit and Tumbler. Her mother, Winnie Magagula, who was then Minister of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT), said “my daughter loves technology and uses it responsibly” (Swazi Observer, 4 January 2013).

Kgomotso stated: “I continued to interact with my friends using all my social networking accounts because I am responsible and know the right time to be on social networks. I personally believe that you do not have to dump your social life in order to attain good results. What is important for every pupil is to maintain a strict study timetable and avoid being distracted by social networks.”

It is against this backdrop of different views and opinions on the effects of the youth usage of social media that this research project addressed the four questions:

1. What are the effects of social media on the lives of the youth?
2. How does it influence the lifestyle and behaviour of the young people?
3. Can it be utilized as a powerful tool to foster freedom of expression and promote access to information as well as instil acceptable societal norms and values?
The findings of this research project are based on a survey conducted to seventy respondents as well as focus group interviews done with thirty participants between the ages of 10 and 24, drawn from the country’s four regions, namely Manzini, Hhohho, Shiselweni, and Lubombo.

3. Aim of the study

The overall aim of this study is to enable MISA Swaziland to foster freedom of expression in cyber space and inculcate best practices of social media among the youth in the country.

4. Objectives

To add to the growing body knowledge on the use of social media by the youth.

To determine content information shared by the youth via the social media.

To foster freedom of expression in cyber-space.

To create an awareness about the influence of social networks on the youth.

To inculcate best practices of social media among the youth.

5. Methodology

Data was collected primarily through survey questionnaires and focus group discussions. A total of 100 respondents constituted a sample for this particular research project. Of the 100, seventy young social media users were surveyed while an additional thirty were interviewed.

Unable to set up an online survey due to some technicalities, a questionnaire was administered. This was done with the members of the Youth Action Movement (YAM) Facebook owned by the Youth Affairs Department of the Family Life Association of Swaziland (FLAS). After discovering its own Facebook Page, the researcher identified seventy YAM respondents for the purposes of this study. They were drawn from the four YAM Centres of Manzini, Mbabane, Nhlangano and Big Bend. They were required to either tick a box next to a correct answer or briefly state in writing why they prefer social media to the mainstream media. Before the survey began, the respondents were allowed to ask the researcher to clarify what they did not understand concerning the study.

As the survey was conducted on Fridays, when the youth came for their FLAS-YAM social activities, there were some time constraints. The researcher was only allocated 30 minutes for the survey because the respondents were involved in their usual social activities. Under the circumstances, it was not possible to combine the questionnaires with focus group discussions. But, there was still a need to complement the survey with the focus group interviews to have a whole picture of the youth usage of the social media. Unfortunately, FLAS could not accommodate that latter part of data collection in its tight schedule.

For the focus group interviews, the researcher identified thirty young social media users who had gathered at Matsapha Swazi National High School on the Africa Evangelical Church (AEC) National Sports Day. The respondents were divided into six groups of five participants in each group. The focus group discussions centred round the advantages and disadvantages of the social media.
Before the focus group discussions began, the researcher explained the purpose of study to the respondents. Being the AEC National Youth Sports Day, the respondents came from all over the country. They were from Mankanyane, Hlobane, Mokwane, Malkerns, Bhunya, Matsapha and Malkerns. That they were respondents from the rural areas gave a representative picture of the youth usage of the social media in both urban and rural areas. Few cases of the youth were dropped and replaced because they did not have access to cellphones.

This method complemented the information already gathered through the survey questionnaires. It provided a much richer type of data than the survey as it enabled the researcher to observe how the youth use the social media through conversation and interaction with each other.

6. Findings

6.0 Survey

6.1 Age

This particular survey focused mainly on the age group between 10 and 24. Even though the statutory youth age limit is 35 in Swaziland, FLAS has fixed it at 24 for its own YAM membership. This youth movement targets mainly school-going children from primary school to the high school level. However, it is worth noting that it has not closed its doors to other young people who are college and university graduates as well as those that are still studying at the local colleges and universities.

Pie Chart 1 shows the ages of youth social media users in Swaziland.
Like most young people across the world, this survey found that 45 per cent of the young Swazis, who form the bulk of social media users, are between 18 and 21 years old. This was followed by 36 per cent of those aged between 22 and 24. The age group between 14 and 17 constituted 15 per cent. Only 4 per cent of the social media users were between 10 and 13 years old. Interestingly, the age also has a bearing on the usage of social media as only those between 18 and 24 were a dominant age group.

6.2 Gender

According to this particular survey conducted in all the four regions of Swaziland, there were more male than female users.

Pie Chart 2 clearly illustrates the gender of the young people who form bulk of social media users.

Of the total number of respondents, 61 per cent belonged to the male gender while the female constituted only 39 per cent. This is not surprising because it truly reflects the gender imbalance which still remains one of the most common characteristics of a patriarchal society. In such a male-dominated society, parents discriminate their daughters. Consigned to the bottom rung of the ladder in society, the daughters are often denied the luxury of owning mobile phones. Conversely, the parents always treat their sons with a great deal of indulgence.
Media literacy skills of the social media users are mainly based on their education level. Those with a very low level of education tend to use social media less compared to the ones with higher education. This is because of their poor intellectual capacity and lack of exposure to the need for social media they do not know to grasp and appreciate the internet-based features offered by the social network platforms. This survey, therefore, considered the respondents’ education level as a significant contributory factor to the multiple uses of social media.

The survey found that the young people topping the list of social media users (60 per cent) had high school education. Thirty-three per cent (33%) of the respondents had reached college; 4 per cent had primary education while only 3 per cent had university education. Worth noting is that the 3 per cent constituted the unemployed university graduates who have no money to buy cellphones.

6.4 Social Network Platforms

It emerged from this particular survey that the usage of social media has gained a lot of momentum in the kingdom. More and more of the young people in Swaziland use the internet and social media to interact on a daily basis with peers, relatives and friends. Manqoba Nxumalo (2011) reports that a ‘new community is being built via social media.’ He cites well-known Swazi Facebook activist, Mandla Gin-
Pie Chart 4 illustrates the aforementioned social network platforms in terms of their popularity.

![Pie Chart 4: SOCIAL NETWORKS](image)

Facebook is the most popular and widely used social network platform amongst the young social media users. The survey found that a total of 41 per cent of the young people in Swaziland use Facebook; 24 per cent Whatsapp; 15 per cent Mxit; 8 per cent Twitter; 4 per cent Youtube; and Instagram and BBM shared only 2 per cent.

### 6.5 Membership to Social Media

Observing that a ‘new community is being built via social media,’ it was crucial to establish the ways in which the Swazi youth hook up with their peers and friends through the social media. This was meant to establish whether this happened as a result of peer pressure or on own volition. It further aimed to shed light on the possible choices and decisions they make on their encounter with offensive information usually posted on the social networks. The respondents were asked if they set up on their own social networks accounts (connected), invited or added to the social network platform.

Pie Chart 5 shows the different ways in which the respondents hook up with their peers and friends on the social media.

![Pie Chart 5: MEMBERSHIP](image)

A total of 60 per cent of the Swazi youth was connected; 30 per cent invited; and 10 per cent added. It is worth noting that the social media has become an alternative vehicle of communication for young people in Swaziland.
6.6 Frequency
With regards to the frequency of youth usage of social media, the researcher asked the respondents how often they use the social media in their everyday lives. They were presented with three options including “often”, “always”, and “sometimes”. A majority of them (43 per cent) used social media sometimes, 40 per cent always, and 17 per cent often. Regardless of the differences, the social media has significantly influenced their social lives. The less use of social media can perhaps be attributed to the fact that the majority of the social media users are school going. Some head teachers have banned the use of mobile phones during school hours, blaming it for the high rate of failure among the students.

Pie Chart 6 shows the frequency of the youth usage of the social media

6.7 Usage
According to Ogunlesi (2013), ‘networking’ and ‘communication’ are the most popular uses of social media. He argues that the “social” in social media will continue to define usage among the youth, and its application tool for political engagement will mostly depend on the extent to which it still manages to fulfil its responsibilities as a vehicle for triggering and sustaining human connection. In this regard, this survey discovered that young people in Swaziland use the social media to produce, distribute and exchange information affecting their social lives. The respondents mentioned that they use social media for sharing information, social networking, marketing purposes and doing business transactions. A total of 58 per cent of them used the social media for sharing information, 26 per cent social networking, 11 per cent marketing, and 5 per cent doing business transactions.

Pie Chart 7 shows the usage of social media amongst the youth in Swaziland
6.8 Information

Rooney (2013) says that in recent years social media has become significant for the distribution of information and ideas, thus increasing flows of information in Swaziland. More importantly, he explains that the social media has extended the public sphere to offer opportunities for a wider range of people both in the country and outside it, to produce, distribute and exchange information and commentary in the kingdom. Nxumalo (2011) adds that in the recent past more young people have been using the internet and social media not just to interact but also to influence opinion.

The survey found that the respondents use the social media as a reliable source of information more relevant to their social lives. They look for educational, social, political, economic and cultural information on the social media. Educational information topped the list at 44 per cent. This is followed by social information at 29 per cent, cultural information 20 per cent, economic information 5 per cent, and political information 2 per cent.

It is worth noting that the respondents use the information distributed via the social media as an empowering force in the various spheres of life. However, the results show that political information is not top priority. Yet, as with many other developing countries, the social media could be expected to play a major role in democracy and governance issues.

Pie Chart 8 illustrates the kind of information young people look for in the social media.
6.9 Channel of Communication
When asked about the channel of communication that works better for them, the respondents thought only of the medium or media that enable them to influence their day-to-day social lives. That media have to offer them opportunities to produce, distribute and exchange information. The respondents were given four channels of communication to choose from the one that indeed works much better for them as young people. The channels were as follows: the social media, newspaper, radio, and television. It emerged from the survey that the social media works much better for the young people in Swaziland because of its democratization of access to information and freedom of expression and opinion. A majority of them (35 per cent) stated that the social media works much better for them. Television followed with 26 per cent while the newspaper got 23 per cent. The radio was last with 16 per cent. It is worth noting that the respondents switch from one channel to another depending on the kind of information that they are looking for at that specific time. Worse still, a 2013 MISA Swaziland research into the print media coverage of children stories found that a majority of school-going children do not read the newspapers because of their lack of coverage of children stories.

Pie Chart 9 shows the channels of communication that work better for the young people in country.
6.10 Preferred Channel of Communication

Ogunlesi (2013) says Africans across the continent are sharing details of their daily lives. This was made possible by the amazing powers of internet and social media, allowing sharing and connections across the continent by information flow. He mentions that social media has advantages such as accessibility and absolute freedom. He cites the Nigerian Senate President who said ‘the emergence of the social media like Facebook, Twitter, Blackberry Messenger, Youtube etc has changed the face of the media practice by making information sharing easier, faster and quicker.’ This became evident in the responses of the young people when asked about their preferred channel of communication. Similarly, they chose the social media as their number one channel of communication because of the abovementioned benefits. One respondent said the social media is ‘easily accessible and can easily distribute information all over the world.’ As the most preferred channel, the social media received 42 per cent, television 24 per cent, the newspaper 22 per cent, and the radio 12 per cent. Recent research by MISA-Swaziland shows that young people are shunning the mainstream media, preferring to get news and information from the social platforms.

Pie Chart 10 illustrates the most preferred channels of communication amongst the young people.
6.11 Favourite Medium

The marginalised Swazis have welcomed the emergence of social media. According to Rooney (2013), such people are afforded an opportunity to speak in their own voices and not mediated by the mainstream media. Mthembu (2012) adds that ordinary Swazis have found a public space in which they can discuss issues that the local media dare not discuss. Therefore, social media has helped counter restrictions imposed on and by the mainstream media.

Nxumalo (2011) mentions that Facebook has become an alternative form of media for many people. The Swazi people have been forced to rely on social media for information because local newspapers have failed to stand up to the repressive machinery of the state. The freedom of expression afforded the people on Facebook has seen the Swazis bypassing the ‘official’ media for the social media. Bird (2013) sums up that social media and access to the internet mean that children have a plethora of information sources available to them, which means traditional media, will need to work hard to get children’s attention.

A majority of the respondents (69 per cent) mentioned the social media as their favourite as opposed to the mainstream media, which got 31 per cent. One of the reasons mentioned by a respondent was that “the social media is easy to access, communicate and share information with many people.” However, as more opportunities are made available, so do barriers to participation exist, because of the inequalities of access to digital media technologies and unequal capacities to participate in a digital public sphere in the kingdom.

Pie Chart 11 shows the favourite of the respondents between the social media and mainstream media.
6.12 Offensive Information

When asked about the offensive information posted on the social media, a majority of the respondents viewed it as one of its great disadvantages. Out of 60 respondents who made an attempt to answer this question, more than half (32) of them complained about the pornographic materials; vulgar language (insults), character assassination and gossip posted on the social media. They listed postings of ‘sex videos, nude pictures of people, explicit sex pictures, vulgar language, pornography’, etc. Interestingly, others found political information, especially criticism of government, cabinet and members of the royal family offensive. This goes to show the extent of political apathy and their lack of understanding politics attributed to the 1973 Decree ban on political activity. They further found it disturbing that underage children are easily exposed to immoral information. Asked about their reaction to immoral information, a majority of the respondents stated that they either delete it or ignore it.

6.14 Advantages

The participants unanimously agreed that the social media offered them a lot of benefits. Chief among them is convenience. They stated that the social media is the most convenient channel of communication. It allows them to always stay in touch with their peers, friends and relatives across the globe. Bayandza Nkambule stated: “If you are on a social network platform, you don’t have to worry about the distance separating you from your family, relatives, peers and friends. It is the most convenient tool which enables me to hook up with them easily even those who live in so far away places across the world.”

The other advantage is that the social media allows the youth easy and instant communication. They said it has made it a lot easier for them to exchange information and ideas with too many people within a very short space of time. It comes handy when they want to discuss not only their homework but also social issues affecting their lives. “When a problem arises in my studies, I just contact my classmates through the social networks. The social media always puts me in instant communication with them such that they give me quick solutions to my problems,” said Siphesihle Mkhabela.

The participants also mentioned the advantage of being in constant contact with many people from all walks of life countrywide and worldwide. They said the social media does not only expand the network of one’s friends, but also exposes one to more people who have common interests. They viewed the social media as a good platform for socialising purposes. “Through Facebook, I’m in touch with many people from all over the world. We are able to share with them information of common interests as if we are next door neighbours. Yet, some of these people are miles away from us,” said Khabonina Ngwenya.

Another advantage of the social media is that of being cheaper, faster and easier compared to text messaging via mobile phones. The participants stated that it is always much cheaper, easier and faster to use social network platforms like Whatsapp, for example, than sending smses. Thembela Nkomo said: “I find using social networks much cheaper, faster and easier than text messaging on my mobile phone. MTN call tariffs are very expensive but the charges for posting messages via Whatsapp are quite affordable. Easy access to communication makes the social media the best channel of
affordable. Easy access to communication makes the social media the best channel of communication."

As the last benefit of the social media, the participants mentioned that it keeps them company. They were unanimous in that the social networks allow them to network and share information with many people without having to meet them in person. This has resulted in them engaging in a lively conversation and interaction in cyberspace. They cited the example of posting messages every time and everywhere by the young people; be it on a street, in a family car or on a public bus. "Once you are connected via the social networks, you never feel bored or lonely. You enjoy the company of Facebook friends who don't mind posting messages and funny pictures every minute," said Sicelo Dlamini.

6.15 Disadvantages

Topping the list of the disadvantages of the social media is that it is very addictive. A total of thirty participants unanimously agreed that they have become too addicted to it. Social networking and sharing information forms an integral part of their social activity in their everyday lives. They stated that they regularly spend most of their time on the social networks right into the wee small hours. "We are very addicted to the social media such that we spend most of the time posting messages to our friends across the world. When others go to bed, we just continue exchanging information into the early morning hours," said Thembelihle Mzizi.

The other disadvantage is the social media's cultivation of antisocial behaviour among the young users. A majority of the participants attributed the astonishing antisocial behaviour of the youth to it. They expressed concern that the young social media users are no longer sociable. They always keep to themselves while they are busy with the postings. "Most of the youth who use social media are antisocial. You always come across them busy on their social media when walking on the streets or travelling by buses. Even at home, they don't even have time to chat with their siblings. They retreat to their rooms to continue with social networking," said Mhonishwa Zwane.

The other disadvantage is youth exposure to the risk of human trafficking. A majority of the participants stated that the social media is fast becoming a vehicle for human trafficking. They mentioned that international crime syndicates entice the youth via the social media to take up fake lucrative job offers in overseas countries; only to discover it is human trafficking when they arrive at their destinations. These syndicates take advantage of the friendship and trust built instantly over easy communication via the social media. Nomathemba Dludlu stated: "As much as the social media is empowering, we are not blind to its negative effects. We are very much aware that it contributes to the crime of human trafficking across the globe."

Another disadvantage is the exposure of the underage to pornography circulated on the social media. All the participants agreed that some corrupt characters post nude pictures and sex videos on Facebook and Youtube. They were totally against social networks that allow their corrupt friends to post all sorts of information on their walls. The major complaint is the limited control over what they receive on the social networks. "What I really don't like about the social media is the exposure of the underage to pornographic materials. I sometimes receive pictures of nude people on my Facebook which I find to be promoting immoral lifestyles and behaviours," said Sifiso Dlamini.

The participants also mentioned as a disadvantage the promotion of colloquial language among the youth. They were unanimous in that the usage of colloquial language on social media has lowered the standard of both written and spoken English language. Its manifestation is the high rate of students who fail the English lan-
language subject at the country’s secondary and high schools. This has sparked a debate on whether the English Language should remain a passing subject in the country. “As slang is the common language of the social media, this has resulted in poor English grammar. The young users of social media use the colloquial language and shortened words. This has contributed to the poor performance of the students in the English Language which is a passing subject in the country,” said Sindiswa Nxumalo.

The last disadvantage is that the social media is seen as a major distraction from the most important social activities. A majority of the young social media users unanimously agreed that they shirk their household chores in order to concentrate on the social media. They conceded that this has resulted in a growing number of lazy and unproductive young people who are a liability to the country. Swaziland needs hardworking and productive young people with a good work ethic to prosper. The participants blamed the high failure rate among the school-going children on lack of concentration caused by the social media. “It’s pity that our focus is more and more on the social media than on our studies. We care less about the most important things in life. No wonder our school performance has dropped drastically,” said Phinda Dlamini.

7. Conclusion
This study examined the usage of social media by young people in landlocked Swaziland. It emerged that they mainly use it for sharing information and social networking. The young people have welcomed the emergence of the social media because, among others, it affords them an opportunity not only to interact but also enjoy the fundamental right to freedom of expression provided in Section 24 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Swaziland adopted in 2005. Much to the delight of the young social media users, the social media has changed the face of the media landscape by making information sharing ‘easier, faster and quicker.’ They can now easily and freely bypass the severely censored mainstream media to access, produce, distribute and exchange information and ideas.

More importantly, the social media has afforded the young people an opportunity to speak in their own voices, not mediated by the mainstream media. The social media has further become an alternative form of media for the young people. Nxumalo (2011) describes Facebook as an alternative form of medium for many people, and that a ‘new community is being built via social media’. They can use this empowering force as a source of information relevant to their social lives. It has become their reliable source of educational, social, political, economic and cultural information.

Notwithstanding its numerous benefits and advantages, the social media continue to have chilling effects on the young people. It was depressing to hear the majority cataloguing its negative effects. The young people express grave concern about immorality perpetuated by a host of corrupt characters via the social media. Chief among these is the posting of pornographic materials, vulgar language, seditious information and character assassination. What is more disturbing is that the social media exposes the underage children to the barrage of immoral information.

As much as the social media is critical in the efforts to inculcate into the young people the culture of freedom of expression and media freedom through access to information, it would be amiss to turn a blind eye to its negative effects on the younger generation who are a future of this nation. This warrants a sense of urgency to mount remedial programmes aimed at tackling the problem of offensive information posted on the social network sites such as Facebook and YouTube. Although the young people try to ignore and delete such offensive information, this cannot be taken as a lasting solution to the problem.
This study suggests seven things to be done to counter the negative effects of information posted on the social media sites:

i. equip the social media users with media and information literacy skills;

ii. educate the social media users about the benefits and disadvantages;

iii. encourage dialogue among the social media users about the benefits of social media networks;

iv. create an awareness about the influence of social media networks on the youth; and inculcate the culture of freedom of expression underpinned by access to information;

v. inculcate the culture in the school – going children to use the social media responsibly;

vi. dispel the myth that social media make school-going children perform badly; and

vii. teach the youth how to access electronic library information.

References


MISA. 2013. Ethical media reporting of youth issues.

Mthembu, M. 2012. National overview 2011, Swaziland. In So this is democracy. MISA, Windhoek.


Swazi Observer, 26 January 2012

Times of Swaziland. 26 January 2012.

Times of Swaziland, 4 January 2013