**Social Media Interview Protocol (to be conducted with international students)**

*Overall, we are trying to find out whether, and in what ways, are Social Media important to your everyday educational experience as an international student at Unisa.By Social Media we are referring to things like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube. Please expand as fully as possible on the questions, as we really want to try and understand things from your perspective.*

**Section 1 Warm-up/Introductory Questions**

*The first few questions are so we can get an idea of who you are and the ways in which you use SM generally in your everyday life.*

***Can you briefly introduce yourself?***

Purpose of question to get a background and to make the student feel more relaxed. Also to draw out if there is a difference between students living in SA and those living elsewhere.)

**Probes:**

Where are you living? Year of study? Subject? How long been in education?

Family structure, age, race, language, socio-economic group, place of residence/homeland, personal circumstances, histories of learning etc.

1. ***Do you use SM? Can you explain to me what role SM plays in your everyday life wrt to your experience of being an international student at Unisa?***

*If not use SM, then go to section 4 (but probably worth double-checking with some examples i.e. so you don’t use social media to help you with your learning, or to get together with other students to discuss your work, or as friends? If not, go to section 4).*

**Probes:**

* If you use SM, how often do you use social media for school/university purposes?
* Which social media do you use and on which type of devices?
* Do you have more than one device to access social media and does the device differ if you are using social media for Unisa-related work or for out of school leisure purposes?
* How do you access social media (through free wifi spots/pay as you go broadband/via contract data plan etc?).
* Do you currently use social media more or less often than you did prior to studying with UNISA?
* Who do you have contact with on social media about your university experiences?
* Do you use SM differently when it’s not about UNISA?

**Section 2 Social Media Experiences**

*I now want to find out about your experiences of using SM at UNISA in a bit more depth by asking you what role social media has played in your distance education experience as an international student so far.*

1. ***How has social media helped you to make the transition to study at Unisa? In what ways? What factors have positively or negatively impacted on your adjustment to university? Has social media played a role here?***

Purpose of question: to understanding the importance of use of SM for contributing towards making the transition into study/adjustment at Unisa)

**Probes:**

* Did you use social media to initially find out about educational opportunities at Unisa?
* Did you follow social media to see what other students already studying at Unisa thought about the place? Which social media?
* Did this influence your perception about coming to study at Unisa or was it not important?
* Did you join any social media groups before starting university, such as subject groups, activity groups, to make ‘friends’ before starting?
* Were social media useful in any way in finding out about other non-academic issues, such as accommodation/visas/financial services etc i.e. daily life, or were face-to-face or other means more important?
* Did you keep in touch with these groups once your university studies started?
* Is studying at Unisa different to studying at your home place? In what ways?
* Have social media helped you adjust to studying in a new context in any way?

1. ***About academic integration: Now you are studying at Unisa, do you use social media for academic or study purposes? Does it help you with your studies as an international student in any way?***

Purpose of question: to understanding the importance of SM for aiding academic experience

**Probes:**

* How do you use social media to support your academic studies?
* Do you use social media for institutional connections for administrative purposes or to contact tutors or funders, or for other purposes?
* Do you use social media to help form new research networks for your future career?
* Can you tell me about the ways you find social media useful for such academic/social/career (related) purposes?

1. ***About informal learning: Do you use SM for learning outside of MyUnisa, without your lecturers or tutors? Do you ever use SM to talk about school work with people other than your lecturers and tutors? In what ways? Anything specifically about how it is useful for you as an international student?***

Purpose of question: to understanding the importance of SM for aiding academic experience via informal learning.

**Probes:**

* Do you use social media for informal study groups/discussions with other students about academic work?
* Or to access information to support your academic studies?
* Do you ever use social media to post your thoughts about something you have learnt in your modules?
* Do you ever use social media to engage with other people about what their opinions are on what you have learnt?
* Do you use social media to help you form your own opinions about your coursework?
* Do you ever use social media as an academic support network in absence of a physical campus – using social media to get answers from peers faster than an email from teachers, asking peers to proofread, advice for exams, etc?
* Can you explain to me why you find social media useful for such ‘informal learning purposes’? (e.g. Is it useful because it is a space that is away from the formal gaze of university staff so it enables you to sort problems/try things out amongst peers or to help you to connect what you are learning with what is happening in your life and the place you live?)

1. ***About social integration at university: Do social media impact on your social connections with others at UNISA? Do SM help you cope better emotionally with being (an international student) at university in any way? Do you feel like SM promotes a sense of togetherness with the people you engage with?***

Purpose of question: to understanding the role of SM in providing social and emotional support and promote belonging. Trying to find out whether SM enable student negotiate the (physical/social/emotional) distances with other (DL) students)).

**Probes:**

* General expectations - Did you use social media when you first became a UNISA student to figure out how everything worked and what being a student at UNISA is all about?
* Has it helped you figure out what is expected of you?
* Social Connections - Do you use social media to make connections and develop friendships with your peers at UNISA?
* Have SM helped you to feel a part of any social groups at Unisa?
* Do you feel comfortable engaging with other students on these groups? Why/why not?
* Do you always declare your nationality?
* Have you ever felt uncomfortable/experienced discrimination because of your race or gender on any social media groups, for example?
* Does the issue of you being an international student ever arise?
* Do you mostly connect with people in the same courses as you or do you try and connect more with people who also come from (country of origin)?
* Belonging - Does this social connection help you to feel more like a part of the UNISA student body, or does it not help?
* Do SM enable you to better understand the ‘place’ of Unisa/South Africa?
* Do you find you learn more about other cultures and ways of thinking from other students or is it not useful in these sorts of was?
* Emotional support - Do you feel like social media provides you with emotional support while you are a student, especially as you are an international student studying at a distance?  – to help not feeling alone, talk about problems, complain?
* Does such support encourage you to carry on with your studies? Why/why not?
* Has SM been important in making you ‘stay’ and endure with your studies?

1. ***About social integration and connection with others beyond Unisa:***

***Do you use SM for maintaining connections with other people too? Does this help you cope better emotionally with being an international student at UNISA?***

Purpose of question: to understanding the role support networks outside of unisa for encouraging retention. Trying to pull out importance of context i.e. differences between students from SA, Namibia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe as well as how social media tie students into networks with others ).

**Probes:**

* Do you use SM to stay in contact with your family and friends?
* Do they help you maintain connection with other friends and family studying or living in other places? Which places?
* Do you use different devices/phone contracts to make these non-unisa social connections? Does this connection to home help or hinder your studies?

***About online identity: Does your profile you represent on SM really relate to how you are in 'real' life? Can you discuss any differences and why? Do you think you are the same person online using SM as you are offline? What is the main difference between your online and offline self?***

Purpose of question Trying to find out whether SM allow several competing versions of Unisa student identity or do they tend to homogenise and simplify what it means to be a student at unisa? What space is there for (inter)national (Nigerian etc) expressions of unisa student identity? Do people express themselves the same on and off line and how do answers to these questions vary with nationality, race, class gender etc )

Probes:

* Is your online presentation different when connecting with people at Unisa compared to how you present yourself online with non-unisa contacts?
* Do you talk about things on SM that you do not/cannot talk about with others face-to-face with regards to your learning experience at Unisa? What sort of things?
* Do SM enable you to express emotions you may not be able to express face-to-face or in any other way?
* Are SM just another place where students socialize and interact or is it different to how you socialise and interact in the offline world?
* Are you more open or more guarded or more confrontatory on SM?
* Do you feel happy to post under your real name and possibly reveal your race and gender?
* Are issues of gender, race, and class more or less evident in this online interaction on SM than face to face?
* Do you feel you have to conform on SM to a particular student culture in relation to South Africa/Unisa or is there room for you to be Nigerian /Zimbabwean/ Namibian, meaning does it allow for more specific presentations of your student identity??
* Do you express your home/national identity on SM? How?
* What languages do you use on SM and why?
* Would you prefer to engage with a group in another language than English?
* Do you feel like you have to act like everyone else on SM or do you get to be who you are in real life or maybe even a bit more of a radical version of yourself?

*About student agency:  Do you ever use social media as a space for personal expression – for celebrating successes , having a voice, expressing your opinions, discussing broader issues about access to higher education in Namibia/Zim/Nigeria?*

Purpose of question: Trying to get at some of the ‘wider issues’ that might shape IDE and ways in which SM used to negotiate these wider issues. Also thinking about how IS may not only (re)make their homeland through social media but also how they might be (re)making Unisa, South Africa and Southern Africa through digital connectivity (and also home students?)

**Probes:**

* Unisa-related - Do you feel ‘free’ to personally express your opinions, ask questions, ‘be yourself’ on SM?
* Have you ever voiced your satisfaction or dissatisfaction with your learning experiences at Unisa on public using social media? Why/why not? What was the response?
* Do you worry about what people will say before you post something about your UNISA experience?
* What worries you/why are you not concerned?
* Wider educational related - What do you think about people using social media as a platform to raise political and personal concerns over higher education in South Africa, such as fees must fall?
* Have you used SM to engage in debates/ express your opinions about the future of education in SA/your home country?
* Do SM provide a space to negotiate the decolonisation of university spaces or do they just reinforce the status quo? (I.e. what are the political roles of SM?)

**Section 3: Wrap up.**

*Thank for all your answers so far. We are getting closer to the end, and I hope you are OK with continuing a bit longer?*

1. ***Do you use social media as often as you would like for the above purposes or is its use restricted in any way?***

Purpose of question: to probe access issues and digital divide, Pull out issues wrt equitable access here wrt specific place of student ie Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Namibia, access in relation to culture etc . Could relate to infrastructure/history/politics etc.

**Probes:**

* If not - Why don’t you use it as often as you like? Check access issues e.g. internet access at home, access to phone/device, cost of connection, ICT literacy, digital divide, other priorities.
* Do you feel like you are capable of using SM to effectively engage with other students? Is it easy or difficult to find other students?
* Any specific restrictions with any specific social media platforms like facebook /twitter/whatsapp? Why?

1. ***About negative experiences. We don’t want to assume SM are inherently good or useful to you for your DL studies, so can you reflect on any problems you think there are or you ever encountered in using SM as an international student while at unisa?***

Purpose of question is to link back to categories in open question on questionnaire and to explore negative experiences in relation to different places and differences between students. How do access/inequality relate to historically produced injustices? Pull out issues wrt specific place of student ie Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Namibia).

**Probes:**

* Does the use of SM become a distraction/time-waster/addictive, overwhelming?
* Any issues of authenticity/trust wrt data or whom you are communicating with?
* Ever concerned about security? State control?
* Have you been subject to sexual/racial/class-based/place-based discrimination?
* Any sense of privacy issues e.g. not knowing who talking to?
* Do you feel that SM breaks down or reinforces barriers between people and place?

1. ***About policy: Would you like UNISA staff to use social media more for academic purposes?***

**Probes:**

* Why/why not? In what ways would it be useful? Any downsides?
* How would you feel about tutors contacting you via social media?
* Would you prefer them do so via official Unisa platforms or via publically available social media?

*Thank you so much, this has been a huge help for me to understand how social media have become part of your life at unisa. Finally, I have just a few shorts questions:*

1. ***In all, can you summarise what social media mean to you as an international student in 3 key words and explain why.***
2. ***Lastly, do you have anything you would like to add to help us shape this project?* Is there anything else you would like to say?**

**Thank you for your time. It is very much appreciated.**

**Section 4: If participant is not using SM:**

***3. If you have not used social media for academic, informal or social purposes, please can you explain why not?***

Purpose of question: be open to possibility that SM is not useful at all (SM useful to education = a Western model). Need to try and find out why this is in the context of particular places and differences between students (race, gender, age, income, place, etc) . How do access/inequality relate to historically produced injustices? I.e. not to simply assume non-use due to technical inability/access).

**Probes:**

* Is there an issue of access? For example, lack of internet connectivity, no smart phone, Lack of money, digital divide, other priorities e.g. work, children?
* Is it an issue of authenticity/trust? For example, do you mistrust of this form of communication? Are you worried about security of data/information/surveillance?
* Or is it a matter of other students not giving sufficient answers or good advice? – receiving subpar answers or incorrect answers from peers.
* Do you avoid SM to maintain privacy? For example, do you not wanting your teachers to find you or not wanting to share your life on social media?
* Do you find SM to be a distraction? For example from academic work/studies, to be a time-waster, addictive, or overwhelming?
* Or is it just Irrelevant for you? Not interested or hard to find other students?
* Have you had problems connecting with other students on same course?
* Others? Anything specific to Nigeria/Zimbabwe/Namibia?

**Section 5: Wrap up.**

*Thank you so much, this has been a huge help for me to understand the role of social media in your experience of being a Unisa student. Finally, I have two short questions:*

* In all, can you summarise what social media mean to you as an international student in 3 key words:
* Lastly, do you have anything you would like to add to help us shape this project? Is there anything else you would like to say?

**Thank-you for your time. It is very much appreciated.**