



RESEARCH REPORT

The Use of Social Media for Adult
Learning and Education (ALE) in
Southern Africa

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Executive Summary: Social Media and Adult Education

This qualitative research study looks at the use of social media in Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in southern Africa, exploring how social media could potentially enhance the learning experiences and promote collaboration among adult learners.

There is very little research on how social media is being used in ALE in southern Africa. Most research focuses on the use of social media in tertiary education or distance higher education. However there are useful lessons that can be learnt from projects and research carried out in other countries in Africa and other regions of the world.

The research investigates the perspectives of educators to understand the opportunities and challenges of integrating social media into educational settings. The literature shows that e-learning brings many benefits. Learners are already widely engaged with social media and may become more engaged with ALE if their educators start to use social media in teaching and facilitating ALE courses. Learners also appreciate that courses run on social media platforms are accessible at any time of the day, making them suitable for adult learners who may be at work or undertaking caregiving duties in the evening when ALE classes are held. Having a repository of learning on social media, allows learners to catch up later. However, the literature cautions that educators need to be very intentional about creating communities of learners online to build interaction and discussion, which is crucial for adult learning and to ward off isolation.

This research contains interviews with 19 people who either work for organisations involved in ALE, work in social media or at universities researching aspects of ALE. These participant interviews highlight that the COVID-19 pandemic was an era of improvisation in digital education and learnings from that time could be built on. The interviews also highlighted that many adult educators are already innovating more and more ways of using WhatsApp in education, campaigns and creating awareness. Some technical and research support is needed to advance the possibility that WhatsApp particularly could become a better tool for ALE educators to use.

The people we interviewed also noted that social media should not dominate ALE – it is only a tool that has had some success in extending ALE programmes, modernising ALE and in introducing blended learning. The participants were unanimous that hybrid learning or in-person learning was optimal and could not yet be entirely replaced by social media-based ALE.

Key findings include:

- Social media enables learners to access education beyond traditional classroom boundaries. This promotes inclusivity, particularly for learners in remote or under-resourced areas.
- Interactive features on social media platforms such as live streaming, group discussions, and multimedia content create dynamic learning environments. Though the functions of social media platforms vary and should be studied carefully to ensure appropriate use for maximum benefit.
- Platforms like Facebook support peer-to-peer learning and professional networking, enabling learners to exchange knowledge and experiences in real time.
- Despite its benefits, the study highlights issues such as digital literacy gaps, privacy concerns, and the potential for distraction while using social media. Effective integration of social media and adult education requires strategies to address these challenges.
- Educators acknowledge the potential of social media to transform adult education but emphasise the need for training in ethical considerations to maximise its benefits.

The study concludes that social media can be a powerful tool for adult education when used thoughtfully and could be used more extensively in ALE in southern Africa. This is particularly the case with WhatsApp, which was generally found to be relatively accessible and inexpensive. To innovate in the use of social media-based ALE, more discussion with learners and practitioners is needed. Because social media is widely used, co-creating curricula with learners is an opportunity that presents itself.

Recommendations include developing a template model for delivering ALE over social media that could be adapted to different situations and material, developing clear guidelines for social media use in delivering ALE, providing training for educators and learners, and encouraging inclusive online learning environments.

Introduction

The advent of e-learning or electronic learning has transformed the landscape of adult education, providing new opportunities for flexible, learner-centred approaches. This literature review details how, as a result of the ever evolving advancements in technology, the incorporation of mobile tools as well as social media have further expanded the scope of e-learning and can provide unique opportunities for adult educators to utilise. Furthermore, this review will highlight social media's capabilities in encouraging collaboration among learners for example and in particular how platforms like WhatsApp can do so.

This literature review highlights how social media can influence adult learners' learning experiences, their engagement with educational content, and overall educational outcomes.

The benefits and challenges associated with the use of social media in educational settings, as well as its alignment with global education goals, such as Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) will also be discussed. By analysing current research, this review provides a comprehensive understanding of how social media can facilitate accessible, and effective learning in the adult education sector particularly in southern Africa where the digital divide remains a significant barrier. Thus, this review critically assesses the potential for social media to reshape adult education and the broader implications for lifelong learning.

There is very little research on the use of social media for adult education and learning in southern Africa. Most research focuses on using social media in tertiary education or distance higher education.

There are many different ways in which social media is being used in post-secondary school education. Instagram and WhatsApp are used quite differently and with different results (WhatsApp has been found to encourage collaboration and deep discussion between learners while Instagram builds learner enthusiasm for learning material posted by educators but less learner to learner interaction).

This review investigates how exactly these social media platforms are used to deliver education to adults, and points out what lessons can be drawn from this for the purposes of ALE in southern Africa.

3. Literature Review

3 (a) What is e-learning?

E-learning, generally refers to learning conducted through electronic media, via the internet, and it offers learners including adult learners flexibility and access to the curriculum outside of the traditional classroom environments. McDowell (2002) highlights that e-learning encompasses web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual education, and digital collaboration, and its impact largely depends on the self-motivation of adult learners. Donna (2009) emphasises that most e-learning programmes are fully online and interactive, enabling communication between learners and instructors. The use of media such as text, images, animations, and streaming in e-learning allows for both self-paced and instructor-led learning (Gray, 2011). As Dokubo (2013) notes, e-learning has become an indispensable component of education in both developed and developing nations, supporting learner-instructor and learner-learner communication while facilitating individualised learning and knowledge construction (Dokubo & Wami, 2020).

3 (b) The benefits of e-learning

E-learning offers many advantages for adult education, including its learner-centered approach and adaptability to individual needs and preferences (Hilai, 2013) as cited in (Dokubo & Wami, 2020). It enables learners from diverse backgrounds to access high-quality resources, lectures, and tutoring, making it an inclusive platform. According to James (2019) as cited in Dokubo & Wami, 2020, e-learning is also recognised for its cost-effectiveness compared to traditional learning, offering benefits such as flexible schedules, content updates, and fast lesson delivery. For adults with physical disabilities, e-learning provides the flexibility to study from home without constraints, while for working adults with family commitments, the absence of fixed class schedules increases participation and engagement. This flexibility allows adult learners to study at their own pace, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the learning process (Dokubo & Wami, 2020).

The development of e-learning systems has been influenced by advancements in network and information technology, making them a crucial component of modern education (İşman & Aydın, 2018) as cited in Dokubo & Wami, 2020. E-learning and Internet-based education makes it possible for individuals to learn from various locations at their own convenience, allowing for flexible learning experiences. All learning materials are centralised and accessible to a global audience, facilitating knowledge acquisition across diverse demographics. Consequently, e-learning systems provide a structured approach to education tailored to individual learners, promoting personalised and efficient learning environments.

Thus, the benefits of e-learning in general have provided insights into the potential of technology's various applications with regards to education as it continues to evolve.

3 (c) Technology's influence on education

The integration of mobile technology, particularly social media, to benefit adult education has gained attention for its potential to enhance learning. Research suggests that mobile technologies, including social media platforms, offer significant benefits in terms of learner motivation and engagement (Alfaki & Alharthy, 2014 in Adedore & Ojedeeji, 2020). The WhatsApp mobile application, for instance, was used successfully in Nigeria to deliver adult literacy programmes, with positive outcomes in terms of learners' attitudes and learning experiences (Adedore & Ojedeeji, 2020).

Social media platforms provide opportunities for autonomous and collaborative learning, enabling adult learners to extend their educational experiences beyond the traditional classroom setting. This aligns with Cercone's (2008) emphasis on the need for individualised learning experiences, which can be facilitated through mobile technology by allowing learners to progress at their own pace (Adedore & Ojedeeji, 2020). Furthermore, the flexibility and autonomy offered by mobile technology, including the ability to interact in real-world contexts, makes social media an effective tool for expanding learning opportunities (Callums & Kinshuk, 2006 in Adedore & Ojedeeji, 2020).

However, this needs to be balanced against learning as a social activity, and against some of the lessons learnt during the Covid-19 pandemic about the isolation felt by learners in 'Zoom' classrooms. The ways that social media platforms can be used by ALE educators to stimulate interaction and discussion are explored further in the findings section, as is the need expressed by some educators for social media-based ALE to be complemented or supplemented by in-person training.

3 (d) WhatsApp

Given that this study is focused on the use of social media in adult education in southern Africa, examples of its use in the adult education sector on the continent were explicitly sought out.

In the adult education sector, the use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp has attracted significant attention, particularly for its role in language learning. WhatsApp, with its various features, offers collaborative opportunities that enhance language acquisition. Riyanto (2013 in Adedore & Ojedeeji, 2020) found that WhatsApp can improve essential English language skills, including reading, writing, speaking, and listening, making it a valuable tool for tutorial delivery.

Despite its widespread use by students in Nigeria, educators in that context remain divided on its impact on academic achievement. Some educators argue that the informal "Internet English" associated with WhatsApp facilitates a decline in formal written language, as it introduces abbreviations that undermine traditional English. Conversely, others view this evolution of language as a natural development, suggesting that "Internet English" represents a form of literacy that can be leveraged to engage learners in more conventional educational contexts (Alsaleem, 2014 in Adelere & Ojedeji, 2020).

This divide highlights the complexity of integrating mobile applications into adult education. While technology offers innovative ways to enhance learning, particularly in language instruction, it also presents challenges in maintaining the standards of formal education. Nonetheless, many see the potential of these tools in promoting literacy and learning autonomy, enabling learners to engage both collaboratively and independently outside the traditional classroom environment (Adelere & Ojedeji, 2020).

3 (e) Benefits of WhatsApp and writing on social media

In the context of adult education, social media and electronic messaging platforms are viewed by some educators as a positive trend, particularly for promoting writing skills. For example, Helderma (2003) highlights that, unlike previous generations where writing was limited, today's learners are consistently writing through their interactions on digital platforms, such as text messaging and commenting on social media as cited in Adelere & Ojedeji, 2020.

This shift is seen as a beneficial development, as it increases the frequency with which individuals engage with written language, encouraging literacy in everyday communication. Similarly, Linhart (2007 in Adelere & Ojedeji, 2020) observes that platforms like instant messaging and email have contributed to a new generation of writers, accustomed to translating their thoughts and feelings into words and that today's learners write more frequently than any generation since the era when telephone communication was less common.

This development proves the role of technology in shaping modern writing habits. In adult education, such consistent interaction with written content may enhance learners' literacy and communication skills, offering opportunities to capitalise on these informal writing experiences in more structured educational settings (Adelere & Ojedeji, 2020).

3 (f) SDG 4: Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education

The integration of social media and technology in adult education is critical to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) in developing nations, particularly in rural Africa.

In a case study of Nigeria, Akintolu and Uleanya (2021) found that using technology in ALE increased the adult literacy rate and fostered digital inclusivity, which fitted in with SDG4. Part of creating inclusive education as part of SDG4 was the need to digitally modernise ALE and close the digital gap between countries who were delivering education using ICT and those that were still not (Onasanya, 2019). These researchers emphasised that adult literacy programmes must be designed to align with learners' personal and professional needs, ensuring the content is relevant to their everyday experiences. This approach fosters self-directed learning and highlights the importance of using modern gadgets and Information Communication Technology (ICT) to create learner-centred environments, which is essential for enhancing sustainable development.

ICT can also address barriers to learning by enabling more flexible, accessible education. Moreover, Oyedele (2013, in Akintolu & Uleanya, 2021) underscores the importance of on-the-job training, suggesting that adult education programmes should consider learners' working conditions and time constraints. Onasanya (2001 in Akintolu & Uleanya, 2021) further supports the idea that incorporating ICT can alleviate challenges and enhance adult learners' experiences in education programmes.

3 (g) The digital divide

The issue of the digital divide and lack of infrastructure is a significant barrier to the effective use of social media and technology in adult education. Various scholars have proposed solutions to address this divide, emphasising the role of policy and digital literacy in fostering equitable access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT). According to certain researchers, policy plays a critical role in reducing the digital divide, advocating for the inclusion of ICT content in educational curricula, the provision of computers to students, and the availability of internet access in public spaces. However, there is concern that internet access can also serve as a distraction, potentially impacting academic performance negatively (Akintolu & Uleanya, 2021).

Digital literacy enables individuals to effectively navigate and use information from ICTs and the internet. This includes learning how to filter out distractions and utilise the available information for beneficial purposes. Steele also advocates for making digital tools affordable and ensuring the relevance of online content to users. Moreover, developing internet infrastructure and encouraging its use are seen as critical strategies for bridging the digital divide. The collective efforts of governments, private businesses, and other societal stakeholders are essential in making these changes (Steele, 2024).

Incorporating these strategies is vital for making adult education through social media and ICTs more accessible, inclusive, and effective, particularly in regions that experience infrastructure challenges (Akintolu & Uleanya, 2021).

3 (h) Potential educational benefits of social media

The growing integration of social media into various sectors, including education, has sparked considerable interest among educators and researchers. Faizi, El Afia, and Chiheb (2021) explore the potential benefits and challenges of using social media in education. Although some critics argue that social media may distract students from learning traditional skills and undermine the roles of teachers and learners (Faizi et al., 2021), others highlight the educational advantages these tools offer. Social media enables both students and instructors to engage in collaborative learning, extend discussions beyond the classroom, and access a wide range of learning resources. Furthermore, social media platforms foster communication, promote peer learning, and encourage student engagement by providing more interactive and flexible learning opportunities.

Faizi et al. (2021) suggest that these tools contribute significantly to enhancing learning experiences by bridging the gap between formal and non-formal education. By supporting communication between students and teachers, social media allows learning to take place in more dynamic and real-time contexts, providing further opportunities for deeper engagement with learning content (Faizi, El Afia, & Chiheb, 2021).

In the context of adult education, several studies have emphasised the role of social media in addressing classroom boredom and promoting engagement. As the world moves with great speed into the digital age, a common reason for students reporting that they feel disengaged from learning is that non-digital learning materials, or too much digital text and not enough digital interaction, is seen as outdated and is not always interesting or relevant to them. To mitigate boredom and boost engagement, social media tools can be used to create interactive and collaborative learning activities, such as discussions, debates, and group projects. These activities allow learners to interact with their peers and others beyond the confines of the classroom, enhancing their learning experiences (Faizi, El Afia, & Chiheb, 2021). However, this also requires innovation and willingness from ALE educators to ensure that learners stay engaged while learning online.

True collaboration in educational settings involves participation, interaction, and synthesis. This form of collaboration goes beyond merely dividing up assignments, requiring students to actively work together on shared tasks. Prince (2004) also emphasised that collaborative learning is characterised by student interactions, rather than learning in isolation.

Social media platforms offer various tools that facilitate such interactions, enabling learners to access resources, share information, and collaborate both within and outside of their educational environments (Ingram & Hathorn, 2004; Prince, 2004 in Faizi, El Afia, & Chiheb, 2021).

3 (i) Importance of ICT

The integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) in adult education has seen significant growth, driven by the need to enhance learning experiences, broaden access to educational opportunities, and develop essential digital skills among learners (European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2015). This literature review highlights the multifaceted advantages of utilising social media and mobile learning tools in adult education.

While the use of technology can greatly enhance the learning process, it is crucial to recognise that technology alone cannot replace the role of educators. Effective adult education requires a balanced investment in technology, the competence of teachers to utilise these technologies, and the creation of digital learning content (European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2015). Moreover, strong leadership is essential to ensure that educational systems and processes support the effective integration of technology, facilitating collaboration within and outside educational institutions.

The effective implementation of ICT in adult learning environments not only enriches educational experiences but also empowers learners with the digital skills necessary for contemporary living and working. Thus, understanding the dynamics between technology, teaching competence, and institutional leadership is vital for harnessing the full potential of social media and mobile learning in adult education. (European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2015).

The Institute for Prospective Technology Studies (IPTS), part of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC), highlights the importance of information and communication technology (ICT) as a crucial enabler of innovation and creativity within education and training. This perspective is echoed by policymakers and educational stakeholders, who increasingly recognise the transformative potential of ICT for enhancing learning experiences (IPTS, n.d.). Furthermore, the Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning identifies the effective utilisation of ICT in adult education as one of its five key priorities, emphasising its significance in fostering inclusive and accessible learning environments (European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2015).

In the realm of adult education, “to maximise learning for adult learners, instructors must be able to accommodate diverse learning goals of the student population (LeNoue et al., 2011 in Upadhyay, 2023, p.13). To do this, social networking sites such as YouTube, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and X can be used as tools of teaching, especially as educators recognise that learners benefit from more visual materials and spend much time on social networking sites.

Integrating social networking sites into their teaching has been found to make learning more relevant (Upadhyay, 2023). These platforms facilitate interaction, communication, and collaboration, enabling learners with limited digital skills to actively shape their learning experiences rather than merely consume information passively (Upadhyay, 2023).

This approach fosters a more participatory and lifelong social learning process (Upadhyay, 2023) – “Activities like sharing a post on Instagram or Tweeting about something, using related hashtags, retweeting posts, and promoting similar ideas or posting a contrary opinion, can become a part of active learning, which might then be discussed and validated by professionals of the field. Moreover, adult learners must be prepared to be a part of the workforce and organisations which have already established their online presence” (Upadhyay, 2023, p. 14).

In their study into adult education and social media, LeNoue et al. (2011) emphasise that learners can create and sustain learning communities in online spaces by engaging in behaviours similar to those found in traditional, face-to-face interactions. They note that “ongoing interaction is the foundational theme underlying all these community-building behaviours” (LeNoue et al., 2011, p. 7) Effective course design acknowledges this dynamic and leverages the advantages provided by online tools.

Supporters of using social networks in adult education highlight that these platforms mirror the dynamics of in-person discussions, which can enhance students’ commitment, engagement, and sense of connection with one another.

While online collaboration has long existed in adult learning contexts, the growing prevalence of social networking has made it more accessible and user-friendly. As many individuals are already familiar with popular platforms like Facebook, they can transition to other similar networks without the added pressure of learning new technologies.

Moreover, social networks foster a sense of learner ownership and facilitate quick exchanges of questions and answers among participants, reducing reliance on instructors or trainers for support (European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2015).

Mukute et al. (2020) studied the impact of ICT in sparking online educational innovations in formal and non-formal education spaces, including small group community-based learning, in Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe during the COVID-19 pandemic. They found improvised online learning during this period led to:

- “...more contextualised responses to education and learning” (Mukute et al., 2020, p.11), where people were able to use online learning to improvise quick adaptations

to the situation at the time;

- A stronger link between education and sustainable development in that adult learners implemented education around livelihoods (vegetable gardening) immediately (Mukute et al., 2020, p.11);
- And the “fostering of responsible educational activism” (Mukute et al., 2020, p.11). This was where poorly resourced learners were assisted technologically by more affluent families. The authors recommended that these “context-appropriate improvisations” (Mukute et al., 2020, p.4) should be expanded in future. The researchers pointed out that “when successful improvisation goes beyond survival it can lead to innovation that...enables continuous improvement of practice” (Leybourne & Kennedy, 2015 in Mukute et al., 2020, p.8).

However, they also highlighted hindrances to e-learning – this included the lack of learners’ resources to buy data, electricity outages, Wi-Fi connectivity disruptions, and a lack of in-person support for learners which caused some to lose interest in the courses (in this case, Zoom classes).

Another problem found was that the home as a learning space does not always work well if families do not have separate spaces for learners to use. This study also found that women learners had an increased burden of housework to accomplish during the day which sometimes derailed their ability to study online from home. This is something that would need to be considered by ALE organisations when setting up online learning courses.

3 (j) Specific uses of social media in ALE

This section is a review of the literature that looks at case studies of how social media is used to educate adults, and what challenges have been identified. For example, Zoom has been used for several years to deliver education to learners who are not physically present, but this has led to the phenomenon of Zoom-multitasking (Santarossa et al., 2021) – where learners switch off their sound and cameras during classes and go about other business.

Using WhatsApp and Instagram as platforms for learning in addition to in-person learning has been found to “elicit agency, deep learning, reflection, and critical thinking among students in higher education” (Santarossa, et al., 2021, p.3) mainly because it encourages interaction between students and casts the educator as more of a facilitator of the discussion. This is in part because social media itself is a form of technology that people have become familiar with as creative of community, knowledge generation and sharing (Santarossa, 2021). Many, if not most, learners would be very comfortable with interacting on social media.

One research study looked at how learning material was posted in several Instagram posts to meet six learning outcomes based on health and wellness (in university teaching). The task for the learners was to interact with the posts, and the researchers measured both the nature of the interaction from learners and the most popular words contained in learners' replies to the posts. They found (Santarossa, 2021) that students were very enthusiastic about Instagram as a platform for learning and frequently engaged the educator. However, they did not engage each other much, something the researchers attributed to the platform (Instagram) and the assignment, which was "to post, not engage in discussion" (Santarossa, 2021, p.10). There are techniques that can be designed to overcome this, including asking learners to "tag fellow classmates or peers in their posts and/or post questions in their captions to elicit greater conversation" (Al-Bahrani & Patel, 2015 in Santarossa, 2021, p.10).

Most of the literature available investigates distance and hybrid learning using social media in tertiary institutions. In tertiary education and even in secondary schools, using social media as a teaching tool is becoming more commonplace, particularly since the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown when using WhatsApp to teach in secondary schools in South Africa at least, became government policy.

However, Adedire and Ojediji (2017) have investigated the use of WhatsApp to deliver tutorials to advanced level learners in adult literacy courses.

In this study, the educators created a WhatsApp group and sent individualised modules to learners. This was set up so that modules would only be sent when the previous one had been completed. To complete each module, the learner would have to answer a set of questions (Adedire and Ojediji, 2017). Learners would need to repeat modules if the answers showed they had not mastered the module. This research found that it was vital to space the content out enough so that it did not overwhelm the learners, who were also working at jobs during the day, as is the case with many adult learners.

The research also found that to maintain enthusiasm by learners, modules needed to be marked and sent back to learners very quickly (Adedire and Ojediji, 2017). Another advantage for learners of delivering the course via WhatsApp was that it was easier to access and participate on a personal phone than on a shared computer (Adedire and Ojediji, 2017).

Kofi (2018) explored how to create a distance learning course entirely based on WhatsApp in rural Ghana where both electricity and internet are unreliable. Course materials were sent to learners via WhatsApp, assignments were returned via WhatsApp and grades were sent out via WhatsApp. The educator became more of a facilitator in learner-to-learner

interactions on WhatsApp and also monitored the WhatsApp group to see what kind of interactions were taking place.

This project archived transcripts of all WhatsApp conversations to use the information to improve the course in the future (Kofi, 2018). Surveying 807 university students, more than half of whom worked full time as well as studying, this study found that WhatsApp was very helpful to learners who would otherwise have struggled to access lectures and learning material. However, “intentional designs and a step-by-step approach to teach both the faculty and the students how to use the application to achieve the utmost outcomes” were essential in creating a quality learning experience (Kofi, 2018, p.51).

The literature highlights some of the advantages of using WhatsApp in educating as supportive to “collaborative learning environments” (Rambe & Bere, 2020, p.29) between learner and educator and also useful in creating “informal and instantaneous” (Rambe & Bere, 2020, p.32) ways for learners to share important learning material with each other, not only in class but at other convenient times of the day, such as while taking public transport or sitting alone in the library. This served as a good example of asynchronous online learning.

In this study, a participant pointed out that it was easier to learn when there was constant discussion of “concepts and problems” (p.30) in the WhatsApp group and that students saw this as “a pooling together...our collective minds helped us develop diverse perspectives, and understand concepts more clearly” (Rambe & Bere, 2020, p.30). Learning on social media was found to be valuable particularly outside of class, when learners would previously have been studying alone at home (Rambe & Bere, p. 20).

The available literature also speaks to the use of delivering awareness programmes via social media. Lim et al. (2022) have found that young people particularly are turning away from Facebook and Twitter towards Instagram, Snapchat, and Tik Tok which contain more video content. This has implications for adult educators who may need to adapt social media based courses to different platforms depending on the preferences of their learner group, or the ages of their learner group. This is highlighted further in the discussion section by some interviewees who note that TikTok can be used in ALE for educating younger learners, while older learners generally do not tend to use the TikTok app and prefer WhatsApp and Facebook.

3 (k) Online communities of practice as effective spaces for ALE

The topic of online or virtual communities of practice appears frequently in the literature on this subject. A virtual or online community of practice is defined as a group of people who work together for the purposes of learning. A key feature of these communities is their

“ability to generate excitement, relevance, and value to attract and engage members” (Sibbald, et al., 2022, p.2) which they do through prioritising participation and fostering free discussion among their members (Sibbald, et al, 2022).

For example, in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, a WhatsApp group that is used as an e-learning forum by educators to expand their own teaching practice and professional education is one example of an online community of practice (Ajani, 2021). In this study, one of the findings was that WhatsApp groups are particularly useful for educators’ professional development when discussions and information can be shared on a particular topic to be taught – including a sharing and pooling of useful audio and video clips – in other words for ongoing curriculum development.

3 (I) Obstacles to using social media in ALE

There is a dearth of research into this topic. The results of studies into how tertiary education students benefit from being taught with the help of social media may not be applicable to adult learners in adult education programmes.

Some learnings can be drawn from the research into using social media as a teaching tool in secondary and tertiary institutions. For example, Rambe & Bere (2013) found that university students who were adult learners with families said it could disrupt their family lives if they were drawn into receiving learning material and participating in WhatsApp discussions at any time of the day or night. These learners described this as “blurring the academic and social divide”, “anti-social” and “disruptive of family life” (Rambe & Bere, 2013, p.35).

Some of the documented drawbacks to using social media in adult education include a lack of suitable devices. Yeboah and Nyagorme’s 2022 study of the use of WhatsApp in tertiary distance education (both undergraduate and postgraduate), found that institutions of learning would need to make sure that every learner had access to a mobile phone that supported WhatsApp, before rolling out teaching using this medium.

The rollout of teaching via WhatsApp needs to occur in a digitally inclusive way, and with the knowledge that unequal access to suitable devices and unreliable network connectivity can prove to be obstacles (Rambe & Bere, 2020). However, Rambe and Chipumza (2013) and Jackson (2019) have found that WhatsApp, as an inexpensive and accessible form of technology, works especially well in Sierra Leone and in other developing economies.

Dauids et al. (2024) point out that in their study of how secondary school teachers in underdeveloped communities in South Africa use social media to educate, that the teachers themselves also do not always have the devices necessary for WhatsApp teaching. Files also need to be small, as learners will not always have the data to download large files.

3 (m) Conclusion

E-Learning must be harnessed for ALE. The literature available highlights important factors for adult learning providers to consider when designing courses for delivery on social media. The first is that the learning institution needs to really prepare the course and its materials well and follow a step-by-step approach in the course delivery, including archiving the whole WhatsApp course transcript and using this to reflect on the quality of the course (Kofi, 2018).

The second is that WhatsApp is an inexpensive form of tech that can enhance accessibility to adult education particularly for students who are not physically based near ALE centres. However, when delivering the courses, educators must assess whether every learner has a suitable device because if not, some learners will be excluded from the benefits of course delivery by social media.

The third is that learning from home can be difficult for students who lack data and a learning space, and for women who may be disturbed by needing to do housework.

The final lesson is that educators must monitor the WhatsApp group messaging when teaching via WhatsApp to minimise distractions. In other words, to make sure that learners are using their time on WhatsApp for group collaboration around the work being taught, and not to distract each other - the educator must also be very active in facilitating learner to learner discussion and interaction (Jackson, 2019).

4. Methodology

4 (a) Introduction

This qualitative research explores the role of social media in Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in Southern Africa, focusing on its current uses, challenges, and potential to enhance educational practices. The study uses a qualitative approach to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives and experiences of stakeholders in the ALE sector.

4 (b) Research design: rationale for qualitative research approach

The research design is the map which the research study follows. It “provides the framework for the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, dos Santos, du Toit, Masenge, Van Aardt, & Wagner, 2014).

In other words, research design is the overarching methodical strategy for conducting research from the start to completion (Yin, 2009, p. 20).

A qualitative research approach was selected for this study because it provides, in-depth insights with descriptive details and is suitable for understanding the complexities of the research topic as it were explored across Southern Africa. Qualitative research focuses on understanding phenomena in their natural context, specifically in real-world settings where the researcher observes without trying to influence or alter the situation (Patton, 2001, as cited in Golafshani, 2003).

Qualitative research methods are useful in studying social contexts and providing detailed accounts of experience (Barbour, 2008). They also illuminate processes within workplaces and organisations which “allows us to examine how changes affect daily procedures and interactions” (Barbour, 2008, p.16). Qualitative research also allows the researcher to enter the lifeworlds of people involved in a phenomenon, such as adult educators delivering education programmes and academics involved in researching the digital future of adult education, allowing for a more accurate description of the activities being undertaken by the research participants. Qualitative research is defined as any type of research that generates findings without relying on statistical methods or numerical analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Instead, it emphasises insights that naturally arise from real-world settings (Patton, 2001, as cited in Golafshani, 2003)

4 (c) Research questions

This research report uses qualitative research to answer the following research questions:

1. What types of social media are different stakeholders in the ALE environment in southern Africa using to deliver ALE?
2. What is social media being used for and by whom (at the macro, meso and micro levels)?
3. How do stakeholders in the ALE environment combine the use of social media with face-to-face teaching - in other words, how social media has become part of blended learning pedagogies?

4 (d) Sampling strategy

This study employed a purposive sampling strategy to ensure the inclusion of diverse and relevant perspectives on the use of social media in Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in southern Africa. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to select participants who are particularly knowledgeable about or experienced with the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). This approach aligns with the study's aim to gather rich, detailed insights into the opportunities and challenges associated with integrating social media into ALE. Purposive samples are useful when researching people from a specific profession who are assumed to possess information that is relevant to the research question (Tongco, 2007). In several cases, we were referred to ALE participants who are known in the sector for advancing digital methods by other practitioners working in ALE.

4 (e) Participant selection

Participants for the study were selected based on their expertise, roles, and experiences in the ALE sector. Three distinct groups were included to capture a range of perspectives:

4. Individuals with in-depth knowledge of ALE and the integration of technology in educational practices, including academics. These participants provided a deeper understanding of trends and systemic challenges.
5. Practitioners: Educators, facilitators, and programme coordinators directly involved in delivering ALE programmes. Their insights shed light on the practical applications and barriers of using social media in adult education settings.
6. Activists: Advocates working at the intersection of education and social justice, particularly in underserved communities. These participants contributed unique perspectives on equity, access, and the transformative potential of social media in ALE.

This approach ensured that the sample reflected a variety of roles within the ALE ecosystem, enhancing the study's depth and breadth of analysis (Creswell, 2013).

4 (f) Selection process

Participants were identified through professional networks, organisational affiliations, and referrals. This selection process ensured voluntary participation and allowed for informed consent, in line with ethical research practices (Bryman, 2016).

To identify participants, we used an online survey to reach out to 198 adult education practitioners actively engaged in delivering adult education, or co-ordinating or working in adult education organisations, or working as educators in organisations that offer education to adults and that engage in campaigns and awareness raising activities, such as labour service organisations, human rights film festivals, and paralegal training organisations (please see survey questions attached in Appendix A). We targeted this purposive sample of people from the adult education field based in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Malawi and Mozambique with the aim of generating the kind of "rich sources of data" (Gerrish & Lacey, 2010, p. 149) that were needed to explore the research questions.

4 (g) Sample size and rationale

We received 7 survey responses and interviewed a total of 19 participants. Each interview ranged from 35 to 55 minutes. Our semi-structured interviews were arranged "around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee / s" (Crabtree & DiCicco-Bloom, 2006, p. 515). The interviews were transcribed and then coded (please see Appendix D).

The number of participants interviewed reflected a balance between capturing diverse perspectives and maintaining a manageable data set for in-depth qualitative analysis. While qualitative research does not rely on large sample sizes, it emphasises the quality and richness of the data collected (Patton, 2002).

4 (h) Ethical considerations

The sampling process adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects, ensuring transparency and respect throughout the research process. This ensured that all participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the option to withdraw at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained to protect participant identities and ensure the integrity of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

By using purposive sampling, the study effectively captured the complex interplay between social media and ALE in southern Africa, drawing on the expertise and experiences of individuals directly engaged with these systems. This approach provided a robust foundation for understanding the potential and challenges of integrating social media into adult education.

4 (i) Data collection methods

Data for the study was gathered through two primary methods:

1. **Survey:**

A survey was used to collect initial insights from a broad sample of participants involved in ALE. The survey included both open-ended and closed-ended questions to capture a mix of quantitative and qualitative data. This approach helped to identify patterns in the use of social media, key barriers, and opportunities for its integration into adult education practices.

2. **Semi-Structured Interviews:**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to delve deeper into the experiences and viewpoints of individuals actively engaged in ALE. This method allowed for flexibility in questioning, enabling participants to share detailed narratives while ensuring consistency across interviews through a set of guiding questions.

4 (j) Data analysis

The data collected through surveys and interviews was analysed using thematic analysis. This approach involved identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns within the data to highlight key themes related to the use of social media in ALE. Themes such as current practices, barriers to adoption, potential for innovation, and training needs emerged as central to understanding the use of social media and adult education in southern Africa.

4 (k) Validity and reliability limitations

In qualitative research, ensuring validity and reliability involves adopting strategies that enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2017). However, inherent limitations exist due to the nature of qualitative inquiry and the specific context of this study, which explores the use of social media in Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in Southern Africa.

Validity in qualitative research refers to the accuracy and authenticity of the findings, ensuring they reflect the perspectives and experiences of the participants (Lincoln & Guba,

1985). While efforts were made to enhance validity through triangulation—combining data from the survey and semi-structured interviews—several challenges remain.

1. **Context-Specific Findings:** The study's focus on Southern Africa means the findings are contextualised and may not fully apply to other regions with differing socio-economic or technological environments. This limitation highlights the need for cautious generalisation.
2. **Researcher Subjectivity:** As the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, the researchers' interpretation could introduce bias (Patton, 2002). Reflexivity was maintained throughout the process, with the researchers critically examining their assumptions and biases.

Reliability in qualitative research refers to the consistency and dependability of the findings (Creswell, 2013). In this study, several factors influenced reliability:

1. **Varied Participant Backgrounds:** Participants included experts, practitioners, and activists, resulting in diverse perspectives. While this enriched the data, it also introduced variability in experiences and interpretations, which could challenge consistency across responses.
2. **Dynamic Nature of Social Media:** The rapid evolution of social media platforms and their functionalities means that findings may quickly become outdated. This limitation highlights the need for ongoing research to capture changes in technology and its use in ALE. For example, WhatsApp and other platforms continuously have new updates.
3. **Limited Sample Size:** The sample size, while sufficient for qualitative research, may not capture the full range of perspectives across the ALE ecosystem in southern Africa. Purposive sampling ensured relevance but may have excluded voices from less-represented regions or demographics.

4 (I) Mitigation strategies

To address these limitations, the study employed the following strategy:

- **Triangulation:** Data was cross-verified using survey results and interviews to strengthen the credibility of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Despite these efforts, the limitations inherent in qualitative research remain. Future studies could adopt a mixed-methods approach or expand the sample size to address these challenges and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the use of social media in ALE.

5. Discussion

5 (a) Survey results

This section presents the findings from an online survey conducted as part of this study. The main aim of the survey was to understand the extent to which social media platforms are used for ALE, and the benefits and challenges of the use of social media in ALE.

The survey was distributed to 198 respondents within the adult education sector, of whom seven completed the questionnaire. The response rate was lower than anticipated. However, many of the respondents made themselves available for in-depth interviews or referred the researchers to adult educators who are currently using social media in education programmes. The data collected also provided valuable insights into current practices and attitudes regarding the use of social media in adult education.

The survey consisted of questions designed to capture both the frequency and purpose of social media use, as well as perceptions of social media's effectiveness. Questions, among others, explored what are the most useful platforms for educational purposes and how social media facilitates connections between learners and educators.

Additionally, respondents were asked about their likelihood of recommending social media as a teaching and learning tool to their peers and learners. The responses offer a nuanced understanding of how social media is currently being utilised in ALE, highlighting its potential benefits while also identifying challenges to its adoption.

These are the survey results:

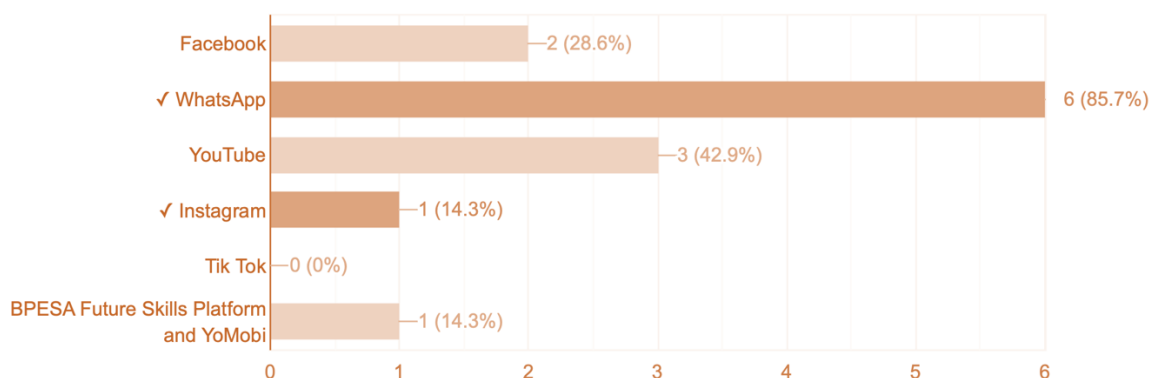
Q1: What do you use social media for?

- Checking on Email and WhatsApp centre conversations.
- Training youth and out-of-school young people.
- For raising awareness, raising the profile of my organisation communication, sometimes hold a meeting, share updates, discover news and trends, network professionally.
- Communication, news/information, education, debate.
- For updates regarding meetings.
- Communicate, organisation, learning.

Q2:

Which social media platforms do you find most useful for learning or discussing educational content in your adult education courses?

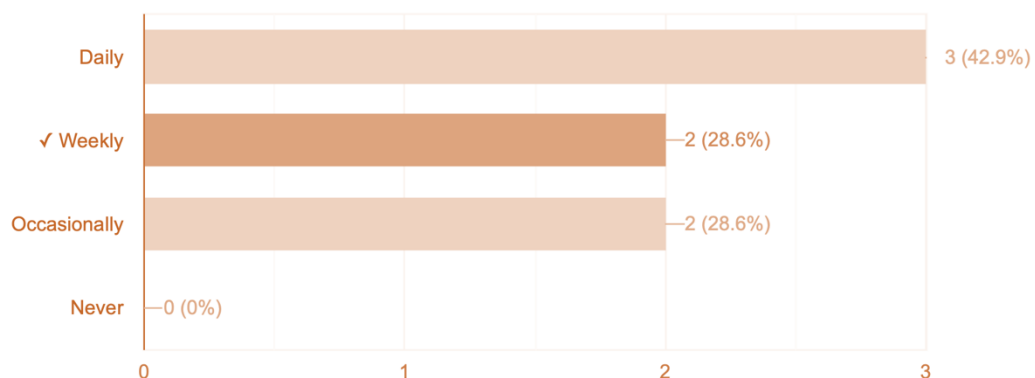
0 / 7 correct responses



Q3:

How often do you use social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube) as part of teaching adult education?

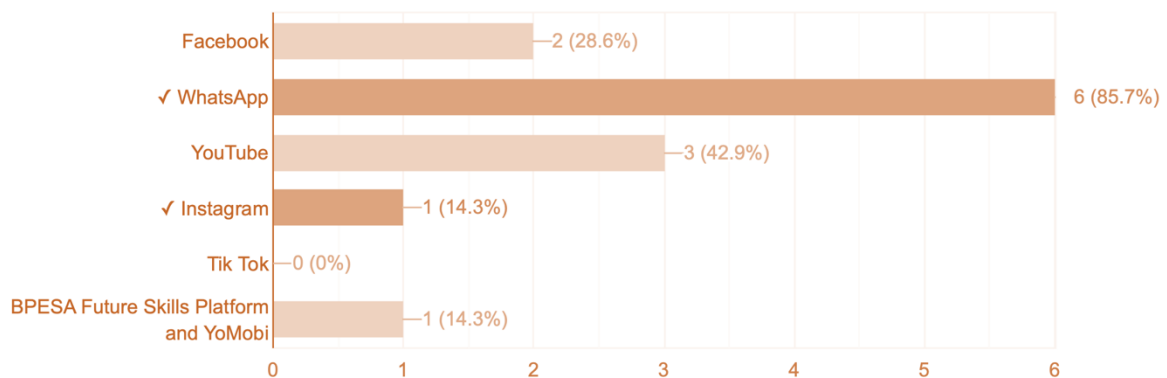
2 / 7 correct responses



Q4:

Which social media platforms do you find most useful for learning or discussing educational content in your adult education courses?

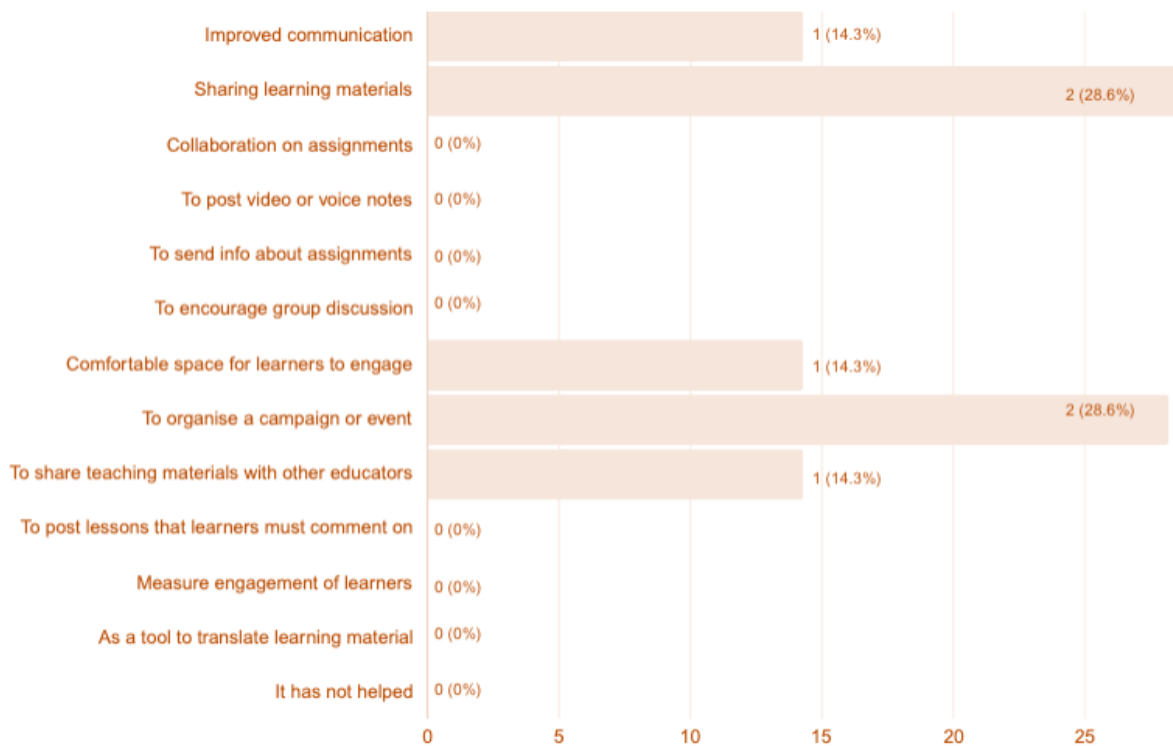
0 / 7 correct responses



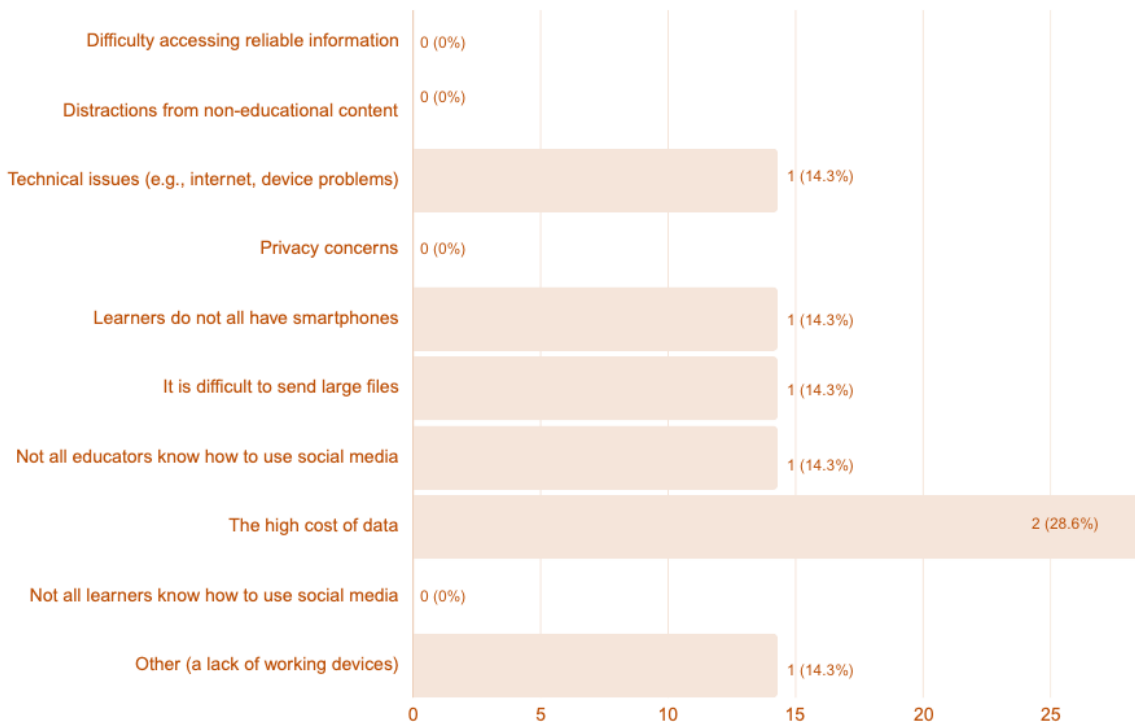
Q5: Please explain why you find the option you selected above most useful for learning or discussing educational content in your adult education courses:

- This uses less data.
- Cost and access considerations.
- These are my preferred social media platforms. And I find them useful educational resources.
- Cost-effective: I find WhatsApp is very affordable and you can easily check who has read the message if you post in a group or send to individuals, making it very effective.
- Instant Messaging: It allows for quick and easy messaging, making it great for conversations, very effective.
- Voice and Video Calls: Users can make free voice and video calls, which is a big draw for staying connected.
- Group Chats: WhatsApp makes it easy to create group chats for friends, family, or work, helping to keep everyone in the loop.
- End-to-End Encryption: This feature enhances privacy and security, making users feel safer when sharing messages.
- Media Sharing: Users can easily share photos, videos, documents, and voice messages.
- Cross-Platform Use: It works on various devices, including smartphones and computers, allowing for flexibility.

Q6: In what ways has social media helped you connect with your fellow learners and fellow instructors or educators?



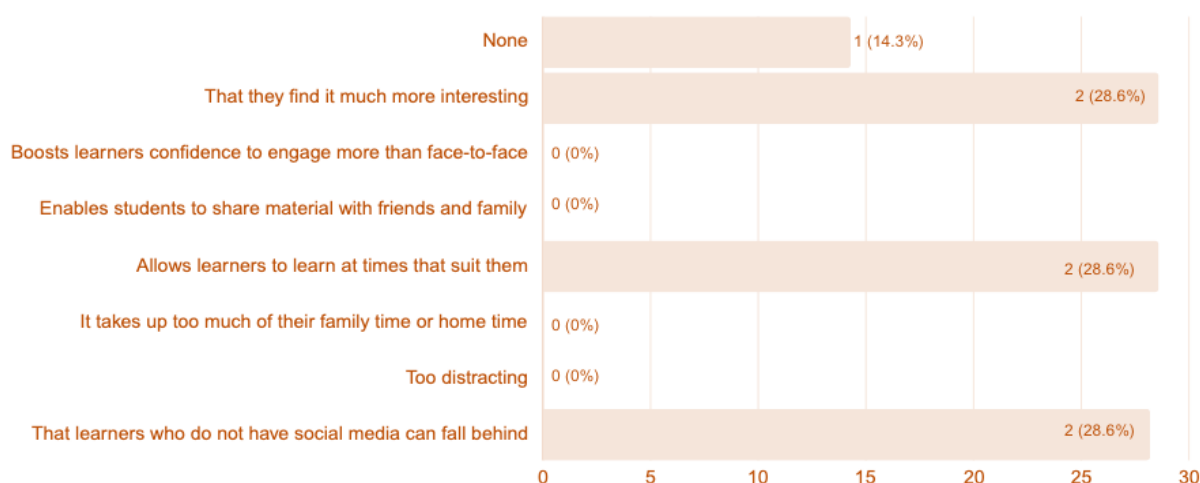
Q7: What challenges have you faced as an adult educator when utilising social media in your teaching?



Q8: If you have not started using social media as an educating tool yet, can you think of some ways it might be useful?

- Not applicable.
- Morning or afternoon studying.
- I'm already using it.
- I am using it, so I guess this question does not apply to me.
- We only use social media for communication with the adult education instructors.
- None.

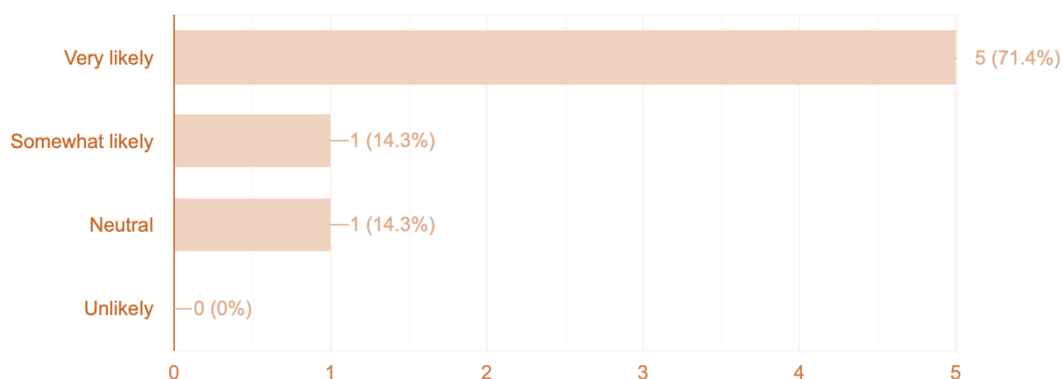
Q9: What feedback have you received from learners about your use of social media as a teaching tool?



Q10:

How likely are you to recommend the use of social media to other adult learners to enhance their learning experience?

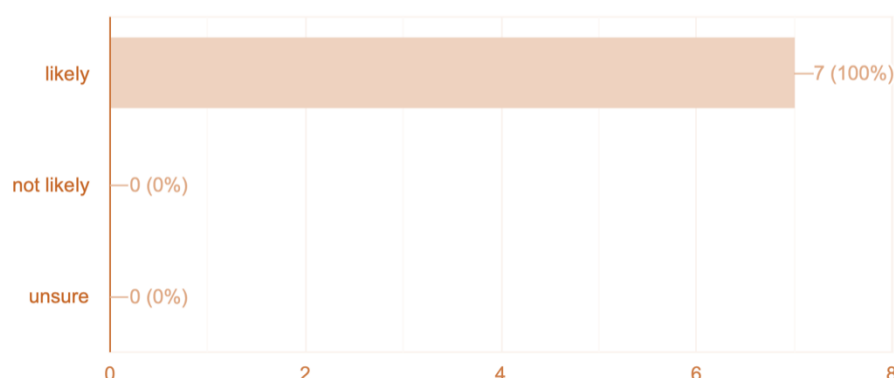
0 / 7 correct responses



Q11:

How likely are you to recommend the use of social media to other adult education lecturers to enhance their teaching experience?

0 / 7 correct responses



5 (b) Qualitative interviews

This study explores the role of social media in Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in southern Africa, focusing on its potential to enhance learning and address challenges faced by educators and learners. The research explored how digital platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube, among others, are being utilised in adult education, the barriers to their effective use, and the innovative strategies being developed or thought about to overcome these challenges.

Data for this section was collected through semi-structured interviews with experts, academics and practitioners in the field of adult education in southern Africa. These data collection methods provided valuable insights into the practical applications of social media in ALE and the broader implications for educational equity and access in the region.

The data is broken down into a number of themes. The discussion reveals both opportunities and challenges. Social media is widely recognised as a cost-effective and an accessible tool for sharing knowledge, encouraging collaboration, and for the dissemination of educational content, among other things. However, significant barriers such as limited digital literacy, high data costs, and unreliable internet connectivity persist, highlighting the need for context-specific solutions. The discussion also highlights the value and potential of co-creating learning materials with students, using local languages, and providing targeted training to both educators and learners to maximise the benefits of social media in adult education.

Interviewees

We interviewed 16 educators from Mozambique, Malawi and South Africa and three social media experts. We have separated an analysis of their data into two sections.

The educator group was made up of educators and organisers from non-profit organisations; a co-ordinator of a film festival project that uses WhatsApp to help educate and give skills to women in impoverished communities to tell their own stories; a co-ordinator of a southern African regional network of non-profit organisations involved in worker and human rights; an adult training institute that offers formal and non-formal education programmes, seminars and short courses; three academics from different universities who work in the field of continuing post-school education and one of the three as facilitator of collective activist learning spaces; an individual who ran a disability rights non-profit, and an online education expert from a leading university in South Africa. Additionally, there was a professional who manages a social media and content production company, along with educators from the adult education sector. The group also featured activists focused on social justice and disability rights.

The non-profit training organisations had all been in existence for between 13 and 41 years, conducting adult education programmes for the entire time. Two of these organisations work extensively across the southern Africa region, bringing adult activists from a wide range of different movements, including community radio, farming, labour rights and land rights together for in-person workshops and they also connected via meetings on social media platforms.

They had immense experience in the different forms of adult education and in making the shift from in-person training to digital training during the COVID-19 pandemic and back again to in-person and more hybrid training.

PART ONE: Interviews with educators

How social media is currently used in ALE

Almost all participants, particularly practitioners in the ALE space and who were interviewed for this study, explained that social media platforms specifically WhatsApp are used as cost-effective and accessible tools for various learning purposes, including monitoring facilitators and supervisors, sharing materials such as booklets, homework, tasks and facilitating information sharing in local languages.

WhatsApp and Facebook played an important role in supporting adult learning and education (ALE) in Mozambique, South Africa and Malawi.

Participants said they found social media useful in delivering adult education and learning because it allowed for classes or workshops to be delivered at an optimal time and it allowed for the inclusion of more learners:

“It is valuable. With certain costs in terms of transport, and in terms of time, with social media you can have more sessions in a day, it allows individuals to sometimes agree on certain times where almost everyone’s free, unlike when the lecturer is available in class at a set time and half the learners are not available” – said a participant who works in educating adult factory workers about GBV.

“Very useful. For us, it would mean we don’t exclude people who wouldn’t necessarily have access to our education, so it would be a way to include all of them” – said a participant from a training institute that mainly runs in-person programmes.

WhatsApp was the best platform for interaction and discussion and resolving concerns instantly, said participants. One of the advantages of WhatsApp was that it created virtual communities in ALE, according to one participant, with a sense of belonging.

Two participants said social media enabled education in several different languages simultaneously, which made education more accessible. Another participant cited another advantage, saying that younger learners had already mastered social media and used it extensively. They were able to master new technological developments easily and commonly taught parents and elders. For these reasons, delivering education over social media was a good idea.

Other reasons to support social media-delivered ALE were that it allowed for independent learning, and for discussion groups such as WhatsApp groups to be set up where intense discussion could take place on one topic.

It also had the potential to bring adult learners together to learn from each other:

“It could be good in terms of bringing together people from different organisations and a wider platform, it means they come into contact with others, they learn from others, they don’t feel like they’re alone, so that feeling of being alone is kind of eliminated. It’s one way of people connecting” – participant from a southern Africa regional organisation.

The participants said they already used social media widely for a range of adult education-related activities. These included using social media platforms to hold meetings, to deliver educational material that learners could view later, and as a broad learning platform where learners can extract whatever they are able to and whatever they found most useful.

For example, an academic who worked with different communities around the issue of fishing said her organisation used WhatsApp as an activist learning platform where voice

notes, images or graphics, photos, videos, polls and text messages could be used to facilitate “many effective conversations”:

“The fact that all that is shared is stored and visible to all members of the group at any time, means that fishers who are out at sea for periods of time, are able to catch up on the chat when they are able to. This is an advantage over scheduled online meetings. We sometimes hold Zoom or WhatsApp video call meetings, but many people struggle to participate because of poor connectivity. If we share content over WhatsApp, people are able to download it when they are in a place with WiFi or better signal” - participant.

The participants who work with city-based factory workers described Facebook and TikTok as cost-effective. These participants said that workers customarily downloaded content when they had access to Wi-Fi and then shared the content with other people at home and in their communities. However, other participants who worked with rural people and villagers said they had not considered using Instagram or TikTok:

“If you look at TikTok, most of the audience are young people and we work with adults who are very senior citizens. We look at how easy the platform is to access. TikTok is too modern for older people and limited in length but WhatsApp voice notes are much easier – you just press and listen” – academic who works with rural people.

The participants also identified that they are currently using WhatsApp for the following additional purposes:

- Facilitating participatory governance participation – translating, summarising and contextualising policies / regulations / environmental impact assessments, legal judgements.
- In campaign settings, to facilitate the drafting of alternative positions on issues (get input from all members of the group to formulate a position).
- Mainly as a means of communication - to advertise courses, meetings and other education forums to participate in.
- As a way of getting more immediate feedback from learners who might otherwise respond slowly to an email.
- *“Yes, teachers and students share resources via the internet. Tasks like demonstrations are uploaded to WhatsApp for marking and moderation.”*
- *"We are using WhatsApp for working purposes...to monitor our facilitators and supervisors in the field...we share materials such as booklets...people see this on time without too much cost... Facilitators record and share lessons in groups. In the digital era, mobile phones are underutilised.”*

- *“Photography of local activities done in the class and in the field we use WhatsApp...attendees will use the WhatsApp—for example facilitators use WhatsApp - send exercises homework and materials for reading to the students...not all classes but some of them...they have group works...they have some activities such as organising meetings online...”*

This participant from the Gauteng province in South Africa added:

“Learners use WhatsApp to share study materials and stay connected despite challenges like being located in different areas. Those who miss class can still access information through the platform”.

Two participants said they already used WhatsApp a great deal in educating. They converted most inputs made at workshops into voice notes, converting pamphlets to jpegs and short pieces of text, and converting booklets to infographics which could all be sent to WhatsApp groups:

So what we’ve done is used those social media platforms for disseminating and getting feedback on infographics. Also used social media for pulling people into our events in relation to making sure they have connection if they don’t have Zoom or Teams, so that’s proven particularly useful for people in far-flung areas where their access is very minimal – participant from a labour research and training institute.

A human rights awareness film festival co-ordinator said that the flexibility (in terms of space and time) of online learning was well known and that learners who were short of time appreciated that online training was “compressed”.

Participants pointed out that Facebook and WhatsApp address the challenges of resource-limited settings by enabling communication and learning in local languages while reducing logistical and transportation costs. Additionally, there is widespread use of Facebook and WhatsApp.

For example, a participant highlighted the following:

“The majority of people here are not using Skype or Zoom because they are not familiar with it, but it’s cheaper to create WhatsApp groups”.

This participant reflected on the platform’s ability to reduce time and costs associated with in-person training, stating;

“I’ve used WhatsApp to deliver courses...it is time-reducing...maximise the time and minimise the cost”.

And a different participant from Mozambique pointed out that the use of social media is a cost saver:

“It’s possible to have a whole course on Facebook...its professional if your compare to Zoom...WhatsApp and Facebook is easy for learners to get in touch and can provide the course...I’ve used WhatApp to deliver course...it is time reducing...maximise the time...and minimise the costs and don’t need to pay transport costs for someone to travel to the centre in Maputo...we agree on time and participants to join - that’s who we provide the trainings...not only for learning purposes but also for business purposes...when we are working in field...no internet access...put on mobile phone and have the meeting...when they don’t have data the students we provide them data to access...in our case depending on network some not very expensive...5 euros or 2 euros to have data for month depending on network”.

“There is one element that I can express...you find that certain educators who are not using social media as a teaching approach...it’s all of them, it’s some of us... they are saying that learners must come to class...even registration I’m using WhatsApp and Facebook for recruiting learners...through social media they can contact us and can refer them to nearest adult centres close to them...”

As the above highlights, Facebook is mentioned for its potential to deliver adult education effectively, as it allows for broad accessibility and cost-efficiency.

Additionally, while there appears to be widespread adoption of particularly Facebook and WhatsApp platforms for information sharing, half of the interviewees (eight) were not using Facebook for ALE – they only used WhatsApp.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic was mentioned by 10 of the interviewees, including practitioners, experts or activists in ALE as a gamechanger with regards to the use of optimal and beneficial technology and social media for information sharing and connecting with others. It changed the usual order of business, and the adult education sector was not exempt according to those interviewed.

This participant from Mozambique stated that:

“Social media increases interaction between learners and educators. After COVID-19, connectivity improved, fostering knowledge sharing and group creation...WhatsApp appears as a formal way of communicationthis is what we learnt from

Covid...formal way of how people can exchange information...majority of people not using Skype or Zoom they are not familiar ...but cheaper to create WhatsApp we use local languages...facilitator and learners share information about many things like agriculture, financial education, climate change...”

A disability rights activist from Kwa-Zulu Natal in South Africa who worked in adult learning in her field found that COVID-19 also forced many to adopt social media for connection and information:

“During COVID-19, a WhatsApp group was used for carers and community-based rehabilitation (CBR) workers to share ideas for children with disabilities. It served as a support network and was very active with daily messages”.

Furthermore, for activists in the ALE space the use of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic was illuminating in terms of its capacity to disseminate messages quickly and clearly:

“During COVID we couldn’t go around...I saw the power of social media...we doing the awareness campaign...for those who are deaf and who could understand professional sign language it was easier for them to get information and access information than those who were deaf and could not understand professional sign language...I work with a sign language professional and she did a video clip (which we shared) and it made a huge difference...there are those who went to school and understood proper sign language and there are those who didn’t go to school to learn it but use sign language and fortunately the sign language was from the area so she was able to help them with sign language that they could understand...”

COVID-19 had sparked online and digital learning improvisations, said one of the academics who works with adult learners. “We started working strongly on WhatsApp from the time of COVID when we had to be innovative about how we worked together” said one participant. She even started a group to ensure that messages that went out about COVID were not fake news.

Making the shift to online ALE

The participants interviewed said none of them had yet delivered a programme from start to finish using social media. Many had shifted to more hybrid forms of working during COVID-19 and were now developing different ways of workshoping via WhatsApp. These were mainly participants who had to connect adult learners over very large geographic areas. Those organisations who conducted intensive three-day workshops or five-day schools, with several facilitators and guest speakers at each one, had largely returned to conducting mainly in-person training.

However, they welcomed the idea that a course could be run from start to finish on social media only, describing it as potentially very interesting and “a way to educate more”.

One participant also developed a process to conduct interactive workshops on WhatsApp where, as the educator, she asked learners to react with emojis at certain points in the workshop. Learners were also invited to send in voice notes at various times in the workshop, and to type comments on the WhatsApp group. In this way, she was able to conduct a workshop and encourage interaction while ensuring that the workshop ran in an orderly way.

Another participant said it would work well to run a Pan-African programme and bring together learners from different countries using a WhatsApp course. Another organisation was already in the process of developing short courses on specific topics to be run online using a platform called Articulate 360.

Participants felt that organisations should start optimising the use of WhatsApp. For example, learning materials could be re-packaged especially for delivery over WhatsApp and organisations could find ways to improve the facilitation of classes and discussions.

For example, one participant said her organisation mainly used WhatsApp voice notes because this was the most accessible way of exchanging information – it was quicker and assisted those participants who could not write. She said WhatsApp voice notes were particularly useful in collecting comments for a campaign that could later be typed up into a joint submission and shared for comment among participants in a WhatsApp group.

Participants also pointed to the value of using WhatsApp in the field – for example, crossing ‘live’ to outside experts for lectures and discussions from the field of study. A participant who uses film in education said his organisation already featured guest appearances from new educators live over WhatsApp. An academic participant said that short video clips from the field also worked well in ALE.

Another participant based in a university’s environmental learning unit said her organisation had livestreamed a consultation with government to learners who had poor connectivity and could only access WhatsApp, not Zoom or Teams:

“We then ‘live streamed’ the meeting over WhatsApp, typing summaries of what was being said or even recording sections and sharing on the group. Participants following over WhatsApp could share their comments or any point they wanted to raise on the WhatsApp group and those of us in the online meeting then conveyed these. So we could use the WhatsApp group as a bridging platform to improve participation in otherwise inaccessible public consultations” – participant.

WhatsApp is also a better platform than Zoom, said another participant, because the interaction it facilitates counters the “alienation that is introduced and often reinforced by online learning over Zoom”.

A different participant spoke of the need to package learning material differently on different social media platforms so that it met the needs of audiences of different ages, based in different areas, and who might have less data than others.

The value of social media and co-creation between learners and educators

Almost all participants agreed that social media was valuable for co-creative purposes and that the improvisations and innovations in co-creation during the COVID-19 pandemic, meant that there was still unexplored potential in the use of social media for ALE.

This participant from Mozambique explained:

“Yes, it’s valuable. Facilitators record and share lessons in groups. In the digital era, mobile phones are underutilised. Platforms like Google Meetings could enhance learning”.

Another valuable aspect of social media that participants mentioned was that it had the potential to support co-creation of curriculum between learners and educators.

“Yes, social media can enhance co-creation of the curriculum. Learners gain ownership by being involved. It reduces costs and maximises results, making learning sustainable and fostering a sense of belonging. Social media increases interaction between learners and educators”.

A participant explained using social media for co-creating curriculum as follows:

“Co-creating content begins with asking learners what they need and incorporating their feedback”.

Furthermore, it was broadly acknowledged that the use of social media in ALE catalysed collaboration.

This participant from Malawi pointed out:

“Social media allows for digital exchanges of information and learning. Videos can be shared across locations to showcase agricultural practices or other educational content, facilitating knowledge sharing and collaboration”.

While not strictly social media, one participant, described the value of an online course that allowed for more inclusion;

“A training course on community-based rehabilitation (CBR) was developed entirely online using Zoom. It included features like breakout rooms and interactive apps to engage participants, making it accessible to people with visual and physical disabilities”.

While the value of social media was applauded, an educator believed that teaching in real time and physically being in the same space is hugely helpful:

“Social media is valuable, especially as many learners are exposed to technology early. However, physical classroom interaction remains important for deeper understanding. Learners often benefit most when both in-person and online methods are combined”.

This participant noted that the use of social media increases interaction and can be used to increase interaction and engagement between educators and learners about course material and ALE:

“People are connected...if you are connected with another one...classroom interaction is facilitator and with participants...we need face-to-face trainings...classrooms interaction is possible via social media...yes it increases interaction ...after COVID-19 people are much more connected via social media...and sometimes people using WhatsApp and creating their own groups...social media increases interaction...in the past never heard of social media...after COVID-19 gained a knowledge of how social media works and how it can improve our knowledge and information sharing.”

However, at least eight participants said that processes to co-create courses or modules to be delivered over social media had not been planned or set out in writing and were mainly practised on an improvised basis:

For example, participants said social media platforms did encourage collaboration between learners, but this mainly happened in the form of discussions in WhatsApp groups. Sometimes a learner would post a news article or a write-up of a local issue to a WhatsApp group and this would stimulate a discussion.

Participants also said they saw more deliberative co-creation of courses as something that could only start later, once the initial steps of setting up social media-based courses had started:

“To start, we need to find the right social media platform which is accessible for everyone, and once they discover that, they can agree as to how they can use that platform to enable their project” – participant.

Another participant stated: “... we haven’t even gotten there yet in terms of that kind of use of social media”. This participant also said co-creation of courses would need to be managed carefully to minimise one of the disadvantages of social media – “miscommunication and misunderstanding if things aren't explained fully or they're not being able to be talked through fully”.

One of the main advantages of educating via WhatsApp was seen as it being a platform where learners could give feedback, responses to the material, reflections after in-person training and evaluations.

However, one academic was already working on a way for courses to be co-created using WhatsApp: an educator and a group could share material, seek comments from each other and work together virtually on preparing a course that they could later deliver via social media platforms.

Training in the use of social media

Almost all participants agreed that training in the relevant use of social media for adult education was essential in order to maximise its benefits for the purposes of learning. Many agreed that in the digital age, this would be a missed opportunity if not acted upon.

“Training on digital literacy and contextualising materials is essential. Facilitators and learners need guidance on creating accounts and using platforms like Skype and Facebook effectively”.

In agreement, another participant said:

“Training is needed on privacy and data security. Expertise should be brought in to provide clarity, especially on tools like Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), which raise privacy concerns”.

A VPN is a way of masking a private network, such as a home computer, when online. A VPN, encrypts users data and hides their IP address. This protect their browsing, identity, and location, giving them more privacy.

Part of the training should include editorial ethics and consent. “Hands-on training is needed to teach educators and learners the various facilities social media offers, such as marketing

farm produce or tailoring products”, said one participant. “Editorial ethics should be followed, emphasising informed consent and clear communication about the purpose of shared information. Social media’s public nature requires careful consideration of what is appropriate to post”, said another.

A participant also mentioned that older people would need training on how to use social media and more generally for training around spotting factual news and being able to discern accurate news from fake news.

“Social media is fine for certain age groups - it’s more difficult for older adults to use who have less exposure to smartphones. One area is to learn the capacities and capabilities of different social media platforms - what one can do with Facebook, YouTube etc...and being proficient at that. I just think that it’s good practice for people to have an awareness of what is useful information and what can be fake information on social media and the ethics around usage...”

Barriers to Effective Use of Social Media

The participants identified numerous current barriers but also set out ways that these could be overcome. The first was an apparent bias towards the use of social media according to age.

This participant from Villiersdorp in the Western Cape province of South Africa explained:

“No, I haven’t explored it fully. I’ve used WhatsApp mainly to upload notes for students attending class. At my age, I am comfortable doing this, but I haven’t looked into other uses”.

The responses from participants also indicated that they were not aware of the full capabilities of social media that could be leveraged for ALE:

“No, I only use Facebook to advertise courses offered at the centre”.

Other barriers include state sanctioned access to the internet which hindered access to social media. For example, at the time the interviews were conducted post-election protests were taking place in Mozambique and a participant described the difficulty with this.

“Facebook yes...most the young people those youth they use Facebook and they use Twitter...YouTube—emails. Not yet...because the problem Mozambique how to acquire resources to use media for whole class which has maximum 20 students and sometimes most them they don’t have qualified phone so it is quite difficult lack of resources...the internet we have is very expensive in Mozambique...in these days the

government cut off internet...sometimes we get midnight or early in the morning...we have difficulties ...because of the protests the government ...apart from that it's quite expensive it's not everyone has money to get internet...if you don't 100...airtime is expensive..."

A further barrier was that while participants appreciated being able to access learning from a great distance that they would not have been able to access before, and they appreciated the connection with other learners who could be elsewhere in southern Africa. They cautioned that online training also needs to meet specific language needs:

"...the challenge comes mainly from not being able to access topics due to language, complexity of the topics, and because these topics are not always able to be unpacked on social media to a level at which learners are able to connect the dots around certain topics", said a participant who co-ordinates a southern Africa project.

Another participant echoed a point highlighted by previous research – that on a WhatsApp group, many learners would want to hold discussions during the evening, after work, and other learners would be too busy caring for their families at that time and would miss the discussion. Often the educator would also not be available at that time to respond to questions.

Several participants said their experience was that online learning platforms are much enhanced when the group can meet in person for a workshop at some stage – preferably early on, and again towards the end of the process to consolidate learnings and relationships. The theme of blended or hybrid learning appeared throughout this research project and is favoured by most of the participants.

Training over social media also needed to be supplemented by in-person contact "because not everyone is able to comprehend what has been sent, without interacting and having examples through in-person contact", said one participant. Another also pointed out that the success of her ongoing ALE project was also connected to some in-person meetings - the project started on WhatsApp during the COVID-19 pandemic, the learners and educators later met in person (after the pandemic), and then continued to work together online to save on costs and travel time after they'd met and forged strong relationships.

Another said that the social media space should become a tool, not the dominant platform. Organisations also had to guard against the impression that online courses were quick and easy and not as good as 'the real thing' (in-person training):

"There is a sort of weariness to not to try to dumb things down too much. In other words, to try to make sure we can use this space but in a way that is not patronising,

and recognising that people would like the full panoply of what the course is, so it doesn't become a "shortcut" in other words" – participant.

There also needed to be a recognition that social media-based ALE was not a silver bullet in the struggle to extend ALE: "...in any kind of social media it's important not just in terms of the hard skills, methodologies, and the platforms, and technical issues. It's about what we're doing on that space and how we're doing it", said the same participant.

The high cost of smartphones and data and poor connectivity was identified as a barrier to sending out materials and to running whole courses online, in much the same way that courses delivered over Zoom are not accessible to all because the technology and funds for data are not always available to participants.

"The main issue is data. People are able to organise smartphones because everyone feels like a smartphone is a tool they need to have", said one participant. Another participant said she had avoided sending out course material to WhatsApp groups of learners because she was aware that many did not have enough data to download material. So, she only sent the material to those who she knew had WiFi access.

Another said that while most learners had WhatsApp on their phones, he had found that learners in rural areas and small towns did not have much access to free internet spaces, such as shopping malls, or WiFi. Free WiFi was supposed to be available at community centres and libraries but many still did not have it.

The high cost of data and connectivity issues disrupted continuous participation in online learning. It also created an inequality where some learners never had enough data to download images and videos provided as teaching materials, said a participant.

Another participant said his organisation invited learners who lived close together to gather in one place and participate in online education using one device, to minimise costs. This often came with inaudible sound though. This participant also said his organisation invited learners to the office to download learning material and view it later.

A well-funded organisation co-ordinator said her organisation provided data so that learners could go online but described this as costly to them. To reduce the costs, they had begun to ask learners to access WiFi at trade union offices but had found that learners did not have transport fare to get there. Another participant said they had solved the problem by motivating to a funder that data for learners must be funded as a core expense – the amount funded was R100 airtime and 1GB of data per month.

The high cost of airtime, smartphones and data was generally seen as a challenge:

“We need strong campaigning demanding that the cost of data and these things be decreased” – participant.

Participants also spoke of the wealth of teaching materials that they could access on YouTube which they used currently in their in-person classes, saying this might not be possible in online courses because of the cost of data. Poor connectivity would also be an obstacle to rolling out a course for participants across southern Africa because it would be unlikely that all participants would be able to connect to WiFi or use data to join the course at the same time. One participant said that when hosting a social media-based course for rural participants, it would be necessary for the ALE organisation to ensure that all participants also had access to electricity, and not only data.

In addition, connectivity in rural areas posed a real problem in terms of access to social media.

“Students don’t always have data. We use a data projector at the centre instead of sharing videos online. If I share a video, I prefer doing it in class because most students can’t afford connectivity”.

This participant who works in rural KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa expressed the same sentiment around connectivity:

“For the people that I’m working with it’s difficult for them to afford smartphones because I’m from the rural areas and sometimes we go without electricity for a week...how do we overcome those challenges?”

Participants from Malawi, South Africa and Mozambique all listed the use of WhatsApp as a useful platform. The participant from Malawi explained that access to smartphones was not a given since it was very expensive. Furthermore, lacking digital literacy was also noted as a barrier to the use of social media for ALE.

This participant from Malawi provided context:

“Participants often lack smartphones or digital literacy. WhatsApp is preferred for facilitators to receive updates and training. Social media use is easier for high school students but impractical for people learning basic literacy”.

Furthermore, connectivity is patchy if it exists at all in rural areas. This was expressed by participants in rural areas of South Africa as well Mozambique and Malawi. There was the idea presented by a participant that corporates could help with access as part of their corporate social responsibility:

“Smartphones and data could be provided through corporate social responsibility initiatives. Connectivity issues, particularly in rural areas, remain a challenge as networks prioritise urban populations”.

However, one participant suggested the following to get around connectivity issues and high data costs:

“Offline solutions could help, such as downloading materials when data is available. However, in rural areas with no connectivity, it remains a challenge to deliver content effectively”.

Furthermore, a participant pointed out that not fully exploring the capabilities of mobile phones can be considered a barrier given that it can play major role in ALE if it could be properly applied in a learning context:

“We are in the digitalisation era—we are using mobile phone capacity 50% and not exploring more...in this digitalisation era we need to explore more the capacity of mobile phones...you can use google meetings...its most important to use social media for our learning purposes...”

Social media: privacy, digital literacy and ethical concerns

Participants were unanimous in their agreement that training in the optimal use of social media is required for adult learning.

“Students and educators need digital literacy training. Specific skills like operating online platforms and understanding privacy rules are essential”.

When it came to privacy issues, participants were already engaged in low level privacy and ethical considerations when using social media. It should be pointed out that they were well aware of privacy concerns when using social media platforms.

“Shared information is kept confidential and not shared without permission. Rules need to be established to ensure this process is followed”.

Speaking again to privacy concerns, some participants said that learners would need to be told to protect their devices with a strong password, while education providers would need to make sure their platforms were secure.

Participants spoke more about finding ways to make the social media classroom a safe space. Several participants said digital literacy, media literacy, and technological skills would all be important. This included establishing boundaries, rules and framing for how to use the space in the same way a classroom would operate. Social media could “be a “free-for-all” with people saying and posting things they would never do in person”, said one participant.

Another suggested that on WhatsApp, the host, or the admin, must set up conditions related to privacy and confidentiality, and become the sole responsible person to control such. Another participant said educators would need to be trained on how to manage online disagreements and keep discussions private:

“In our WhatsApp groups we have sometimes had issues where discussions that have happened on our group have been forwarded or ‘screen grabbed’ by someone in the group, to be shared with others. This carries quite high risks for the participants.... This led to a deep lack of trust within the group at one stage, and raised potentially serious risks for the participants”- participant who works with communities around legal training and court cases.

Children’s rights came up as a factor to consider for training when using social media. This would apply in specific contexts, such as if learners are under the age of 18 or in the case of one participant who is a disability rights activist involved in adult learning where the participant teaches parents with disabled children:

“Children’s rights ...informed consent to participate and clear information that if you sharing on behalf of somebody else...and needing to realise who has access to social media and being aware of what you sharing and how it might get into a bigger public space than what you had thought”.

One participant said, generally speaking, little is known about the exact parameters around privacy when using social media and that training is necessary in order to use social media for ALE responsibly and safely:

“We can use information technology techniques...this is another thing to train people...how to access links on WhatsApp...can bring expertise from outside to help with privacy and data ...last week there were protests in Mozambique - the government stopped internet ...the young people started using VPN...some people were saying if you accessing VPN you giving authority to your private information...we don’t know if it’s true or not...we need clear information in terms of expertise in the area information technology...”

Fake news also came up as a red flag to watch for in the use of social media:

“I just think that it’s good practice for people to have an awareness of what is useful information and what can be fake information on social media and the ethics around usage”.

Possibilities for standardising ALE delivery over social media

The participants felt that having a social media-based ALE course or template that they could tweak to suit the needs of their learners would be optimal. It would need to be a course that could be accessed on a variety of different devices, including older devices, one participant suggested. The course template or platform would need to be something flexible that educators could work with in terms of adding their own tailored material to it, and that would suit learners living in different conditions.

Some participants said they would prefer “having the flexibility to be responsive to emergent issues and contexts rather than using a pre-designed template”, and it would be more useful to ‘train the trainers’ to design educational material that their organisations could deliver via social media.

Several participants said the best way to approach this would be for technical social media experts to work with organisations to convert educational material into a course that could be delivered on social media.

A lot more support would be needed for trainers to be able to devise and deliver social media-based ALE courses. The first thing needed would be to train trainers to recognise that social media could be used as a tool for learning - “I think that’s still something emerging – the awareness that this tool is not just for you to chat, it’s a resource you can use”, said one participant.

According to a co-ordinator from an adult education institute, educators and trainers had not realised the extent to which social media could be used as a platform for learning remotely:

“The digital space is seen as kind of a threat compared to how [adult education] was done previously. We also find that we’re not necessarily clued up or ready to do that transition from in-contact learning to digital learning. We must prepare for that more actively to find a combination of doing contact learning and digital learning” - participant.

One participant stated that in a region where poverty and unemployment is chronic, adult education programmes would need a lot more support in general, especially the development of new, social media-based programmes.

Participants also described the possibility of having a standard platform to be utilised for ALE created from the bottom-up:

“A tailor-made approach from the bottom-up would be beneficial, ensuring the content meets the needs of the target audience”.

Many participants believed that a whole course could be designed for dissemination on social media. This participant felt that the approach towards designing a social media-based course should be co-creative because allowing students’ input is valuable. He used the expression (in bold) to explain that a top-down approach should be avoided.

*“We need to discuss with them...by using social media we reduce time and minimise cost and maximise results...**we can’t cook the food in the office and take to the field and tell them to eat.** They can feel like the curriculum is ours and to belonging to facilitators”.*

Another suggestion made by a participant was that a standard online platform be implemented to allow for regional exchanges for ALE:

“It will be good to have standard platform to use for ALE ...it will create a group of ToT (training of trainers) —and you can get a common understanding of how to use the standard platform and this way we can prevent reinvent the wheel...we can uniformise...we are thinking of the next phase of DVV Africa...Malawi and Mozambique etc. sharing experience. We work as two countries...we have the same culture and same language...the trainers can work together jointly and use a standard platform...including South Africa...can get insights form popular education and make connections with MOJA platform...it will be a way of sending quality information and learn from each other... from country to country according to the context”.

PART TWO: Interviews with social media analysts and online curriculum design experts

This section presents key insights from semi-structured interviews conducted with two key contributors to the study: an online and course curriculum design expert, and a social media analyst and content producer. Their perspectives provide a nuanced understanding of how social media platforms can intersect with ALE.

The curriculum design expert brings an understanding of pedagogical frameworks and learner engagement strategies in digital environments, while the social media analyst contributes insights into platform dynamics, content creation trends, and audience behaviour. Together, their insights shed light on how adult education can be optimised through social media, highlighting innovative practices and areas for consideration.

The findings are structured to explore three overarching themes that emerged from the interviews: the integration of social media tools into curriculum design, strategies for leveraging social media platform-specific features to enhance learner engagement, and co-creation in ALE. These themes provide a perspective of how social media can serve to advance adult education.

Integration of Social Media Tools into Curriculum Design

Social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp, were identified by the educational online course expert as powerful tools for creating accessible and inclusive learning opportunities. The integration of these tools into curriculum design enables institutions to meet the diverse needs of learners, especially in low-data and low-income contexts.

"You could use it for...multiple ways especially for low data areas...the fact that many people use it socially...with course materials a lot of the problem is high data outputs...like high res images...so you need to convert those to audio so that this becomes an inclusive pedagogical practice...where you do multiple formats so that you can impact differently-abled audience and audience from low-income areas...WhatsApp is not just about being a social media platform - it's about accessible, inclusive means for differently-abled people from different contexts to access learning".

The same participant explained that leveraging platforms like WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook can enable learning in multiple languages and that learning on social media can be a co-creative experience between students and educators:

"Especially multilingualism in isiXhosa or in isiZulu or in Sotho, whether or not they can find resources that represent all the different languages in the classroom. So there are definitely ways in which you could co-create the curriculum".

"So as for social media, I think we can use YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp to involve students... If they can find open resources or a lot of links, a lot of links like reels, or shorts, (which can facilitate) different learning outcomes that is in line with a course. You could let students go and find resources that actually resonate with them and share it on the platform. So that could be an exercise".

"They can also use it as a way of peer-to-peer review. So send them out to go and look for a resource and then ask them to share it on WhatsApp. And then they could actually see whether that resource is good or not to use in the course".

The social media analyst and content producer added that social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook enable organisations to overcome barriers like cost, connectivity, and technological literacy by leveraging familiar platforms for structured learning:

"We haven't really done many campaigns that involve WhatsApp in a more integrated or complex way...or develop apps with API but I have worked with organisations using chatbots in WhatsApp to communicate with beneficiaries... uses chatbots in order to create courses for parents in different contexts...There is definitely a need to integrate WhatsApp in broader communication (and education) strategies...multimedia that can be shared...it's definitely one of the more overlooked tools to offer".

This same participant believes that an educational course could be offered on Facebook:

"Yes, you can use Facebook to do that...there are closed groups in Facebook...there's the live function and it's an easy way to broadcast...benefit of social media is its two-way communication and people can interact and engage...we need to study the tools and see what works best for particular interventions".

The social media analyst and content producer also said that apart from social media being used for ALE, there are other platforms that may be useful:

"There are other platforms that hold course materials...and then you're paying for the intelligence of people who put the course together and storage space [for the online materials]...there are platforms designed to hold course work...it's worthwhile looking at those ...a client we are working with...called United in Crisis...they train up community members to better respond when disaster strikes... they found a platform that holds their course work...rather trying to retrofit into platform that's not designed for that".

Strategies for Leveraging Platform-Specific Features to Enhance Engagement

The educational online course expert emphasised the importance of leveraging the unique features of platforms like Facebook to design a secure learning environment.

"You can run a complete course on Facebook...you'd have to have it closed off (from the general public)...how to assess people on Facebook...you can put on videos and instructional text...you could provide resources and scaffold all the resources like you could use WhatsApp with Facebook and have a bouquet...this is what it means to look at innovative pedagogical practices...how to present a bouquet of options...you could include a YouTube link...as in open education resource...the challenge is that Facebook would want to know if you are monetising it...with Meta, student information is problematic...they will have the students' data".

The same participant explained that using the unique functionalities of social media platforms, means that educators and learners can have more engagement through strategies that include providing multimodal educational content. The participant also suggests codes of conduct when using social media for learning:

"Social media is very good at allowing people to engage in platforms where they don't feel, you know, judged or they don't feel like they are seen. So it's a good way to create groups, let it be driven by the students and the social media platform. Let the social media be driven by the students, not be driven by the lecturer."

"Basically multimodal approaches, using social media for multimodal approaches, not just in terms of text PDFs but in terms of video, audio, and media posts like images. And then in terms of translanguaging or multilingualism, allowing people to use their own language to explain things to each other".

"WhatsApp groups for education would mean there are specific times people can talk or put something in the chat without disturbing each other. So after-hours ethical use of social media in terms of what is appropriate to share, what is not appropriate".

The social media analyst and content producer explained that social media bypasses logistical challenges but stressed that a facilitator is still required to moderate exchanges and learning online. The participant also stated that it allows for learning that is relevant in this era rather than learning methods of the past:

"Social media can connect people remotely...you always need a facilitator to guide conversations...there are so many types of platforms and ways to do this...by having conversations between people and sharing lived experiences through multimedia".

"Social media is a simple tool to connect people...you can use in-app services tools...the phone has a camera and sound...you can connect people to fieldwork for more practical learning rather than old-school methods...and it allows people to ask questions...test and see if what works for your needs—every audience is different".

With regards to expensive data costs and smartphone costs, the same participant had this to say:

"Data is expensive...but you can get a very decent phone for under 1000 rand...but developing more offline content is possibly the way to go...one of the programmes called WiiLearn ...which has solar power pack with a projector and it has 90 gigs of learning material for every single grade... video material games coding...it doesn't require the internet ..."

"This guy (inventor of WiiLearn) has been in IT - he has pilot projects in Namibia, Chad and Kenya...and it is a solar powered battery that powers the tablet and projects and in the evening they were showing a movie at night on Saturday when most children roaming the street and they had 300 to 400 children watching...also something that DG Murray has advocated for was for zero rated platforms...we need consumers to put pressure on service providers to provide zero rated platforms ..."

Co-creation in ALE

Understanding audience behaviour or learners' behaviour was identified as a critical component for the creation of relevant educational content or courses. The educational online course expert highlighted the role of community-building in ALE and peer-to-peer learning, which are key to encouraging engagement and co-creation in adult education contexts.

"Yes because it's all peer-to-peer community and people learn from each other and that's where they create a community and that's a powerful tool for engagement as opposed to one-directional learning from lecturer to students...everyone walks into a space to speak with their own knowledge regardless of who they are...what is the community co-creating and learning?"

Understanding learners' behaviour involves creating opportunities for learners to express themselves, share their knowledge, and feel seen and validated:

"Also the context, bringing in backgrounds of who they are, ...who is in your room, in the classroom using social media to share their own social media posts so that you get to know them better. And in terms of that, knowing your class, knowing the students".

"Social media is a very good way for students to be seen and heard and validated".

Training was also mentioned as key to the success of utilising social media for ALE:

"Both educators and learners need training because there's codes of conduct on social media that are very different from socially using the platform".

The social media analyst and content producer explained that social media can empower learners by encouraging co-creation and agency, in the same way that face-to-face learning can:

"I think so co-creation between students and educators is possible. I don't think so in pressurised live recordings...people should be given tasks and record information and use free tools like Canva as long as there is a structure for feedback... ..I'm not an expert when it comes to tech and development, I am reading a book that is the future of education... a book called Hidden Potential by Adam Grant ...where he talks about scaffolding learning and ...learning through reflection rather than learning because someone telling you what to learn and it's one way directional...co-creation allows people to engage more...socially when you give people more agency and allow them to lead others and then they step up".

The same participant explained that training educators and students in the use of social media for ALE is important, including the functions of various platforms and that physical contact time with other students or with educators was important for students to feel supported:

"Understanding platforms before they use them...testing them...creating shared spaces for learning or mentorship...people can learn online but feel more comfortable when they know someone can help them navigate".

"I heard a talk by the guys who started Get Smarter...they realised they had to have connect sessions...people can learn online but it's when you create shared spaces for learning or talk to a mentor - that's when people feel comfortable that there's actually a human that can help them navigate through the course content...any platform can work as long as you are going on the journey together".

Furthermore, the same participant explained that privacy and data of students must be protected:

"Understanding the laws first like POPIA and making sure that everyone signs applicable consent forms and for people to understand where the content will be used... as long as everyone is aware of everything you can avoid any mishaps...or getting a lawyer involved in the beginning in order to get checks and balances right

and have a repository of consent forms and make provision for people who don't want to show their face and make provision to protect them".

6. Findings

6 (a) Summary of Findings

- Social media platforms like WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook can be used to disseminate multi-modal educational content, such as audio, video, and text, tailored for low-data and low-income contexts. This helps towards inclusive learning opportunities, especially for differently-abled audiences.
- Leverage the multilingual capabilities of platforms to enable learning in multiple languages, such as isiXhosa, isiZulu, and Sotho and other languages in southern Africa, ensuring that educational resources represent diverse linguistic backgrounds.
- Platforms like WhatsApp, equipped with chatbots and API integration, can facilitate helplines, mentorships, and course delivery.
- While social media is powerful and impactful, organisations should also consider platforms explicitly designed to hold coursework.
- Learn and understand and leverage platform functions.
- Implement clear rules for using social media in educational settings to address after-hours communication, appropriateness of shared content, and data privacy concerns. Ensure compliance with laws like POPIA, provide consent forms, and offer protections for participants who prefer to remain anonymous or not show their faces.
- Provide training to ensure educators and learners understand platform functionalities, codes of conduct, and the importance of collaborative learning.
- While social media allows for remote learning, a facilitator's presence is critical to guide conversations and provide support.

6 (b) Detailed Findings

The literature review and semi-structured interviews reveal many fascinating aspects to taking the delivery and design of online or digital ALE beyond Zoom. The information yielded by the review and interviews points to an incredible opportunity for adult education organisations to take the lead in innovating new ways of delivering modules that reach more learners than ever before by formalising and optimising the use of social media to do this. However, a recurring theme throughout this research is that ALE should not rely wholly on social media to deliver course content and host classes, but that this must be combined

with in person contact in recognition that social media is just a tool. It is absolutely necessary to make sure the platform and the activity ‘fit’ or are suitable for each other.

The literature review highlighted that some of the more formal social media educating methodologies being used by ALE educators elsewhere in the world have not yet been considered for use in southern Africa. These include course designs with learning outcomes that are assessed by measuring the nature of learners’ interactions with Instagram posts containing course content, for example. This should be explored further.

6 (b) (i) Developing the potential for extended uses of social media in ALE

Semi-structured interviews with participants highlighted that social media is already being used widely by different practitioners involved in ALE for disseminating learning materials and facilitating discussions. It is being used as a design and distribution method for educational texts, videos and visual images, and also to create online communities of practice and as a platform to host discussions among a broad range of learners. However, a more innovative use of social media for delivering ALE programmes or modules has not been formally developed by organisations involved in adult education.

It is clearly feasible to do so – this would require converting existing material and developing new courses (as relevant) so that they could be hosted, delivered and distributed via the different social media platforms.

6 (b) (ii) WhatsApp

Of all the social media platforms being used, participants said that they used WhatsApp the most. This indicates that WhatsApp has more potential to be developed further as a platform for delivering ALE. A positive finding is that the use of WhatsApp is widespread and, even in areas of poor internet connectivity, is widely used. WhatsApp courses should be designed so that learners can engage with them after delivery – in other words, at different times of the day, depending on when they have access to WiFi, when internet connectivity might be best and what time of day is most conducive for learning.

The interviews also highlighted interesting uses of WhatsApp to deliver live and interactive classes. These can include live video links to guest lecturers, group calls, which are easier to access than Zoom meetings, and WhatsApp interactivity protocols for classes. As one participant mentioned, when connectivity is limited, an educator can speak to material and then learners can interact by using ‘thumbs up’ emojis, and through having a time allocated to ask questions.

Pedagogically, discussion is an important feature of adult learning, and enables a much deeper understanding of the topic being taught. Another advantage of using social media is that learners can post text, articles, material and/or visuals that have relevance to their daily lives. As a platform, social media draws out learners' lived experiences, which in a Freirean approach, is seen as pivotal in ALE, as the learners then play an active role in their own learning experience. We recommend more exploration into the technical ways that WhatsApp can be used to achieve specific outcomes.

On this point, we recommend that MOJA look into design aspects of WhatsApp courses that include chatbots which can be programmed to answer questions on modules being taught. This would enable learning to continue even if the learner missed the live class hosted by the educator. Chatting with a chatbot as part of a package of material that could include voice notes, plain text material and videos would also allow learners several different options for engaging with course material (the interviews revealed that some learners, for example, only watch videos provided when they have access to WiFi but engaging with a chatbot on WhatsApp does not use up much data).

In this regard, one of the organisations interviewed is currently developing a legal WhatsApp chatbot that can answer questions about different clauses in the Labour Relations Act over WhatsApp.

6 (b) (iii) Building on the improvisations made during the COVID-19 pandemic

The discussion by participants and the literature on some of the discoveries that were made while educating adults during the COVID-19 pandemic indicates that some of the advantages and challenges of online delivery of ALE and online learning have already been uncovered. This is an advantage for developers of ALE courses that will be taught online, as some of the deterrents to students (particularly rural and/or impoverished students) are already known – such as long Zoom lectures creating difficulties in terms of access, the high cost of data, and the lack of interactivity and 'switching off' of students.

6 (b) (iv) Obstacles to using social media in ALE

The high cost of smartphones and data and poor connectivity are still serious obstacles to rolling out online education. The educators who were most likely to innovate in using WhatsApp, for example, for different kinds of education (sharing videos, crossing live to guest speakers from the field, working collaboratively with learners on discussions) were those who were working with learners who either had a funded monthly supply of data or who were able to come to an office and access free WiFi.

The information about how the cost of data and smartphones affects online ALE is useful as it gives an indication to organisations that they would need to provide data to learners. The

interviews indicated that some organisations are already doing this, at a cost of about R190 per learner per month (covering 1GB of data and R100 of airtime). ALE organisations may find this amount relatively inexpensive and potentially easy to fund.

6 (b) (v) Artificial Intelligence and ALE

In designing ALE courses that can be taught on social media, MOJA may also like to consider how to optimise the use of Artificial Intelligence in ALE courses. For example, adult learners could do assignments by having an AI transcription app transcribe voice notes. This can be quite helpful for learners who do not have access to laptop or desktop computers and who struggle to write using a phone keyboard. Investigating the use of AI tech would also allow MOJA to get ahead of and determine ethical and pedagogical boundaries around the kind of issues that universities are currently grappling with, with regards to the use of AI in education, such as plagiarism – a major problem in tertiary education currently.

6 (b) (vi) Support for educators to use social media in ALE

We believe there are clear findings that educators do need support if they are to make optimal use of social media as a teaching and learning platform. For example, the survey findings showed educators were ‘highly likely’ to encourage learners to make use of social media for learning but only ‘likely’ to encourage educators to do the same. This, and the interview responses, indicates that currently, educators seem to be facing a block. This block could be that educators have begun using social media to facilitate communication and discussion, to arrange or schedule times or events, to host interactive meetings, and to send and receive some information, but have stopped short of being able to design entire modules that can be delivered over social media.

Educators would benefit from having some technological support or training to begin designing social-media based training programmes that could be easily tailored to support inclusion of their own content and preferred training methods.

6 (b) (vii) The preference for hybrid forms of ALE

Of note is that many participants indicated that the use of social media in ALE should accompany in-person training and not entirely substitute it, with some citing the alienation caused by online learning conducted via email and Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding indicates that ALE organisations might need to find a way to bring participants together at the beginning of a course, and perhaps at certain points during a course, where possible. However, where courses are being delivered to learners all over southern Africa and the cost of meeting physically would be too great, the online courses should be cleverly and innovatively designed to introduce as much interaction between learners as possible.

This could be done through asking learners to deliver a voice note or video clip introducing themselves, for example.

6 (b) (viii) What could be done next

A final recommendation could be that MOJA convene physical focus groups of learners who, with their smartphones and social media apps, could work with course developers and researchers on developing a WhatsApp test pilot or dummy course on a particular topic. This would reflect the bottom-up preference for designing ALE programmes as expressed by participants. This could be a topic chosen because of its relevance to the group of learners. This kind of focus group research would illuminate the kinds of material that learners feel is relevant, the most optimal presentation of the material and could also highlight some of the aspects of social media that are more useful in ALE than others (for example, whether learning outcomes are achieved better by using more video clips and fewer voice notes).

This kind of further research would also position MOJA well to keep pace with developing social media courses as the technology develops further.

APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. How often do you use social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube) as part of teaching adult education?

- Daily
- Occasionally
- Never
- Weekly
- Other:

2. What do you use social media for?

3. Which social media platforms do you find most useful for learning or discussing educational content in your adult education courses?

- WhatsApp
- Tik Tok
- Instagram
- Facebook
- YouTube
- Other:

4. Please explain why you find the option you selected above most useful for learning or discussing educational content in your adult education courses.

5. In what ways has social media helped you connect with your fellow learners and/or fellow instructors or educators? (you can choose multiple options)

- Improved communication
- Sharing learning materials
- Collaboration on assignments
- To post video notes or voice notes about the material for learners
- To send information about assignments
- To encourage group discussion
- To create a space where learners feel comfortable to engage with their fellow learners and with you
- To organise a campaign or event

- To share teaching materials with other educators
- To post lessons that learners must comment on
- To measure the engagement or interest or interaction of learners with what you are teaching
- As a tool to translate learning material
- It has not helped
- Other:

6.What challenges have you faced as an adult educator when utilising social media in your teaching?

- Difficulty accessing reliable information
- Distractions from non-educational content
- Technical issues (e.g., internet, device problems)
- Privacy concerns
- Learners do not all have smartphones
- It is difficult to send large files
- Not all educators know how to use social media
- The high cost of data
- Not all learners know how to use social media
- Other:

7.What feedback have you received from learners about your use of social media as a teaching tool?

- None
- That they find it much more interesting
- Boosts learners' confidence to engage with educators and peers more than face-to-face lessons
- Enables students to share learning materials with a wider group, like family & friends
- Allows learners to learn at times that suit them
- It takes up too much of their family time or home time
- That it stops learners from learning because they get distracted by other socialmedia posts
- That learners who do not have social media can fall behind
- Other:

8. How likely are you to recommend the use of social media to other adult learners to enhance their learning experience?

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neutral
- Unlikely
- Other:

9. If you have not started using social media as an educating tool yet, can you think of some ways it might be useful?

10. How likely are you to recommend the use of social media to other adult education lecturers to enhance their teaching experience?

- likely
- not likely
- unsure

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever heard of or considered using WhatsApp for more purposes than sending out course material, and what kind of ideas do you have around this?
2. Have you ever considered different ways to carry out adult education and learning on social media, for example running a whole course on Facebook?
3. What are some of the concrete ways that adult learning organisations can deal with the problems of the high cost of smartphones and data and poor connectivity, i.e. can courses be designed around this?
4. Is it valuable in your opinion to use social media for Adult Learning and Education for the purposes of bringing in guest lecturers or video clips from the field? (For example in a food security or farming course, to have practitioners sending in information from the field, or being available on a WhatsApp group call to discuss topics and answer questions?)
5. Would you be ok with designing a course/courses for social media yourself or do you think it would be useful to have a standard platform or design that you as the educator could tweak?
6. Are there ways in which social media can be used by you as a facilitator to involve students in finding learning resources and sharing these with the class and the educator, so as to co-create the curriculum?
7. What are some of the ways you think social media could be good for ALE in terms of collaboration between learners and increased educator-learner interaction?
8. What support or training would be useful for both educators and learners to use social media effectively in Adult Learning and Education? [Are there specific skills (e.g., digital literacy, media literacy) for example?]
9. How could privacy and data security concerns be addressed when using social media in Adult Learning and Education?

APPENDIX C: THEMATIC ANALYSES

Interviews with academics and educators

Thematic Analysis 1:

Question	Response Summary	Themes
Have you ever heard of or considered using WhatsApp for more purposes than sending out course material, and what kind of ideas do you have around this?	WhatsApp is used for online learning and for sharing documents like monitoring forms and class instructions for government officials and facilitators.	Document sharing, communication tool for officials and facilitators, ease of use.
Have you ever considered different ways to carry out adult education and learning on social media, for example running a whole course on Facebook?	Participants often lack smartphones or digital literacy. WhatsApp is preferred for facilitators to receive updates and training. Social media use is easier for high school students but impractical for people learning basic literacy.	Accessibility issues, preference for facilitators over participants, digital literacy gap.
What are some concrete ways adult learning organisations can deal with the high costs of smartphones, data, and poor connectivity?	Smartphones and data could be provided through corporate social responsibility initiatives. Connectivity issues, particularly in rural areas, remain a challenge as networks prioritise urban populations.	Corporate responsibility, rural connectivity challenges, cost barriers.
Is it valuable to use social media for ALE for guest lecturers or video clips?	Social media can be effective for facilitators and officials but not directly for participants in rural areas. Platforms like MOJO on Facebook work for adult education practitioners. For agriculture or vocational education, videos can share knowledge across locations.	Facilitator use, video-based learning, practical application for specific skills.
Would you design courses for social media or prefer a standard platform to tweak?	A tailor-made approach from the bottom-up would be beneficial, ensuring the content meets the needs of the target audience.	Customised content, audience-specific design, adaptability.
Can social media be used to involve students in finding and sharing learning resources?	Facilitators collect input from participants through WhatsApp. For example, participants listed vocational skills they wanted via WhatsApp, which helped in curriculum development. Co-creating content begins with asking learners what they need and incorporating their feedback.	Co-creation of curriculum, participant input, user-centred design.
How can social media enhance collaboration between learners and educators?	Social media allows for digital exchanges of information and learning. Videos can be shared across locations to showcase agricultural practices or other educational content, facilitating knowledge sharing and collaboration.	Digital collaboration, cross-location learning, practical application.

Question	Response Summary	Themes
What support or training would be useful for using social media in ALE?	Hands-on training is needed to teach educators and learners the various facilities social media offers, such as marketing farm produce or tailoring products.	Practical training, marketing potential, capacity building.
How could privacy and data security concerns be addressed when using social media in ALE?	Editorial ethics should be followed, emphasising informed consent and clear communication about the purpose of shared information. Social media's public nature requires careful consideration of what is appropriate to post.	Privacy, informed consent, ethical guidelines.

Thematic Analysis 2:

Question	Response Summary	Themes
Have you ever heard of or considered using WhatsApp for more purposes than sending out course material, and what kind of ideas do you have around this?	Communication with learners through WhatsApp is helpful. It allows learners to share materials and access information when in-person visits are not possible. For teaching women with children with cerebral palsy, it would make outreach more efficient.	Accessibility, flexibility, enabling broader outreach.
Have you ever considered different ways to carry out adult education and learning on social media, for example running a whole course on Facebook?	Personally, I haven't explored it, but my children motivate me to consider it as a way to reach more people. It could ease the challenges of face-to-face education and create opportunities for broader impact.	Potential for expansion, motivation to adapt, overcoming face-to-face barriers.
What are some concrete ways adult learning organisations can deal with the high cost of smartphones, data, and poor connectivity?	In rural areas, people face challenges like lack of electricity and affordability of smartphones. These factors hinder access to social media for education.	Resource limitations, rural connectivity challenges, affordability issues.
Is it valuable to use social media for ALE for guest lecturers or video clips?	Yes, especially during COVID-19, social media proved powerful for awareness campaigns. For deaf learners, using a professional sign language interpreter in videos made a significant impact, especially when using local, understandable sign language.	Inclusivity, use of localised content, effective communication during crises.
Would you design courses for social media or prefer a standard platform to tweak?	I wouldn't be able to design a course myself but would appreciate if someone else could design it and teach me how to use it. It would make my work much easier.	Need for support, reliance on experts, willingness to adapt tools.
Can social media be used to involve students in finding and sharing learning resources?	Social media can make a difference, particularly for activists. For example, videos explaining human rights could be	Accessibility for illiterate users, multimedia learning,

Question	Response Summary	Themes
	stored on phones for illiterate users who can listen and learn.	empowerment through visual aids.
How can social media enhance collaboration between learners and educators?	My son, who has a learning disability, shares information he finds online with the family, facilitating discussions. Social media can foster such interactions, but people like me need basic training on how to use it effectively.	Intergenerational learning, enhanced collaboration, need for foundational training.
What support or training would be useful for using social media in ALE?	I'd like to learn basic tools like Facebook and X without feeling overwhelmed. Training should include how to protect oneself from negative experiences while maximising social media as a positive tool.	Basic digital literacy, emotional resilience, protecting mental health.
How could privacy and data security concerns be addressed when using social media in ALE?	Privacy concerns arise when sharing sensitive content, such as videos demonstrating childcare techniques. There must be safeguards to prevent parents from sharing others' personal information, like the faces of children in the videos.	Privacy safeguards, group rules, sensitivity to personal information.

Thematic Analysis 3:

Question	Response Summary	Themes
Have you ever heard of or considered using WhatsApp for more purposes than sending out course material, and what kind of ideas do you have around this?	During COVID-19, a WhatsApp group was used for carers and community-based rehabilitation (CBR) workers to share ideas for children with disabilities. It served as a support network and was very active with daily messages.	Peer-to-peer support, network building, sharing ideas through WhatsApp.
Have you ever considered different ways to carry out adult education and learning on social media, for example running a whole course on Facebook?	A training course on community-based rehabilitation (CBR) was developed entirely online using Zoom. It included features like breakout rooms and interactive apps to engage participants, making it accessible to people with visual and physical disabilities.	Accessibility, interactivity, integration of inclusive tools.
What are some concrete ways that adult learning organisations can deal with the high cost of smartphones, data, and poor connectivity?	Offline solutions could help, such as downloading materials when data is available. However, in rural areas with no connectivity, it remains a challenge to deliver content effectively.	Offline solutions, rural connectivity challenges, cost barriers.
Is it valuable to use social media for ALE for guest lecturers or video clips?	Social media can be valuable for sharing practical knowledge. For instance, video-based warning	Practical knowledge sharing, increasing access to critical

Question	Response Summary	Themes
	systems in flood-prone areas were shared with other communities to increase awareness.	information, multimedia solutions.
Would you design courses for social media or prefer a standard platform to tweak?	Designing platforms for accessibility is essential, especially for people with disabilities. Expertise in creating such platforms is scarce and expensive in the country, making it a challenge to implement inclusive solutions affordably.	Accessibility, inclusivity, need for affordable expertise.
Can social media be used to involve students in finding and sharing learning resources?	Co-creating curricula with students is a valuable idea, and social media could potentially facilitate this process. Previous work involved co-creating curricula without social media, which could now be integrated.	Co-creation, curriculum design, collaboration through social media.
How can social media enhance collaboration between learners and educators?	Blog writing was used as an interactive tool during online education at UCT. Students from diverse backgrounds shared blogs and learned from each other's experiences, which proved to be highly beneficial.	Interactive tools, peer learning, collaborative content creation.
What support or training would be useful for using social media in ALE?	Training should include platform-specific skills, understanding fake information, and ethical use of social media. Older adults need more exposure to smartphone technologies to use social media effectively.	Digital literacy, media literacy, generational training gaps.
How could privacy and data security concerns be addressed when using social media in ALE?	Privacy concerns can be addressed through informed consent, awareness of data sharing implications, and understanding how shared content might reach a larger audience than intended.	Informed consent, data sharing awareness, safeguarding privacy.

Thematic Analysis 4:

Question	Response Summary	Themes
Have you ever heard of or considered using WhatsApp for more purposes than sending out course material, and what kind of ideas do you have around this?	Learners use WhatsApp to share study materials and stay connected despite challenges like being located in different areas. Those who miss class can still access information through the platform.	Accessibility, peer-to-peer sharing, bridging geographic gaps.
Have you ever considered different ways to carry out adult education and	The principal would be better suited to answer this question. Training was	Potential for future development, need for leadership input.

learning on social media, for example running a whole course on Facebook?	recently provided to help with learner development.	
What are some concrete ways adult learning organisations can deal with the problems of high costs of smartphones, data, and poor connectivity?	A local woman provides study materials affordably. Most learners have WiFi access, but not all are consistent in using it. Learners are encouraged to seek assistance from family when needed.	Local solutions, WiFi access variability, reliance on external support.
Is it valuable to use social media for ALE for guest lecturers or video clips?	Social media is valuable, especially as many learners are exposed to technology early. However, physical classroom interaction remains important for deeper understanding. Learners often benefit most when both in-person and online methods are combined.	Blended learning, early exposure to technology, limitations of remote learning.
Would you design a course for social media or prefer a standard platform to tweak?	A standardised platform would be beneficial, but personal limitations mean the task would be better suited for someone else. Such platforms can ensure broader national reach and consistent quality.	Standardisation, delegation to experts, broad applicability.
Can social media be used to involve students in finding and sharing learning resources?	Platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook could be useful for resource sharing, but input from an expert on implementation would be helpful.	Potential for co-creation, need for expert guidance on implementation.
How can social media enhance collaboration between learners and educators?	Social media like WhatsApp and Facebook is already used for recruiting and connecting learners with nearby adult education centres. Some educators resist social media as a teaching tool, but it facilitates initial contact and ongoing communication.	Enhanced recruitment, resistance to adoption by some educators, expanded connectivity.
What support or training would be useful for using social media in ALE?	Workshops are needed for both educators and learners to show the benefits of social media, improve teacher-learner relationships, and access study materials. Workshops can help educators and learners better communicate and collaborate using social media.	Need for training, relationship building, enhanced communication.
How could privacy and data security concerns be addressed when using social media in ALE?	Rules for group behaviour are necessary to maintain respect and focus, especially in groups with mixed generations. Clear consequences for misuse would help ensure appropriate use.	Need for group rules, generational differences, maintaining respect and focus.

Thematic Analysis 5:

Question	Response Summary	Themes
Have you ever heard of or considered using WhatsApp for more purposes than sending out course material, and what kind of ideas do you have around this?	We use WhatsApp for monitoring facilitators and supervisors, sharing materials like booklets, and fostering formal communication. During COVID, we learned WhatsApp is cost-effective and accessible. It's used for sharing information in local languages, focusing on agriculture, financial education, and climate change.	Accessibility, cost-effectiveness, local language usage, diverse applications of WhatsApp.
Have you ever considered different ways to carry out adult education and learning on social media, for example running a whole course on Facebook?	Yes, Facebook and WhatsApp are widely accessible and cost-efficient. I've used WhatsApp to deliver courses, reducing time and costs. We provide data for learners when necessary. These platforms are practical for fieldwork with limited internet access.	Cost reduction, accessibility, time efficiency, practicality in fieldwork.
What are some concrete ways adult learning organisations can deal with high costs of smartphones and data and poor connectivity?	Learners need awareness of prioritising resources like data. Integrating learning with savings could support learners in affording data. Sustainable solutions are needed to address data costs and promote the importance of accessing information.	Awareness, sustainable practices, affordability of data, don't blame learners for wasting data or being unable to afford enough data.
Is it valuable to use social media for ALE to bring in guest lecturers or video clips from the field?	Yes, it's valuable. Facilitators record and share lessons in groups. In the digital era, mobile phones are underutilised. Platforms like Google Meetings could enhance learning.	Digitalisation, resource sharing, potential of mobile devices.
Would you design a course for social media yourself or prefer a standard platform to tweak?	A standard platform would be beneficial for uniformity and efficiency. It would allow trainers from different countries to share experiences, ensuring quality and context-specific learning.	Standardisation, collaboration across regions, efficiency.
Can social media be used to involve students in finding and sharing learning resources?	Yes, social media can enhance co-creation of the curriculum. Learners gain ownership by being involved. It reduces costs and maximises results, making learning sustainable and fostering a sense of belonging.	Co-creation, learner ownership, sustainability.
How can social media enhance collaboration and interaction in ALE?	Social media increases interaction between learners and educators. After COVID-19, connectivity improved, fostering knowledge sharing and group creation.	Enhanced connectivity, increased interaction, post-COVID innovation.
What support or training is needed for educators and learners to use social media effectively?	Training on digital literacy and contextualising materials is essential. Facilitators and learners need guidance on creating accounts and using platforms like Skype and Facebook effectively.	Digital literacy, contextualisation of materials, capacity building.

Question	Response Summary	Themes
How can privacy and data security concerns be addressed in social media-based ALE?	Training is needed on privacy and data security. Expertise should be brought in to provide clarity, especially on tools like VPNs, which raise privacy concerns.	Privacy concerns, need for technical expertise, digital security.

Thematic Analysis 6:

Question	Response Summary	Themes
Have you ever heard of or considered using WhatsApp for more purposes than sending out course material, and what kind of ideas do you have around this?	No, I haven't explored it fully. I've used WhatsApp mainly to upload notes for students attending class. At my age, I am comfortable doing this, but I haven't looked into other uses.	Limited exploration of WhatsApp's potential, age-related comfort with specific functions.
Have you ever considered different ways to carry out adult education and learning on social media, for example running a whole course on Facebook?	No, I only use Facebook to advertise courses offered at the centre.	Minimal use of Facebook beyond advertising, lack of course delivery via social media.
What are some concrete ways that adult learning organisations can deal with the problems of high costs of smartphones, data, and poor connectivity?	Students don't always have data. We use a data projector at the centre instead of sharing videos online. If I share a video, I prefer doing it in class because most students can't afford data.	Limited connectivity, cost barriers, reliance on in-person resources like projectors.
Is it valuable to use social media for ALE for guest lecturers or video clips?	It can help students who can't attend classes due to transport issues, but I mostly provide information myself rather than relying on social media.	Potential for remote learning, dependence on direct teaching rather than external sources.
Would you be okay designing courses for social media or prefer a standard platform to tweak?	CPUT has designed online courses for our students, but only some can access them due to the challenges I mentioned earlier.	Accessibility challenges, reliance on pre-designed platforms like CPUT's system.
Can social media be used to involve students in finding learning resources and co-creating curricula?	Yes, teachers and students share resources via the internet. Tasks like demonstrations are uploaded to WhatsApp for marking and moderation.	Resource sharing, task submissions via WhatsApp, co-creation of curriculum.
How can social media enhance collaboration between learners and educators?	Students feel more at ease at home and are less shy compared to being in class, which could help improve interaction.	Increased comfort in online environments, potential for enhanced interaction.
What support or training would be useful for effective use of social media in ALE?	Students and educators need digital literacy training. Specific skills like operating online platforms and understanding privacy rules are essential.	Need for digital literacy, specific skill development for online learning.
How could privacy and data security concerns be addressed when using social media in ALE?	Shared information is kept confidential and not shared without permission. Rules need to be established to ensure this process is followed.	Confidentiality, importance of permissions and rules for data security.

Thematic Analysis 7:

Question	Response Summary	Themes
Have you ever heard of or considered using WhatsApp for more purposes than sending out course material, and what kind of ideas do you have around this?	Photography of local activities and sharing homework or materials are common uses. Facilitators organise meetings online via WhatsApp. However, many people in Mozambique lack smartphones or internet access, limiting the potential for maximising social media capabilities.	Limited technology access, resource constraints, practical applications of WhatsApp.
Have you ever considered different ways to carry out adult education and learning on social media, for example running a whole course on Facebook?	Facebook and other platforms like YouTube and email are used by younger audiences, but the lack of resources and high internet costs in Mozambique make it difficult to deliver a course entirely on social media. Government actions, such as cutting internet during protests, also pose challenges.	Accessibility challenges, high costs, inconsistent connectivity, government restrictions.
What are some concrete ways adult learning organisations can deal with the problems of high costs of smartphones, data, and poor connectivity?	Volunteer-based organisations rely on donations and partnerships for resources like materials, transport, and facilitator allowances. Sustainability is a challenge, with most activities supported by DVV, which provides funding for basic needs.	Dependence on donors, sustainability challenges, resource acquisition strategies.
Is it valuable to use social media for ALE for guest lecturers or sharing video clips?	Social media can solve communication barriers, enabling group work and access to knowledge. For example, Brazilian YouTube videos teach practical skills like making charcoal from recycled paper, which are then shared with students.	Knowledge sharing, practical skill dissemination, global learning through social media.
Would you design a course for social media yourself or prefer a standard platform to tweak?	A standard platform with examples would be helpful, as there is currently limited knowledge about course design.	Need for structured support, lack of design expertise, potential for standardised platforms.
Can social media be used to involve students in finding and sharing learning resources and co-creating the curriculum?	Students already share knowledge via community radio programmes, which could be expanded to social media. Social media could allow students to contribute ideas and content, making learning more interactive and community-oriented.	Co-creation of curriculum, interactive learning, community engagement through media.
How can social media enhance collaboration between learners and educators?	WhatsApp groups and community centres can facilitate discussions and collaborative projects. Educators and learners can exchange ideas, solve problems, and analyze responses in real time, promoting an interactive learning environment.	Real-time collaboration, community-centred learning, increased educator-learner interaction.
What support or training is needed for educators and learners to use social media effectively in ALE?	ICT training is essential to teach skills like using computers, managing internet tools, and operating software like PowerPoint.	Need for digital literacy, training on ICT tools, capacity building for educators and learners.

How could privacy and data security concerns be addressed when using social media in ALE?

Using passwords, unique usernames, and controlled access to group discussions ensures privacy. Administrators regulate participation, and communication tools like WhatsApp are used securely for organising meetings.

Privacy protocols, secure access control, administrative oversight in group communications.

Thematic Analysis 8:

Question	Response Summary	Themes
Have you ever heard of or considered using WhatsApp for more purposes than sending out course material, and what kind of ideas do you have around this?	No, but uses it to interact and respond instantly to students, shares material, very useful. It could be possible but poor internet connectivity will be a problem to link with far off learners and even screens would maybe have to be organised first, NPOs in different centres and towns should avail space. Other problem is that online learning introduces alienation and isolation. People who learn online together always end up wanting to meet as a group eventually and this can reinforce what they have learnt.	High data costs, connectivity, use of WhatsApp not developed past messaging and discussions.
Have you ever considered different ways to carry out adult education and learning on social media, for example running a whole course on Facebook?	Only uses YouTube as a teaching aid for resources in in-person classes and asks students to google things while teaching.	Use of digital media still in infancy.
What are some concrete ways adult learning organisations can deal with the problems of high costs of smartphones, data, and poor connectivity?	It is a huge problem, cannot send big files, learners don't have access to WiFi. Data will need to be funded.	Funding needed.
Is it valuable to use social media for ALE for guest lecturers or sharing video clips?	Yes, this already happens in university education with seminars and it happened during Covid.	Knowledge sharing, practical skill dissemination, global learning through social media.
Would you design a course for social media yourself or prefer a standard platform to tweak?	No comment.	-
Can social media be used to involve students in finding and sharing learning resources and co-creating the curriculum?	Yes, WhatsApp can be used to encourage group discussion and as part of that to encourage learners to share materials. It is very important for co-creation especially as people become digitally-literate. Also you can ask people to research a certain topic online while you are discussing it as a way to involve the learners more and then they can explain what they have found.	Co-creation and digital literacy.

Question	Response Summary	Themes
How can social media enhance collaboration between learners and educators?	It creates a virtual community where there is a sense of belonging and learners can refer back to the group where they have discussed issues.	Belonging and community.
What support or training is needed for educators and learners to use social media effectively in ALE?	It needs to be accepted that these platforms should be used as part of interactive education. It is a powerful tool.	Mastering the use of social media learning to be part of the digital future.
How could privacy and data security concerns be addressed when using social media in ALE?	No comment.	-

Thematic Analysis 9:

Question	Response Summary	Themes
Have you ever heard of or considered using WhatsApp for more purposes than sending out course material, and what kind of ideas do you have around this?	<p>Currently I coordinate and contribute to several “WhatsApp” groups that serve multiple purposes – primarily they exist to enable communication, information flow, sharing of advice and solidarity, ...we share updates on policy developments, new mining / oil and gas applications, changes to fishing regulations, etc. We have developed methods for collectively summarising and making sense of policies, reports or regulations, as well as writing letters to government officials, submitting comments on EIAs, etc., through a combination of voice notes (translated across isiXhosa, Afrikaans and English), WhatsApp polls, graphics, videos.</p> <p>The fact that all that is shared is stored and visible to all members of the group at any time, means that people who are away working are able to catch up on the chat when they are able to. This is an advantage over scheduled online meetings. We sometimes hold Zoom or WhatsApp video call meetings, but many people struggle to participate because of poor connectivity. If we share content over WhatsApp, people are able to download it when they are in a place with WiFi or better signal.</p>	Use of different languages; used for different working purposes that could be adapted for ALE teachings; visually exciting; accessible and can log on and learn anytime.
Have you ever considered different ways to carry out adult education and learning on social media, for example running a whole course on Facebook?	In my organisation, many educators are involved in the development of ‘micro-credentials’ which are short courses that can be run online using a platform called Articulate 360. My experience is that these	Online plus physical meetings are more effective.

Question	Response Summary	Themes
	online learning platforms are much enhanced when the group can meet in person for a workshop at some stage – preferably early on, and again towards the end of the year / process to consolidate learnings and relationships.	
What are some concrete ways adult learning organisations can deal with the problems of high costs of smartphones, data, and poor connectivity?	In my organisation, we motivated to our funder that a core expense of coordinating our network of SSF was to provide all participants with R100 airtime and 1GB of data per month.	Funders needed.
Is it valuable to use social media for ALE for guest lecturers or sharing video clips?	Yes, this is very useful. Another way we used WhatsApp ‘in the field’ was when we participated in online government consultations, for example in the public participation process for the Ocean Economy Master Plan. Some of us were able to join the Zoom or Teams meeting, but many of the fishers were not able to join due to poor connectivity. We then ‘live streamed’ the meeting over WhatsApp, typing summaries of what was being said or even recording sections and sharing on the group. Participants following over WhatsApp could share their comments or any point they wanted to raise on the WhatsApp group and those of us in the online meeting then conveyed these. So we could use the WhatsApp group as a bridging platform to improve participation in otherwise inaccessible public consultations.	Could involve students in participating in live online events.
Would you design a course for social media yourself or prefer a standard platform to tweak?	Definitely prefer having the flexibility to be responsive to emergent issues and contexts rather than using a pre-designed template.	Course should be able to be tailored.
Can social media be used to involve students in finding and sharing learning resources and co-creating the curriculum?	Yes – in our whatsapp group often it is learners themselves who share news articles or local issues to the group to stimulate a discussion about what people think / how to respond.	Ask students to stimulate discussion or find material first on a topic, removes top-down approach.
How can social media enhance collaboration between learners and educators?	No response.	
What support or training is needed for educators and learners to use social media effectively in ALE?	Digital literacy and media literacy in relation to being able to discern reliable sources and ‘fake news’ on the internet would be useful. Training for the facilitators of social media-based learning on how to navigate privacy issues,	Eliminating fake news, finding ways to discuss sensitive issues.

Question	Response Summary	Themes
	especially when discussing sensitive issues related to legal proceedings, and when there are tensions between different activist groups, would be useful.	
How could privacy and data security concerns be addressed when using social media in ALE?	In our WhatsApp groups we have sometimes had issues where discussions that have happened on our group have been forwarded or 'screen grabbed' by someone in the group, to be shared with others. This carries quite high risks for the participants – for example, when a discussion was happening about a particular private company and the way they were exploiting workers, and then some of this discussion was forwarded to the actual company. This led to deep lack of trust within the group at one stage, and raised potentially serious risks for the participants.	Risks of breaching trust, needs safeguards.

Thematic Analysis 10:

Question	Response Summary	Themes
Have you ever heard of or considered using WhatsApp for more purposes than sending out course material, and what kind of ideas do you have around this?	Yes. To post video notes or voice notes about the material for learners. First of all, there's a growing number of people who are using WhatsApp. As much as there are limitations in terms of not all constituents, the poor and working class, not being able to afford data, at least it's there. It's the most available compared to others in terms of accessing data. I haven't used WhatsApp to send out course material because of data, considering most people might not have enough data to download things. So I would be sending to few, whom I am certain are connected to WiFi. Well on a positive side, I've received so much feedback. People appreciating, from a distance, getting to know what is happening, related to various topics. But also, the challenge comes mainly from not being able to access topics due to language, complexity of the topics, because not all the time are	Limitation of WhatsApp – language, data cost, inaccessible material that cannot be adequately explained as it can face-to-face.

	topics able to be unpacked on social media to a level at which they are able to connect the dots around certain topics.	
Have you ever considered different ways to carry out adult education and learning on social media, for example running a whole course on Facebook?	Not really.	-
What are some concrete ways adult learning organisations can deal with the problems of high costs of smartphones, data, and poor connectivity?	We need strong campaigning demanding that the cost of data and these things be decreased.	High cost of data.
Is it valuable to use social media for ALE for guest lecturers or sharing video clips?	I would say partially. I think in-contact is also important, because not everyone is able to reach or comprehend what has been sent, without interacting and having examples through in-person contact.	In-person contact needed too.
Would you design a course for social media yourself or prefer a standard platform to tweak?	I think it could work to attempt that, it would be useful if one could actually explore that angle [of having a standard design].	Interested in having the tools to work from.
Can social media be used to involve students in finding and sharing learning resources and co-creating the curriculum?	Yes, I think first of all, creation of groups dedicated to that particular issue, or process, solely for that. WhatsApp groups tend to end up being a place where everything is brought, but if it's a group strictly meant for that particular process, then yes.	Boundaries and guidelines needed.
How can social media enhance collaboration between learners and educators?	The first thing is accessibility, which links to the issue of language being used. Interaction can be used to lessen that.	Language important in collaboration.
What support or training is needed for educators and learners to use social media effectively in ALE?	Digital literacy, media literacy, technological skills are all important.	Digital literacy.
How could privacy and data security concerns be addressed when using social media in ALE?	I think the host, or the admin, must set up conditions related to privacy and confidentiality, and the admin becomes the sole responsible person to control such.	Privacy issues need guidance.

Thematic Analysis 11:

Question	Response Summary	Themes
Have you ever heard of or considered using WhatsApp for more purposes than sending out	Well we always share information on WhatsApp in the form of a pamphlet or a voice note. So, when there's an education	Converting material to be able to be disseminated on WhatsApp.

course material, and what kind of ideas do you have around this?	lecture, we record then share in the WhatsApp groups in the form of an audio, it's shareable, and we also do the pamphlets, which are also shareable.	
Have you ever considered different ways to carry out adult education and learning on social media, for example running a whole course on Facebook?	No we haven't considered that, but it's something that we are always thinking of... to educate more. We use Facebook and TikTok. First, they are accessible and in terms of the data range, for the group of workers and adults we work with, they always find it accessible to use Facebook and Tiktok. Tiktok, whenever we ask, they say it's easily downloadable to share with other people in their community.	ALE materials can easily be shared once they are uploaded on Facebook and TikTok.
What are some concrete ways adult learning organisations can deal with the problems of high costs of smartphones, data, and poor connectivity?	I think what we normally do when we have sessions, we will ask a group according to the area that they're staying, to either join as a group, or to invite them to come in terms of downloading, to come and download using our wifi. So that's how we try to minimise the cost. Instead of sending everyone, or everyone using their data, we say they can group themselves and use one device.	Supportive fraternal organisations needed to help with high costs of data, connectivity issues.
Is it valuable to use social media for ALE for guest lecturers or sharing video clips?	-	[Misunderstanding of question]
Would you design a course for social media yourself or prefer a standard platform to tweak?	We would love to do that ourselves.	Keen to innovate in terms of what works best for own organisation and learners.
Can social media be used to involve students in finding and sharing learning resources and co-creating the curriculum?	Definitely. Students are advanced in terms of technology, especially in terms of the new technology that keeps emerging.	Use learners' expertise in social media to fuel co-creation.
How can social media enhance collaboration between learners and educators?	I think it enables the teachers, in case the learners aren't available at a specific time, they can always schedule a time which is convenient for everyone, even if they're at home. So they can do the lecturing online.	Agreeing on convenient times together is useful.
What support or training is needed for educators and learners to use social media effectively in ALE?	To start is to find the right social media platform which is accessible for everyone, and once they discover that, they can agree as to how they can use that platform to enable their project.	Support can also be determined by the needs of the learners
How could privacy and data security concerns be addressed when using social media in ALE?	I think it's finding ways of protecting their device with things like a very strong password, and that requires education. So once they get that kind of assistance it	Train people to protect themselves.

	becomes easier for them to protect themselves.	
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Thematic Analysis 12:

Question	Response Summary	Themes
Have you ever heard of or considered using WhatsApp for more purposes than sending out course material, and what kind of ideas do you have around this?	We are involved in film training for younger people, and also mostly women, giving them skills with telling their own stories... because we are working in more rural communities, the better mode of communication for that setup is WhatsApp because of availability and accessibility of mobile phones and WhatsApp. We also use WhatsApp for meetings, we do that.	Hasn't moved far past using WhatsApp for meetings and discussion.
Have you ever considered different ways to carry out adult education and learning on social media, for example running a whole course on Facebook?	That's very interesting but we've never done that before.	Interested in innovation.
What are some concrete ways adult learning organisations can deal with the problems of high costs of smartphones, data, and poor connectivity?	WhatsApp is a bit cheaper, as I said, also because most people do have mobile phones, and it's a bit cheaper if you compare it, and Facebook is cheaper as well, social media generally. But I'd say WhatsApp is cheaper for communication particularly in our case where we work with poorer communities.	Social media is affordable.
Is it valuable to use social media for ALE for guest lecturers or sharing video clips?	Yes, it is definitely practical because we've done it before, where we're using online and we bring in one of the trainers via WhatsApp, mostly through WhatsApp, to train some of our beneficiaries.	Innovating and opening the learning up to others.
Would you design a course for social media yourself or prefer a standard platform to tweak?	I think the latter would be best, something we could tweak that is available to us - I'm not an expert to design, so having something that is flexible that you can work with, that can suit different conditions, would work.	Expertise in taking social media ALE forward would be useful.
Can social media be used to involve students in finding and sharing learning resources and co-creating the curriculum?	Learning independently is very possible, but are they disciplined enough that they don't get distracted, because it's social media there's so many things that can be distracting. I guess depending on what they are learning, but in our case yes. Because we have timelines, we have deadlines, I believe the people we are working with will be focused, so I do	Caution around distraction; idea for learners to be more independent if material is interesting enough.

Question	Response Summary	Themes
	believe yes it is possible, but there is also the side where it can be a distraction as well.	
How can social media enhance collaboration between learners and educators?	It's flexible, in terms of space and time, it can be compressed. You could be anywhere you are and learn from whoever - it's not rigid, you can be anywhere and use it to communicate, to learn, you don't have to have a physical classroom setup.	Of use to learners in terms of flexibility.
What support or training is needed for educators and learners to use social media effectively in ALE?	The question is do we always see social media as a tool for learning... for some people the awareness that this tool is not just for you to chat, it's a resource you can use for learning. I'm not sure if there is much research and awareness around social media as a tool for learning, I think that's still something emerging. I think maybe there can be some policies and campaigns, something of that nature, to say this is a tool we can use. I don't think it's happening, at all, yet.	Educators need to be taught to see social media as a tool for learning and not just for chatting; still in early stages.
How could privacy and data security concerns be addressed when using social media in ALE?	Policies should be in place, policy makers need to put those regulations in place, the frameworks and laws, I think that's where the role of government comes in. In issues with law and regulation that could be helpful. Also do a bit of awareness, awareness campaigns I suppose.	Policies, laws, regulations.

Thematic Analysis 13:

Question	Response Summary	Themes
Have you ever heard of or considered using WhatsApp for more purposes than sending out course material, and what kind of ideas do you have around this?	We mostly work with trade unions, we provide worker education, and all aspects of the work that has to do with unions, what a shop steward would need in his or her work particularly as a shop steward. We also provide formal and non-formal education programmes and seminars and short-courses and schools, etcetera. We use WhatsApp and Facebook to encourage discussion. We've created a platform through WhatsApp where we keep our participants updated on several things: courses, meetings, other education forums they can participate in.	Using WhatsApp more for admin and communication purposes still.

Question	Response Summary	Themes
	So it's a means of communication for us, and people are most likely to respond to WhatsApp compared to an email, because it's more immediate.	
Have you ever considered different ways to carry out adult education and learning on social media, for example running a whole course on Facebook?	We have considered it, but we haven't necessarily developed material around it... we have online learning for longer courses, but we have considered it, and we are considering it.	Interest in new developments.
What are some concrete ways adult learning organisations can deal with the problems of high costs of smartphones, data, and poor connectivity?	That's difficult, we provide the data but it's costly to us - so we have asked organisations to provide data to participants, or people need to go to the union office where there's wifi, but it's not always possible for participants to travel and that's an additional cost. So we haven't thought of what's an additional means of covering that cost.	Support from fraternal organisations; funding needed.
Is it valuable to use social media for ALE for guest lecturers or sharing video clips?	Very useful. For us, it would mean we don't exclude people who wouldn't necessarily have access to our education, so it would be a way to include all of them.	Inclusion of those who can't participate physically.
Would you design a course for social media yourself or prefer a standard platform to tweak?	I think it would be useful to assist people in terms of teaching them ways in terms of designing various forms of educational material. If there's material available that's generic, that's also good, but in most instances with our organisation we would have to design according to what we have.	Rather train people to develop their own social media based courses.
Can social media be used to involve students in finding and sharing learning resources and co-creating the curriculum?	I'm sure.	-
How can social media enhance collaboration between learners and educators?	It could be good in terms of bringing together people from different organisations and a wider platform, it means they come into contact with others, they learn from others, they don't feel like they're alone, so that feeling of being alone is kind of eliminated. It's one way of people connecting.	Collaboration between learners, bringing new groups of learners together, minimising isolation.
What support or training is needed for educators and learners to use social media effectively in ALE?	Digital literacy and technical skills would be useful. I don't think we've realised as organisations to what extent we can use the different platforms for learning remotely [inaudible]. The digital space is seen as kind of a threat compared to how it was	Needs more support around innovative uses; need to minimise the perception that digital learning is a threat to education; need hybrid ways.

Question	Response Summary	Themes
	done previously, we also find that we're not necessarily clued up or ready to do that transition from in-contact learning to digital learning. We must prepare for that more actively to find a combination of doing contact learning and digital learning.	
How could privacy and data security concerns be addressed when using social media in ALE?	I don't have enough information about it. We generally try not to share people's information, we follow the POPI act. We also need to be able to have a secure platform, and make sure your platform is secure when you invite people to join.	POPI, secure platform.

Thematic Analysis 14:

Question	Response Summary	Themes
Have you ever heard of or considered using WhatsApp for more purposes than sending out course material, and what kind of ideas do you have around this?	We've used WhatsApp on several fronts. It's not just about sending out materials, it's about communication. We found it very very useful in terms of allowing people to have feedback, to give responses to the material, or particularly to evaluations. So after events, after workshops, to have WhatsApp groups where people can post their reflections and thoughts, so in other words what we can improve: the materials, as well as our approach in regards to "popular" adult education. We found that WhatsApp groups are useful because most people, the vast majority of people we work with, have them on their phones. it's just a question of packaging the materials and facilitating the discussions more effectively and efficiently in terms of improving that. In terms of a platform for information sharing , for feedback, for evaluations, we've found WhatsApp to be very useful.	WhatsApp still being used for discussion and also for getting learners thoughts on topics; accessible to most; packaging material is all that is needed now.
Have you ever considered different ways to carry out adult education and learning on social media, for example running a whole course on Facebook?	We have not considered running an entire course on Facebook, no. We have live streamed - and what we use social media platforms for is taking some of the larger scale materials that we produce, let's say we produce a booklet or a different material, and [making a] one page, half a page, infographic. So what we've done is	Slowly moving into digital ALE; step by step move into fully digital ALE.

Question	Response Summary	Themes
	<p>used those social media platforms for disseminating and getting feedback on infographics. Also used social media for pulling people into our events in relation to making sure they have connection if they don't have Zoom or Teams, so that's proven particularly useful for people in far-flung areas where their access is very minimal</p>	
<p>What are some concrete ways adult learning organisations can deal with the problems of high costs of smartphones, data, and poor connectivity?</p>	<p>The only issue is data costs, so, the challenge for us is how to address that issue - the data challenges, because a lot of people in rural or small towns don't have a lot of access to WiFi or free internet. Other than that there's many of us in South Africa who have been trying to address that problem for some time and continue to do so, so, I mean obviously the first stop in that battle is to get the regulator, the communications regulator, ICASA, to basically regulate the industry, and to force the providers to lessen data costs. ... it's clear in South Africa, in particular, that the rates are much higher than they are in other places, but there's no political will to act against the service providers or at least to force them into that. So, for example, the promise of the government some time ago to provide free WiFi simply has not been rolled out nearly to the extent it should've been. There's still many, many community centres and libraries which do not have it.</p>	<p>No Wi-Fi in small towns or rural areas; political campaigning needed to reduce cost of data and improve connectivity</p>
<p>Is it valuable to use social media for ALE for guest lecturers or sharing video clips?</p>	<p>Certainly, our approach is to use social media where it's useful. Obviously everyone has critiques of social media and its limitations but in the context of - it's about accessibility, I think that's the key issue, and where those platforms can be used where they're making researchers accessible, to materials, to feedback, to give lectures or whatever the case may be, then yes we're certainly supportive of that, but I don't think we've explored it enough to be honest with you. Certainly in our field there's probably quite a lot more space in terms of making use of this. But there is a weariness, in some ways, and I think this is where the balance is, a sort of weariness to not to try to dumb things</p>	<p>Find ways to use social media to make more info more accessible to learners; don't use social media to dumb down or condense material too much.</p>

Question	Response Summary	Themes
	down too much. In other words, to try to make sure we can use this space but in a way that is not patronising, and recognising that people would like the full panoply of what the course is, so it doesn't become a "shortcut" in other words.	
Would you design a course for social media yourself or prefer a standard platform to tweak?	I think probably one could do a little bit of both. I think you need to have the creativity - I certainly, on a personal level, I could design a course, but [inaudible] for those who are much more knowledgeable about the social media space about what fits the best, and so the way it's laid out, the way it's presented. So I think a combination of educators, first and foremost, and then those who are more social media savvy and who have that kind of expertise, and coming together would be the best scenario.	Welcomes innovation; needs assistance that can be tailored for specific learners.
Can social media be used to involve students in finding and sharing learning resources and co-creating the curriculum?	That's a difficult question, I think you sort of need to take it step-by-step. So in our case, we haven't even gotten there yet in terms of that kind of use of social media. But in terms of the co-creation of things, I think, you need to be quite careful to manage expectations and to be able to communicate exactly what it is that you're doing. Because, our experience in terms of social media is, whilst the space and platform is a good one, oftentimes there can be a bit of miscommunication and misunderstanding if things aren't explained fully or they're not being able to be talked through fully. So, in some ways there's a combination, you can use social media but it's not the sole platform, in other words you're going to need to use other forms of communication to make sure that people are all on board and understand exactly what's going on on both sides.	When working with learners on co-creating, maintain boundaries and manage expectations.
How can social media enhance collaboration between learners and educators?	We have a generational gap, first of all, which needs to be closed with those who are maybe not so comfortable on social media and the younger generations which use it all the time, and coming together to try and talk about that, to try to see how one can make use of the space. It would be crucial, in our experience, to not rely on social media fully, but to combine it with	Close the digital divide and generation gap; combine it with in-person and other forms of communication so that social media doesn't dominate as a platform.

Question	Response Summary	Themes
<p>What support or training is needed for educators and learners to use social media effectively in ALE?</p>	<p>other forms of communication and contact, so the social media space becomes a tool not the dominant platform.</p> <p>-creating some kind of boundaries, some kind of rules and framing for how to use the space, first of all.</p> <p>- the social media space can sometimes be a “free-for-all” and people when they get on the social media space will say things or put things up that they will never do in person.</p> <p>- use the social media to improve literacy, first of all, because that’s sort of more foundational basic education anyway. And also design skills and ways of presenting, and digital skills as well in terms of how to create content as well.</p> <p>We are seeing a rightward shift, a lot of this misinformation, demagoguery, and everything else. So for us in any kind of social media it’s important not just in terms of the hard skills, methodologies, and the platforms, and technical issues. It’s about what we’re doing on that space and how we’re doing it.</p>	<p>How to use it in a boundaried way, maintain order in online classrooms, make sure it is progressive.</p>
<p>How could privacy and data security concerns be addressed when using social media in ALE?</p>	<p>In certain partnerships, depending upon the political-social situation we’ve shifted to Signal, for example, because we find it a much more secure platform than WhatsApp, and it’s also a “free” software, it’s not owned by one of the big tech companies.</p> <p>Try to choose a platform and popularise that platform. WhatsApp is so ubiquitous, we use it, but oftentimes privacy and security fall through the cracks in many cases. The other thing is education on that, for a lot of people are unaware of the kind of threats out there. Creating free to use antivirus software and protection software would be another thing, which doesn’t cost an arm and a leg to actually use, ... it could prevent the more popular kinds of phishing, misinformation, where</p>	<p>Be conscious of security and not complacent; protect learners’ devices from viruses, etc.</p>

Question	Response Summary	Themes
	people try to get your data or sell you things, or whatever it is, that come on.	

Interviews with Social Media Experts and Curriculum Designers

Thematic Analysis 15:

Question	Response (Quote)	Theme
Have you ever heard of or considered using WhatsApp for more purposes than sending out course material, and what kind of ideas do you have around this?	"We haven't really done many campaigns that involve WhatsApp in a more integrated or complex way...or develop apps with API (Application Programming Interface. For example, the weather bureau's software system contains daily weather data. The weather app on your phone "talks" to this system via APIs and shows you daily weather updates on your phone. (Amazon Web Services, n.d.) but have worked with organisations using chatbots to communicate with beneficiaries...ParentText uses chatbots in order to create courses for parents in different contexts...There is definitely a need to integrate WhatsApp in broader comms strategies...even with advocacy campaigns where there is maybe a low threshold of understanding technology...organisations can use it to set up helplines, support services or online mentorships in educational settings...multimedia that can be shared...it's definitely one of the more overlooked tools to offer."	Expanding WhatsApp's Role in Education: Using chatbots, multimedia, and zero-rated packages for accessibility.
Have you ever considered different ways to carry out adult education and learning on social media, for example running a whole course on Facebook?	"Yes, you can use Facebook to do that...there are closed groups in Facebook...there's the live function and it's an easy way to broadcast...benefit of social media is its two-way communication and people can interact and engage...You could use Zoom, but Zoom is not so easy to access...it's a bit more complex...we need to study the tools and see what works best for particular interventions."	Broadcasting on Social Media: Leveraging Facebook's closed groups and live functions for two-way educational interactions.
What are some concrete ways adult learning organisations can deal with	"Data is expensive...developing more offline content is possibly the way to	Offline and Hybrid Models: Using offline content and

Question	Response (Quote)	Theme
the high cost of smartphones, data, and poor connectivity?	go...programmes like WiiLearn use solar power packs with projectors, providing video material and games for every grade...doesn't require internet...Zero-rated platforms are also advocated to reduce costs. Consumers need to put pressure on service providers to make platforms more accessible."	solar-powered tools to overcome connectivity and cost barriers.
Is it valuable to use social media for ALE by bringing in guest lecturers or video clips from the field?	"Definitely...social media is a simple tool to connect people...use in-app services tools...the phone has a camera and sound...connect people to fieldwork for more practical learning rather than old-school methods...allowing people to ask questions...test and see if it works—every audience is different."	Enhancing Practical Learning: Connecting learners with guest lecturers and fieldwork through multimedia tools.
Would you be okay with designing a course for social media yourself, or would you prefer a standard platform to tweak?	"I don't know if social media is the answer...there are platforms designed to hold coursework...worthwhile looking at those rather than retrofitting social media into something it's not designed for."	Course-Specific Platforms: Highlighting the potential limitations of social media and recommending dedicated learning platforms.
Can social media be used to involve students in co-creating the curriculum?	"Yes...tasks could involve recording information and using free tools like Canva as long as there's a structure for feedback...co-creation allows people to engage more...give people more agency and allow them to lead others."	Co-Creation of Curriculum: Encouraging student agency and participation through structured activities on social media.
How could social media be used for collaboration and educator-learner interaction in ALE?	"Social media can connect people remotely...you always need a facilitator to guide conversations...there are so many types of platforms and ways to do this...by having conversations between people and sharing lived experiences through multimedia."	Facilitating Remote Collaboration: Using social media to share lived experiences and enable meaningful interactions.
What support or training would help educators and learners use social media effectively in ALE?	"Understanding platforms before they use them...testing them...creating shared spaces for learning or mentorship...people can learn online but feel more comfortable when they know someone can help them navigate."	Digital Literacy and Support: Emphasising platform testing, mentorship, and shared learning spaces for effective use.
How could privacy and data security concerns be addressed when using social media in ALE?	"Understanding the laws like POPIA...everyone signing applicable consent forms...making provisions for people who don't want to show their faces...getting a lawyer involved for checks and balances."	Privacy and Data Security: Ensuring compliance with data laws and addressing individual privacy concerns in social media use.

Thematic Analysis 16:

Question	Response (Quote)	Theme
Have you ever heard of or considered using WhatsApp for more purposes than sending out course material, and what kind of ideas do you have around this?	"You could use it for...multiple ways especially for low data areas...the fact that many people use it socially...with course materials a lot of the problem is high data outputs...like high res images...so you need to convert those to audio so that this becomes an inclusive pedagogical practice...where you do multiple formats so that you can impact differently-abled audience and audience from low-income areas...WhatsApp is easily used in a social context—audience in low-income areas wouldn't be able to necessarily use a platform that takes a lot of data...so we optimise WhatsApp to provide multi-modal outputs or formats to fit their needs...WhatsApp is not just about being a social media platform – it's about accessible, inclusive means for differently-abled people from different contexts to access learning. If you are pursuing adult learning and never had access to formal education...navigating first how to access learning is another task...it's very difficult for people to sign up like with passwords...the idea of digital literacy is not a given...so this creates affordances by using social media...they already know how to communicate on social media...you are optimising what they know and scaffolding off their knowledge of how they already use and know how to use social media...this is about inclusive innovation and access to learning...it's about how you think about access to education on multiple dimensions...and social media is a way that people are learning...the only caveat is when people want certification...but adult learning is more about how do you self-develop...it's about learning as social capital and learning as becoming...you've got to meet them where they're at...that's the problem with formal education...this is more about the social justice audience..."	Inclusive Pedagogical Practices and Accessibility: Leveraging WhatsApp to create low-data, multi-modal learning opportunities that meet diverse needs.

<p>Have you ever considered different ways to carry out adult education and learning on social media, for example running a whole course on Facebook?</p>	<p>"You can run a complete course on Facebook...you'd have to have it closed off (from the general public)...how to assess people on Facebook...you can put on videos and instructional text...one of the biggest challenges is to have someone to monitor the chats of the group or do you want to have a self-based course where they can have an interactive knowledge chat among themselves...you could provide resources and scaffold all the resources, like you could use WhatsApp with Facebook and have a bouquet...this is what it means to look at innovative pedagogical practices...how to present a bouquet of options...you could include a YouTube link...as in open education resource...the challenge is that Facebook would want to know if you are monetising it...with Meta, student information is problematic...they will have the students' data...if they are on Facebook it is already linked...whether the course is open access or the lecturer believes it's theirs...we are concerned about Facebook - what it is that they using the data for..."</p>	<p>Innovative Pedagogical Practices on Social Media: Designing secure, multi-platform courses while navigating privacy concerns.</p>
<p>What are some of the concrete ways that adult learning organisations can deal with the problems of the high cost of smartphones and data and poor connectivity, i.e., can courses be designed around this?</p>	<p>"That's always been a problem even with access to laptops...either they have organisations they partner with that provide them hardware and they have a cross-hybrid model...where they download the work or they have access to hardware like smartphones...it's not so much hardware but in-person check-in that allows them (the students) to feel like a community that supports them to learn...blended models have been shown in research to be more effective to get adults to complete their studies..."</p>	<p>Blended Models for Accessibility: Partnerships and hybrid approaches to address connectivity, hardware access, and foster community.</p>
<p>Is it valuable in your opinion to use social media for ALE for the purposes of bringing in guest lecturers or video clips from the field?</p>	<p>"Yes because it's all peer-to-peer community and people learn from each other and that's where they create a community and that's a powerful tool for engagement as opposed to one directional learning from lecturer to students...everyone walks into a space to speak with their own knowledge regardless of who they are...looking at every student who is already bringing</p>	<p>Community-Based Learning: Fostering peer-to-peer engagement and knowledge sharing through guest lecturers and co-created learning spaces.</p>

This participant was called to attend a work commitment during the interview and later answered the questions in a voice note.

But I do think with educators, working with educators, they prefer to actually have a template or a design that they could honestly just tweak and customise. It's very difficult for them to figure all these things with a platform as well as learning outcomes. So that's what I would advise for educators.

So as for social media, I think we can use YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp to involve students.

Basically with YouTube, if they can find open resources or a lot of links, a lot of links on reels, on shorts, around different learning outcomes. That is in line with a course. You could let students go and find resources that actually resonate with them and share it on the platform.

So that could be an exercise.

They can also use it as a way of peer-to-peer review.

So send them out to go and look for a resource and then ask them to share it on WhatsApp. And then they could actually see whether that resource is good or not to use in the course. Obviously, from the perspective of a student-centred approach, you'd have resources that they could find that are aligned to students.

So like an animated video or podcast or things that use their language, especially multilingualism in isiXhosa or in isiZulu or in Sotho.

Whether or not they can find resources that represent all the different languages in the classroom.

So that is definitely ways in which you could co-create the curriculum.

What are some of the ways that you think social media could be good for ALE?

In terms of collaboration between learners and increased educator-learner interaction?

I think with adult learning, in terms of collaboration, it's around engagement.

So social media is very good at allowing people to engage in platforms where they don't feel, you know, judged or they don't feel like they are seen.

So it's a good way to create groups, let it be driven by the students and the social media platform.

Let the social media be driven by the students, not be driven by the lecturer.

And then also, basically, multimodal approaches, using social media for multimodal approaches, not just in terms of text PDFs but in terms of video, audio, and media posts like images.

And then in terms of translanguaging or multilingualism, allowing people to use their own language to explain things to each other.

Also the context, bringing in backgrounds of who they are, their social.

So who is in your room, in the classroom using social media to share their own social media posts so that you get to know them better.

And in terms of that, knowing your class, knowing the students.

Social media is a very good way for students to be seen and heard and validated.

So I would say they definitely need training, both educators and learners, because there's codes of conduct on social media that is very different from socially using the platform.

So WhatsApp groups for education would mean there are specific times people can talk or put something in the chat without disturbing each other.

So after-hours ethical use of social media in terms of what is appropriate to share, what is not appropriate.

Memes or something that's racist or sexually explicit, you really want codes of conduct.

And then making sure that people understand IP (Intellectual Property) and IP laws and data around the use of social media, what data gathering happens on the back end.

So I would incorporate that and then specific activities, study which platforms have better functionality for which outcomes.

And I think that's a way in which to navigate these things.

Like all platforms, especially AI and what's happening in the field.

Data privacy is really about data mining, and so people need to understand why the data is needed, how it can be used for marketing, how it can be sold.

So I think it's important for people to get a sense that they shouldn't use anything, okay?

Thematic Analysis 17:

Question	Response (Quote)	Theme
Have you ever heard of or considered using WhatsApp for more purposes than sending out course material, and what kind of ideas do you have around this?	"We use WhatsApp for meetings...we use to hold meetings...in a group of adults...then we hold a meeting...we have a WhatsApp group and group for executive members...sending messages to others, sending educational videos, job postings...if video is relevant like HIV awareness."	Utilising WhatsApp for Communication and Awareness: Leveraging WhatsApp for meetings, information sharing, and educational videos.
Have you ever considered different ways to carry out adult education and learning on social media, for example running a whole course on Facebook?	"One may want to pursue that but I typically think if I go to Zoom...have a training on Zoom, we are an affiliate on Zoom...blind SA holds training on Zoom...we find Zoom very difficult but maybe having training on WhatsApp might be harder for adult individuals...we would really appreciate training."	Training on Social Media Platforms: Highlighting challenges and the need for training to use platforms like Zoom or WhatsApp for education.
What are some of the concrete ways that adult learning organisations can deal with the high cost of smartphones and data and poor connectivity?	"Maybe the only time...maybe if a projector is used and then where they are able to see [the work that has] been done using a projector..."	Overcoming Connectivity Barriers: Using projectors to share resources with groups in low-connectivity settings.

Question	Response (Quote)	Theme
How are blind people accessing social media?	"An individual who does training explains in length where, when, and how training is done...types of features of phone or app for example mute or unmute on Zoom...the person who does training must know all that to help visually impaired."	Providing detailed, accessible training for visually impaired learners.
Is it valuable to use social media for ALE by bringing in guest lecturers or video clips from the field?	"It will be valuable...if a video is sent, I'm able to pause the video or even rewind so that I'm able to grasp it properly, and if I miss something I can replay the video."	Value of Video Content in ALE: Supporting learning through accessible, replayable video content.
Would you be okay with designing a course for social media yourself, or would you prefer a standard platform to tweak?	"People will ask where and how much is the learnership...it will seem like a learnership and it will have to pay...the question of data...will data be provided."	Considerations for Course Design on Social Media: Addressing concerns about costs and data provision for learners.
Are there ways in which social media can be used by you as a facilitator to involve students in finding learning resources and sharing these with the class and the educator, so as to co-create the curriculum?	"It would be possible I agree on that...there have been classes not necessarily on Zoom where you find individuals have seminars on Zoom...can have the same seminars on WhatsApp...individual is talking to everyone on Zoom and everyone is learning."	Using platforms like Zoom and WhatsApp for interactive seminars and resource sharing.
What support or training would be useful for both educators and learners to use social media effectively in ALE?	"We would really appreciate training...to use these tools effectively, educators and learners need specific skills and guidance on navigating platforms like WhatsApp and Zoom."	Providing necessary training to educators and learners for effective social media use.
How could privacy and data security concerns be addressed when using social media in ALE?	"What can happen...let me use WhatsApp...when you host a session if you create or start a meeting, you as the person who started the meeting must have the prerogative to secure that information...the app must allow that...the person who is allowed to record is the admin...some information can be private..."	Ensuring Privacy and Data Security: Highlighting the need for admin control and data security measures on social media platforms.

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