

**An exploratory study on the uses and gratifications of smartphones in
the workplace: a case study of the National Energy Regulatory of South
Africa (NERSA)**

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An exploratory study on the uses and gratifications of smartphones in the workplace: A case study of the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA)

I declare that this dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to an originality checking software and that it meets the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

Signature: *Fikile Maud Mabaso*

Date: 19 August 2025

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ABSTRACT

Smartphone use in the workplace has shown both positive and negative effects. The study examines how employees of the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA) utilise smartphones and the gratifications derived from their use. The Regulator permits all employees, including general staff and management, to use smartphones during working hours to enhance communication and improve service delivery in the energy industry. However, the absence of a regulatory framework in the form of policies, regulations, and guidelines leaves it unclear how smartphones should be used and managed in the workplace. The researcher identified a gap in the literature on smartphone use in the workplace, particularly within an organisation such as NERSA, thereby necessitating this study. No researcher had conducted this type of work at the time of the study.

The study adopted an interpretive paradigm to explore the uses and gratifications of smartphones in the workplace and to understand how staff and management utilised smartphones. The study was largely qualitative and used descriptive statistics.

The target population comprised two hundred and twenty (220) NERSA employees. Of these, eighty-eight (88) took part. The study employed the uses and gratifications theory to explore how smartphones were utilised in the workplace. Self-administered online questionnaires, comprising open- and closed-ended questions, were distributed via SurveyMonkey to collect data. Respondents were sent an online questionnaire via a link in their email. The data from open-ended questions were analysed and organised thematically, while the data from closed-ended questions were presented in graphs and tables.

It was found that employees used their smartphones more for personal activities than for work-related tasks, with personal use in the workplace exceeding 15 percent.

The study recommends increasing smartphone use in the workplace to better benefit organisations. Policies, regulations, or guidelines should be adopted to advise employees on this matter.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Apps	Applications
EFT	Electronic Funds Transfer
4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
GHS	General Household Survey
IP	Intellectual Property
SNSs	Social Networking Sites
UGT	Uses and Gratifications Theory

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CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Communication and the use of technology have advanced significantly over the years, with one of the most transformative milestones being the introduction of mobile phones in 1979 (Horst 2021:2). Initially accessible only to affluent individuals in business and industrial environments, mobile phones became more affordable and widely available over time through technological advances and economies of scale, transforming them into essential tools for communication and connectivity across all segments of society. Their adoption became widespread because people found them nearly indispensable (Koyuncu & Pusatli 2019:6). By 2007, mobile phones had evolved into smartphones, featuring elegant designs, efficient processors, and user-friendly interfaces, incorporating computing technologies and tablet-like capabilities, and offering a vast array of Internet access (Mobasheri, King, Johnston, Gautama, Purkayastha & Darzi 2016:174).

Molyneux (2014), de Jong, Donelle & Kerr (2020), and Wang, Xiang & Fesenmaier (2014) define smartphones as multipurpose devices that function as computers with internet access and can efficiently download applications (Apps). The authors describe smartphones as handheld devices that support email, internet access, and telephony, providing multiple communication channels suitable for personal and professional use. According to Mobasheri et al. (2016), smartphones have evolved into constant companions in daily life. Their use has surged worldwide, reaching 3.3 billion users in 2019 (de Jong et al. 2020:27), with an estimated 7.5 billion users by 2026 (Kogler, Paulick, Scheffran & Birkholz 2024).

According to Koyuncu and Pusatli (2019:1), the adaptable design of handheld devices enables inventors and technicians to conceive and develop new applications that offer diverse portfolios for various purposes. The authors further state that “Google Play Store and Apple App Store contain about 3.8 million and 2 million applications respectively, as of the first quarter of 2018”.

The widespread adoption of smartphones signifies their extensive acceptance. "Today, smartphones have even reached the point of addiction for many and have become an indispensable instrument in people's daily lives" (Koyuncu & Pusatli 2019:1).

According to Kincade (2017:1), a workplace is an environment where individuals perform their duties, whether in a physical or virtual setting. Kincade's (2017:1) study, conducted in the United States of America (USA), examined the potential overuse of smartphones in the workplace among millennials and management perspectives on the issue. Kincade (2017:1) and Dittrich (2020:18) emphasise that millennials, having grown up in the digital age, share a close relationship with their smartphones. Kincade's (2017:1) study aimed to determine whether smartphones were primarily used for work-related or non-work-related purposes during working hours.

The findings revealed a discrepancy in perceptions. While millennials believed their smartphone use was necessary and did not exceed reasonable limits, managers argued that excessive use was prevalent and often unrelated to work tasks (Kincade 2017:3). The author further notes that millennials contended that smartphones enhanced work efficiency by enabling the delivery of requested information beyond working hours and maintaining constant connectivity between management and subordinates. By contrast, managers observed that employees frequently wasted valuable work hours browsing non-work-related sites, highlighting the tension between perceived productivity and actual workplace behaviour (Kincade 2017:4).

Ting (2022:61) describes the millennial generation as "digital natives", identifying them as individuals born alongside the rise of technology, including smartphones. The author further asserts that this generation does not struggle to integrate smartphones into their work and personal lives, owing to their skill set and familiarity with these devices. This expertise enables young employees to significantly assist their colleagues in achieving amicable solutions and desired outcomes (Ting 2022:61). Millennials can play a crucial role in sharing knowledge and in understanding the uses and gratifications

associated with smartphone use in the workplace. Hence, the researcher explored the uses and gratifications of smartphones within the workplace.

Molyneux (2014:89) argues that employers view the use of smartphones for personal activities during working hours, rather than for work-related tasks for which employees are compensated, as a significant challenge. The author further notes that this issue has increasingly become a concern for many employers. While the use of smartphones in the workplace cannot be entirely prohibited, it can be regulated to ensure that work duties are not compromised (Molyneux 2014:89). Consequently, the current study examined the uses and gratifications derived from smartphone use in the workplace. The National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA) was selected as the research site because the researcher was an NERSA employee. Additionally, participants were readily available, and, since most owned smartphones, the researcher assumed they were more likely to use both personal and work-related applications.

1.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY PROBLEM

According to Koyuncu & Pusatli (2019:1), smartphones have both benefits and drawbacks in the workplace. In addition to phone calls, smartphones can be used to send and receive email, interact with social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google+, and complete electronic financial transactions, among other tasks.

Pitichat (2013:1) argues that smartphones can hinder workplace productivity if their use is not regulated or guided by established workplace policies. However, Duke and Montag (2017:90) argue that smartphones can enhance work experiences, performance, and productivity. Duke and Montag (2017:22) found that smartphone use is associated with some output loss, and a significant relationship was also observed between smartphone addiction and decreased work output. Smartphone use may be driven by perceived pressure in the work environment, leading employees to “escape” into addictive smartphone use (Duke & Montag 2017:22).

According to Kim (2018:1), employees spend significant time on smartphones for non-work-related purposes. Kim (2018:1) further reports that the average number of times people check their smartphones daily is 85. Accessibility is also improving dramatically; consequently, the growth rate of smartphone use is astounding (Kim 2018:1). The author further states that smartphone use in the workplace can reduce productivity by approximately 5 hours per week. This estimate does not account for time spent on activities such as browsing the internet, playing mobile games, running errands, shopping, and other similar pursuits (Kim 2018:1). Consequently, it is essential to draw a clear distinction between professional and personal smartphone use in the workplace. The study investigated the uses and gratifications of smartphones in this context, aiming to uncover how both staff and management utilised these devices and the gratifications they derived from their use. By examining these dynamics, the research sought to provide insights into the interplay between professional responsibilities and personal activities facilitated by smartphones in the workplace.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.3.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory

According to Kivunja (2018:15), the theoretical framework serves as a roadmap for a study, guiding its direction and structure. In this study, the theoretical framework is rooted in the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which examines how individuals proactively seek specific media to fulfil their needs and interests (Severin & Tankard, 1997). UGT was utilised to deepen understanding of how staff members and management at NERSA utilise smartphones and the gratifications derived from their use. The main objective of the study was to investigate the uses and gratifications of smartphones in the workplace, as employees' lives seem to revolve around these devices, significantly influencing both their personal and professional experiences (Ajimakin 2018:12). Specifically, the study focused on four core constructs of UGT: "Socialising, information-seeking, entertainment, and self-status-seeking behaviour" (Ajimakin 2018:65).

While UGT has been extensively applied to traditional media, Ballard (2011:3) notes that research into the motivations for individuals' use of social networking sites (SNSs) remains relatively limited. SNSs allow users to find and connect with others, such as family, friends, or followers, with whom they share a common connection or viewpoint, including images, favourite books, or interests (Ajimakin 2018:12). These platforms also facilitate the sharing of images, favourite books, and other personal interests. The nature of SNSs varies across platforms, and the continuous emergence of new sites has significantly enhanced user communication (Ajimakin 2018:12).

A more general term for internet-based platforms that enable users to create and share information for social purposes is "social media" (Ajimakin 2018:12). Menon and Meghana (2021:2) note that SNSs support large user bases and facilitate social interaction. These platforms, accessible via websites or applications, include popular social networking sites such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter (X), and TikTok (Menon & Meghana, 2021:2). Users engage with these platforms for various purposes, including sharing information, posting images, and maintaining social connections, making social media an indispensable part of their daily lives (Ajimakin 2018:12). This study, therefore, leverages UGT to explore how smartphones and SNSs are utilised in the workplace, shedding light on the motivations and gratifications associated with their use.

1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study examined how employees utilise smartphones and the gratifications derived from their use. Grounded in the uses and gratifications theory, the research analysed and described smartphone use in the workplace. The researcher's affiliation with NERSA facilitated access to the target population and sample for the study.

To enhance the validity and reliability of the data, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative methods (Heitmayer 2020). This methodological framework safeguarded the comprehensive

collection, analysis, and synthesis of relevant information, providing a holistic picture of the findings (Heitmayer 2020).

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study were to:

- Explore how staff members and management use the functionalities of smartphones in the workplace.
- Describe the perceived gratifications sought by smartphone use in the workplace (including using applications).
- Explore management's perspectives on staff members' use of smartphones in the organisation.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions of the study were:

- How do staff members and management use the functionalities of smartphones in the workplace?
- What are the perceived gratifications sought by smartphone use in the workplace (including applications)?
- What are managers' perceptions of staff members' use of smartphones at the workplace?

1.7 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The study adopted an interpretive paradigm to explore the uses and gratifications of smartphones in the workplace and to understand how staff and management utilised them. Albers (2017:215) defines quantitative research as the collection of statistical data that should be analysed and synthesised to draw conclusions. Apuke (2017:40) describes quantitative research as the calculation and analysis of variables to obtain results. Therefore, the analysis of statistical data addresses questions regarding who, how much, what, where, when, how many, and so on, about a specific variable or interaction of variables within a study (Apuke 2017:40). The

quantitative method was employed to augment the information gathered from the open-ended questions.

According to Mohajan (2018:23), qualitative research involves individual interaction. This interaction is examined to provide insight into how individuals perceive their experiences. Social reality is constructed by collecting data through appropriate interviews, recording, engaging in human interaction, and employing instruments such as questionnaires (Mohajan 2018:23). The qualitative method enabled the researcher to explore and understand the uses and gratifications of smartphones in the workplace and to comprehend how staff and management utilised smartphones in the workplace.

The qualitative methodology provided a deeper understanding of how employees at NERSA use smartphones in the workplace. It also uncovered employees' smartphone usage and gratifications, and their impact on their personal and professional lives, particularly in four areas: information seeking, socialising, self-actualisation behaviour, and enjoyment (Ajimakin 2018:65).

1.8 STUDY APPROACH AND DESIGN

The research design is the roadmap that guides and directs the research process. According to Ajimakin (2018:64), it is a comprehensive plan that underpins a study and provides an overarching framework. This framework typically includes selecting research participants, specifying the study's location, defining data collection methods, and developing strategies to address research questions. Data was collected using self-completed questionnaires comprising both open- and closed-ended questions. A nonprobability sampling technique was used to purposively select individuals (Zohrabi 2013:255). Purposive sampling was utilised to ensure that all the necessary data for the study was collected. To capture both quantitative trends and unexpected qualitative insights, the questionnaire employed a mixed-methods design, including both closed- and open-ended items (Zohrabi 2013:255). A significant advantage of open-ended questions is that respondents are free to articulate their views with ease, thanks to the

anonymity assured to participants (Zohrabi 2013:255). In contrast, closed-ended questions capture participants' demographic information to complement the qualitative data collected.

According to Blumberg et al. (2014:229), SurveyMonkey is a safe and reliable online questionnaire tool developed and implemented by Momentive. The questionnaires were distributed to respondents via a link sent to each employee's email address. The questionnaire was piloted to ensure it collected the intended information.

The target population for this study comprised NERSA's 220 employees, representing a diverse mix of genders, staff levels (including management), age groups, races, and academic backgrounds. A nonprobability sampling approach was used, with participants purposively selected based on their accessibility and availability.

A mixed-methods research design strengthened the study. It served as a comprehensive framework, guiding participant selection, study location, data collection methods, and the interpretation of research questions (Ajimakin 2018; Heitmayer 2020).

Data was collected using self-administered questionnaires that included both open- and closed-ended items. These questionnaires were distributed electronically via SurveyMonkey, a secure and reliable online tool developed by Momentive (Blumberg et al. 2014:229). Participants were emailed a link to the questionnaire. Prior to full deployment, the questionnaire was piloted to ensure it captured the intended data effectively.

The combination of purposive sampling and qualitative research, complemented by descriptive statistics, enabled a broader exploration of the research questions, balancing depth and breadth in the collected data (Heitmayer 2020). This approach ensured that the findings of the study were both insightful and methodologically sound.

1.9 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

This chapter introduces the foundational elements of the study, including the background, research problem, and theoretical framework. The subsequent chapter examines the current state of knowledge on the topic. It synthesises previous research findings to establish a solid foundation for this study and to guide future research.

Chapter Three details the research methodology, beginning with the context and rationale for adopting a mixed-methods approach. It outlines the selection criteria and data collection process, and discusses ethical considerations and study limitations.

Chapter Four presents the research findings, analysing and interpreting the results through thematic discussion, supported by textual analysis, tables, and graphs.

The final chapter summarises the key findings and provides a comprehensive conclusion to the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a literature review of the topic and research questions of the study. It begins by outlining the features, functionalities, and applications of smartphones. It then examines the effects of smartphones on the workplace, focusing on both positive and negative impacts. The chapter further discusses the uses and gratifications theory and concludes with a conceptual framework of the positive and negative effects of smartphone use in the workplace.

2.2 SMARTPHONE FEATURES

According to Zondi (2021:9), smartphones have hardware and software similar to other devices, such as computers and tablets. The hardware of smartphones is equally important, even though they primarily function through software. Whatever the user interacts with on the smartphone is integral to its hardware features. Additionally, smartphones run on various operating systems, such as Android, iOS, and Windows (Zondi 2021:10). Smartphone use has grown exponentially, supported by numerous features and functions derived from earlier technologies (Saeed & Hassan 2020:166).

Smartphones have significantly transformed how users communicate and maintain relationships in the modern world (Saeed & Hassan, 2020:166). According to Ting (2022:16), the most noticeable qualities of smartphones are their numerous functionalities and portability, which blur the lines between time and space. Smartphone users can access any information they need and engage in enjoyable activities from any location at any time (Ting 2022:16).

2.3 SMARTPHONE FUNCTIONALITIES

Molyneux (2014:83) defines the smartphone as a multipurpose device that functions like a computer with internet access. Molyneux (2014:83) further states that the smartphone is a functional device that utilises many downloaded applications. It is a handheld device capable of email, internet

use, and telephony, and it encompasses a wide range of communication channels, replacing items such as digital cameras, watches, and video recorders, among others (Molyneux 2014:83). According to Moon et al. (2022:102), smartphones combine widespread internet use with the advantages of portable telephones, thereby creating a unified and harmonious communication environment. Users perceive smartphones as "polymedia," employed for social and technological purposes and connected to broader social networking sites (Moon et al. 2022:102).

According to Ting (2022:16), the variety of smartphone functions enhances work performance and productivity through flexibility. These devices offer numerous conveniences and services that users value. Life without them would be unimaginable, as some users' daily routines depend on them, including reminders, scheduling, GPS, and staying in touch across personal and professional spheres (Ting 2022:16).

2.4 TYPES OF SMARTPHONE APPLICATIONS

According to Singh and Ranjan (2014:643), applications are small programs installed on a handheld device. They provide quick, easy access to information through a single point of access; with one touch, the user can access the full range of information. These applications can be downloaded from the Apple App Store or the Play Store in just a few seconds and include shopping, media, financial management, books, health, education, fitness management, and entertainment, among others (Fawareh & Jusoh 2017:103).

Given the diverse range of smartphone apps, the various contexts in which they are used, and the different gratifications users derive from them, the number of contexts is extensive. The subtle patterns of smartphone use are not captured by daily variations in behaviour or by combining all usage into a single high level metric, such as the average screen time for the day or week (Fawareh & Jusoh 2017:103).

To advance theories of mobile media use, it is essential to build an empirical foundation grounded in reliable evidence that reflects how smartphones are used in users' daily lives (Toth, Parry & Emmer 2023:4).

2.5 THE USE AND IMPACT OF SMARTPHONES IN THE WORKPLACE

The global prevalence of smartphones underscores their widespread use (Koyuncu & Pustli 2019; Moon et al. 2022; Ting 2022). Today, smartphones have become a technological addiction that most users find indispensable, prompting questions about how individuals managed before their advent (Dittrich 2020:3). While smartphones are essential devices that provide a wide range of services for both personal and professional life, they also have disadvantages. The following section will discuss the positive and negative impacts of smartphone use in the workplace.

2.5.1 Positive impact of smartphones

According to Zondi (2021:14), smartphones have revolutionised daily life across social relationships, politics, health, economics, and finance. Since their introduction, people's lives have improved and become easier to manage. Trisha and Lin (2019:12) state that digital technology is fundamental to human existence. Sheridan (2018:26) asserts that smartphones facilitate relationships across all spheres of life, including socio-political, economic, and educational contexts. Most online interactions save people significant money, for example, by reducing the need to travel between different areas.

Trisha and Lin (2019:30) concur with Chadi, Mechtel, and Mertins (2018:3), Sheridan (2018:3), and Trisha (2019:2) that digital connectedness has become so imperative that it can be compared to breathing. Digital life is now inextricably intertwined with people's daily lives in both personal and professional spheres. Menon and Meghana (2021:3) report that most academic work is delivered through mobile applications. Digital technology has enabled most individuals worldwide to work and study online, an opportunity unavailable 30 years ago. Companies use smartphone applications to streamline training and provide study materials to all learners

(Menon & Meghana 2021:3). Below are further positive impacts of smartphone use in the workplace.

2.5.1.1 Assistance at the workplace

Smartphones have proven beneficial in many fields, including education, health, politics, the economy, and finance. In the office, smartphones are primarily used to communicate closely with colleagues about workflow procedures. A study conducted at Northern Border University in Saudi Arabia by Fawareh and Jusoh (2017:103) found that smartphones had supplanted desktops and email, which were previously commonly used for communication. Smartphones are also widely used in education and knowledge acquisition, as well as for social media and knowledge exchange. A study by de Jong et al. (2020) conducted in a healthcare facility found that healthcare workers utilised their smartphones to acquire knowledge on diagnoses, procedures, medications, and laboratory testing. Most smartphone applications in the healthcare industry are used to access information related to patient care (Jong et al. 2020).

2.5.1.2 Employee availability via smartphones

Smartphones keep employees engaged in their jobs even after working hours, enabling their organisations to achieve set objectives (Kim 2018:3). They have revolutionised the workplace, as work is no longer confined to the four walls of an office but is now anywhere and everywhere. They have enhanced employees' availability, enabling employers to reach them even outside working hours (Zondi 2021:26). Employers can send a message, call the employee, dispatch an email, or utilise an application, using the most appropriate communication channel for the message at hand. Moreover, employees can interact with the customers or clients they serve in numerous ways (Zondi 2021:26).

2.5.1.3 Knowledge sharing

Masarweh and Afndy (2018:34) assert that smartphones have enabled access to information anytime, anywhere, further removing restrictions on knowledge and information. Employees empower themselves through various

knowledge-sharing platforms, learning as much as they can from one another (Masarweh & Afndy 2018:34). Lim and Teo (2022:30) noted that a certain level of cyberloafing encouraged learning and creativity. In that sense, cyberloafing served as a refresher and ultimately fostered innovation to some extent. It particularly benefited employees in knowledge intensive roles that involved considerable creative thinking. The conclusion was that cyberloafing could aid in boosting creativity, thus benefiting the organisation in achieving its objectives (Lim & Teo 2022:30).

2.5.1.4 Communication and collaboration

Smartphones have enhanced communication among employees and between staff and managers. Before the advent of smartphones, staff in some organisations often did not call, text, or email their managers about work-related matters. A formal communication protocol, set out in the internal communication policy, governed interactions between staff and managers. Smartphones have blurred those boundaries; staff call or communicate with managers as needed, and managers do the same (Mark 2019). Teamwork groups facilitated by smartphones, particularly WhatsApp groups, enable instant and straightforward communication. As smartphones have emerged as vital tools for business, some companies provide employees with allowances to purchase airtime and data to facilitate communication among staff (Zondi 2021:27).

2.5.1.5 Increased productivity

Agrawal and Panwar (2019:2047) describe smartphones as devices that enable users to accomplish far more at work while requiring fewer resources and less effort. The features and functions of smartphones enhance organisational productivity because they are portable and provide access to most information at the touch of a button (Mark 2019). Employees save time, allowing them to devote it to other activities and complete more work than they would without a smartphone. Additionally, smartphones help organisations avoid the need to hire more staff and pay additional salaries (Mark 2019). The author further notes that organisations that incorporated

smartphones into the workplace saved substantial time that would otherwise have been lost if employees had not used them. As a result, high productivity and deliverables were achieved ahead of schedule or on time, as employees continued to work remotely (Mark 2019).

2.5.1.6 Work Completion

According to Priyadarshini, Leena, and Venkatesan (2018:6) and Ting (2022:17), smartphones have enabled users to complete tasks promptly, enhance their performance, and increase productivity at work. Integrating smartphones into the workplace consistently benefits workflows by facilitating seamless processes. Employees who utilise smartphones face no restrictions, enabling them to carry out their tasks outside the office; they can work anywhere and at any time, leading to greater productivity in the workplace (Priyadarshini et al. 2018:6; Ting 2022:17).

2.5.1.7 Employee engagement

Smartphones create continuous engagement with the workplace even when physically away from work (Ting 2022:17). Some employees felt a constant urge to stay connected to their work-related telephone calls, and the explanation given was that this stemmed from the informal nature of smartphone connectivity (Ting 2022:17). Their respective managers and clients expected their subordinates to be always reachable, especially colleagues with fewer responsibilities, who were assumed to have more free time (Ting 2022:18). According to Agrawal and Panwar (2019:2048), an employee's ability to remain connected and engaged in work activities is referred to as "task absorption".

Employees who are fully engaged in their work develop an emotional bond with their work, which motivates them to devote all their abilities, creativity, and skills to the organisation's success in achieving its goals (Agrawal & Panwar 2019:2048). The success of any organisation depends on the commitment, focus, determination, devotion, and discipline of its employees as they engage in various tasks (Rehman 2018:166).

2.5.1.8 Employee Performance

Sendawula, Kimuli, Bananuka, and Muganga (2018) defined performance as an employee's positive attitude towards the organisation they serve, manifesting in affirmative actions in their duties. Such an attitude is more likely to occur in a work environment where the employee's efforts are recognised, possibly through incentives, and where their contributions to the workplace are genuinely valued, promoting good work and encouraging other employees to follow suit (Agrawal & Panwar 2019:2049). Sendawula et al. (2018), Agrawal and Panwar (2019:2049), and Lim and Teo (2022:31) note that smartphones enhance the employee's performance in the workplace in many ways, including availability even after working hours, ease of communication between employees, and access to and engagement in activities anywhere and anytime, among others.

2.5.2 Negative impact of smartphones

The positive impacts of smartphone use in the workplace are widely recognised for promoting and achieving organisational objectives. However, smartphone use in the workplace also has negative effects that can undermine the achievement of organisational objectives if not appropriately managed or controlled. According to Chadi, Mechtel, and Mertins (2022:288), the use of smartphones in the workplace hinders workflow, as employees are repeatedly interrupted and distracted by calls and notifications that divert their attention from the task at hand. Chadi et al. (2022:289) argue that smartphones have "not improved communication and connectivity" as claimed, but rather slowed work progress, resulting in employees falling behind their schedules. Chadi et al. (2022:2898) further state that employees struggle to concentrate on tasks until their completion when smartphones are not available.

According to Sheridan (2018:1), smartphones are a great gadget. However, they have diminished face-to-face interactions, leading people to work in silos and be largely absent from their immediate surroundings rather than engaging with them. Employees have become inseparable from their smartphones,

resulting in alienation. The vibrant social work environment that once existed has diminished primarily due to smartphone use in the workplace (Sheridan 2018:6). Trisha and Lin (2019:23) argue that smartphones are gradually eroding human engagement, defined as social connection in the workplace. They maintain that professional and social interactions are the basis of the success of any enterprise. Working in silos, driven by employees' engagement with their handheld gadgets, does not promote the well-being of any organisation (Trisha & Lin 2019:23). Further negative impacts of smartphone use in the workplace are outlined below.

2.5.2.1 Interference and interruptions

Interference and interruptions caused by smartphone use in the workplace will persist unless employees self-regulate this distraction by switching their smartphones off, particularly when undertaking tasks that require greater concentration. Zondi (2021:31) asserts that employees exhibit a short attention span due to the pervasive use of smartphones. Some employees display divided attention, a behaviour observable in a meeting setting where individuals keep their smartphones nearby while attending (Zondi 2021:31). Employers have not adequately addressed the use of smartphones by employees in the workplace and the detrimental effects these devices can have on organisational performance if not properly managed (Lim & Teo 2022:12). It has been found that employees' workflows and performance are frequently disrupted by smartphone use in the workplace, thus hindering overall organisational performance (Lim & Teo 2022:12).

2.5.2.2 Smartphones addiction and distraction

Zondi (2021:31) asserts that "humans are victims of habits, and employees are no exception". Employees often use smartphones for both personal and professional purposes, which can lead to addiction. Zondi (2020:31) contends that smartphone addiction primarily affects daily work productivity and employee behaviour; as a result, employees lose control over their smartphone usage and subsequently miss work deadlines.

Abbasi (2018:26) defines smartphone addiction as the continual use of a smartphone that makes it difficult to set it aside. Abbasi (2018:26) notes that smartphones can contribute to various illnesses and stress, as users often fail to obtain adequate rest due to prolonged use. When an employee does not have sufficient rest, there is a considerable likelihood that their effectiveness in the workplace will be diminished by fatigue, resulting in careless work and reduced productivity (Abbasi 2018:26). Smartphone addicts find it nearly impossible to resist checking for new notifications, even when they lack the inclination to do so; they are entirely at the mercy of their smartphones (Abbasi 2018:26). Dittrich (2020:3) describes smartphone behaviour as a "checking habit," suggesting that smartphone use can become habitual. Dittrich (2020:3) further notes that checking smartphones results in shorter session times than traditional computers, yet may lead to increased overall usage. The frequent use of smartphones has become similar to an addiction, significantly interfering with everyday life and potentially classifying it as a serious behavioural addiction (Dittrich 2020:3).

2.5.2.3 Wasted time

According to Zondi (2021:32), workers who overuse smartphones waste considerable time at work. According to Abbasi (2018:22) and Lim and Teo (2022:9), this behaviour is referred to as "cyberloafing". Employees who overuse smartphones spend significant time making personal calls, browsing the internet, and sending and replying to emails, as well as using WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms. This behaviour negatively affects their ability to complete tasks and ultimately detracts from the organisation's overall performance and productivity (Lim & Teo 2022:9).

Kim (2018:1) estimates that employees check their phones an average of 85 times a day, resulting in approximately five hours of lost productivity per week. This figure accounts only for time spent on personal phone use and does not include time spent browsing the internet or engaging in other personal activities, such as running errands. Kim (2018:1) also emphasises the need to

draw a clear line between personal and professional use of smartphones in the workplace.

2.5.2.4 Loss of productivity

According to Kim (2018:1), Zondi (2021:32), and Dittrich (2020:3), decreased workplace productivity is largely attributable to the unwarranted use of smartphones. Social media use, Internet surfing, gaming, and access to various applications are among the ways smartphones negatively impact organisational performance (Kim 2018:1). Dittrich (2020:4) notes that frequent smartphone interruptions disrupt focus on the task at hand, dividing the employee's attention. Hyperactivity was another behaviour observed in the investigation, associated with decreased self-reported productivity (Dittrich 2020:4).

2.5.2.5 Late night smartphone use for work

Derks, van Duin, Tims, and Bakker (2015) concluded that late-night smartphone use for work, due to fatigue, hinders productivity the next day. This was a "4-day quantitative diary study aimed to shed light on the relationship between daily smartphone use and daily work-home interference" (Derks et al. 2015:155). In that study, surveys were completed twice daily, in the morning and afternoon. One of the study's findings was that late-night smartphone use reduced employees' sleep and impaired their performance the following day due to fatigue (Derks et al., 2015).

Abbasi (2018) associates late night use of smartphones for work as part of addiction; the employee has lost control over this habit, and this is where self-regulation or self-control should be exercised to curb this destructive behaviour.

2.5.2.6 Manager's perception on smartphones overuse at the workplace

Kincade (2017:3) found that staff members did not believe they overused their smartphones during the working day. In contrast, manager participants believed overuse was rampant (Kincade 2017:3). Staff members argued that smartphones enhanced work efficiency in many ways, i.e., by sending

requested information outside working hours and by keeping management connected to staff members at any time and place to respond to inquiries that might arise (Kincade 2017:3). The author continued that managers, on the other hand, argued that productive working hours were wasted by staff members browsing websites that were not work related.

According to Spath and Vengrouskie (2022:17), employees may need to self-regulate to comply with workplace ethics. Self-regulation, such as “metacognitive and cognitive strategies”, is a form of habit control and plays an imperative role in managing temptations (Spath & Vengrouskie 2022:17). The authors argue that employees’ cyberloafing behaviours have cost companies \$183 billion a year, with employees spending close to six (6) hours per week surfing the net. This behaviour/habit must be regulated/controlled or managed to some extent to prevent such losses in some companies (Spath & Vengrouskie 2022:17).

2.5.2.7 Work-home dynamics

Smartphones have blurred the lines between work and home. Employers expect employees to remain connected to their work domains, continuously updating their principals on progress even after working hours at home (Derks et al. 2015:15 & Ting 2022:17). Some employees explained that easy connectivity also led management to expect their subordinates to always be reachable (Ting 2022:18).

According to Derks et al. (2015:156), communication technology significantly contributes to work-home interference because of the lack of clear boundaries between these two domains. Research over the past two decades on work-home conflict has concluded that employers and employees face challenges in balancing these aspects of life. Although they struggle to balance work and family demands, it is important to note that not all employers and employees experience work-home conflict to the same extent (Derks et al. 2015:156).

2.5.2.8 Availability: blurring of work-home life boundaries

Masarweh and Afndy (2018:13) assert that smartphones have made it more difficult to differentiate between work and home life. This is because work is performed at home, even outside business hours. In some households, dissension and conflict arise when employees are engrossed in their work, even when they have home duties. These employees fail to spend quality time with their families, leading to tension at home.

Derks et al. (2015:156) contend that when a company purchases smartphones for its staff for work-related purposes, it should be explicit with its employees about what it expects of them regarding the use of these devices. Employees who fund their smartphones should not be expected to be always available to their employers. Derks et al. (2015:156) further note that, among other measures, employees can avoid working overtime by blocking employer calls and filtering emails for a predetermined amount of time. More recently, in France, the "Right to Disconnect," also known as the "El Khomri Law," was introduced to protect employees from constantly receiving smartphone notifications from their employers from the moment they woke up until they went to bed (Pearce 2019). The effectiveness of this law is currently under evaluation.

2.6 SMARTPHONE ETIQUETTE

In both social and professional contexts, etiquette is regarded as a recognised norm for carrying out tasks correctly, primarily with respect for others (Zondi 2021:12). In essence, etiquette is about following the rules, conventions, and social standards that are widely accepted and that members of a society should follow to fit in (Zondi 2021:12). Abassi (2018:24) discusses self-regulation, the process by which workers control their conduct by making sure they use smartphones in a way that is appropriate for the workplace. Abassi (2018:24) further states that employees should have legitimate reasons for using their smartphones, given the time their employers pay them. Previous research has found that employees who don't practise self-control end up

using their phones excessively, which puts them at risk of developing a smartphone addiction (Abassi 2018:24).

2.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework is defined as an "interconnected group of concepts and propositions that result in a systematic picture of occurrence" (Kivunja 2018: 5). Adom, Hussein, and Agyem (2018) concur with Kivunja (2018) that the theoretical framework serves as a guide for the study from beginning to end. It provides a review of the existing theory used to understand and make sense of a research problem and to interpret findings (Adom, Hussein & Agyem 2018).

This study is grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), a theoretical perspective that explains media use by focusing on users' intentions and motivations rather than on the media itself (Ballard 2011:6). The theory assumes that individuals are not passive consumers but active agents who deliberately choose communication technologies that meet their specific needs (Ballard 2011:16). In contrast to traditional media theories that emphasise media influence, UGT highlights the purposive and goal-driven nature of media selection and use (Ballard 2011:16).

In this research, UGT provides a framework for examining how employees and management at the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA) utilise smartphones for work-related and personal purposes. The theory enables analysis of the motivations for smartphone use, variations in usage patterns across organisational roles, and the perceived benefits of such use (Urista, Dong & Day 2008). For example, managerial staff may rely on smartphones for coordination, decision-making, and immediate access to information, whereas other employees may primarily use them for routine communication, information seeking, and task execution (Urista, Dong & Day 2008).

Overall, the Uses and Gratifications Theory provides a coherent and systematic framework that guides the study across its stages, from

conceptualisation to the interpretation of findings (Adom, Hussein & Agyem 2018). This study employed the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) to investigate smartphone uses and gratifications among NERSA staff and management.

2.7.1 Brief history of uses and gratifications theory

Severin and Tankard (1997) define the uses and gratifications theory as an “endeavour to understand why and how consumers proactively seek out certain media to satisfy specific needs”. This perspective is audience-centred, aiming to provide in-depth insight into mass communication. West and Turner’s (2010:392) definition of uses and gratifications is primarily based on Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs”, suggesting that it is an extension of the needs outlined by Maslow in 1954, which posits that people actively seek to fulfil their needs. Maslow illustrated human needs using a pyramid (Turner 2010:392). The most fundamental need resides “at the base of the pyramid: basic needs, such as food and shelter, while self-actualisation at the top of the pyramid is the least pursued need” according to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Turner 2010:392).

According to Moon et al. (2022:107), the uses and gratifications of the following media were examined, and the results were as follows: listeners found radio informative, reaching even remote rural areas and offering some sports coverage (Moon et al. 2022:107). Saeed and Hassan (2020) argue that readers of print media, such as newspapers and books, experienced a sense of security because reading provided them with information and helped regulate their daily routines. An investigation was conducted into the audience to determine why they watched political programmes during the 1964 elections in England. The findings revealed that the audience used television to escape the realities of their lives, forge personal relationships, establish their identity, and engage in self-reflection. Compared with newspapers and films, television offers a broader range of opportunities for gratification (Moon et al. 2022:107). The aforementioned media were explored: radio, film, print, and television. Television had a larger audience than radio and print media,

while radio and print were regarded as supplementary (Saeed & Hassan 2020).

2.7.2 Uses of gratifications in new media

UGT shifted its focus to new media, and consumers can produce content and respond to their respective communication partners, meaning that there's interaction between the sender and the recipient (Menon & Meghana 2021:2). The authors further state that interactivity is one of the distinguishing factors that describes the ability of users to respond to the communicators. New media led to the narrowing of the distinction between the producer of the content and the consumer, which also led to a new term called "prosumers" (Menon & Meghana 2021:2).

Through UGT, researchers have provided insights into key concerns regarding the gratifications associated with conventional media (Ajimakin 2018:11). Scholars have utilised UGT to investigate the reasons and gratifications people derive from social media, reflecting the widespread popularity of these platforms. Numerous fields of study, including social communication, learning theory, and human development, have benefited from the application of UGT in these research projects. It is important to note that UGT is valuable in social media studies because it is rooted in communication literature (Ajimakin 2018:11).

It is widely argued that media effects theories have shifted from "what the media does to people" to "what people do with the media" (Severin & Tankard 1997; Moon et al. 2022:107). The uses and gratifications theory holds that the media are readily available to consumers (Severin & Tankard 1997; Menon & Meghana 2021). The authors assert that consumers intentionally select suitable media to fulfil their needs, which may include enhancing knowledge, providing leisure, facilitating social interactions, or escaping the surrounding noise (Severin & Tankard 1997; Menon & Meghana 2021; Moon et al. 2022:107). This study is grounded in UGT to conceptualise and understand the motivations behind NERSA employees' smartphone use and gratifications in the workplace.

Urista, Dong, and Day (2008:218) view uses and gratifications as an emotional communication paradigm that emphasises how people utilise mass media and other forms of interaction, such as communicating with one another, to meet their wants, desires, preferences, and needs. Urista et al. (2008:218) argue that this psychological viewpoint differs from the traditional view, which holds that individual media consumers are passive rather than active. The authors categorised media gratifications into process and content. Process gratifications arise from activities, such as browsing or surfing the web, that are unstructured and do not involve creating content on one's profile. By contrast, content gratifications arise from obtaining information that interests the user (Urista et al. 2008).

Leung and Louis (2013) found that the uses and gratifications of SNSs, or the motivations behind posting social content, include social, entertaining, and self-actualising aspects. In some cases, these motivations stemmed from the need to release unwanted emotions. Leung and Louis (2013) also discovered a relationship between gratification and narcissism; certain users exhibited egocentrism and self-centredness in their smartphone usage behaviours. Ifnedo (2016:350) argues that the uses and gratifications theory posits that consumers will continue to engage with SNSs for as long as these platforms satisfy their needs and gratifications. Socialisation is one of the motivating factors, such as reconnecting with old friends, establishing new relationships, staying informed about events in their areas of interest, and maintaining connections (Ifnedo 2016:352). According to Ifnedo (2016:353), further investigation revealed that emotional, cognitive, social, and habitual uses were not consistently satisfied, indicating inconsistencies.

On most social networking sites, prosumers take control of both the production and dissemination of content (Menon & Meghana 2021:3). They are actively engaged in creating and sharing information globally without limitations (Menon & Meghana 2021:3). Audiences utilise social media collectively rather than as isolated individuals, participating in social situations (Moon et al. 2022:109). The social and psychological aspects of life drive

consumers to use media to satisfy needs such as information seeking and social interaction. The authors also state that audience engagement is vital to the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Moon et al. 2022:109).

Fulfilling needs or wants is generally understood as a disposition that influences people's actions (Moon et al. 2022:109). Moon et al. (2002:110) argue that there is no difference between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained; they further assert that the two terms are vague and difficult to explain because of the nature of respondents' answers. People choose a particular media platform to satisfy a need or desire (Moon et al. 2022:110). Satisfaction equates to gratification, and these authors argue that the term 'gratifications' could be used interchangeably with 'satisfaction' (Moon et al. 2022:110). This approach is positive, based on a "socio-psychological communication tradition that focuses on mass media communication" (Menon & Meghana 2021:1). The driving question of this approach is: "Why do people use media, and what do they use them for"? Menon and Meghana (2021:1). Employees use their smartphones for both personal and professional reasons, motivated by social interaction, convenience, entertainment, and information (Menon & Meghana 2021:1). Some of the reasons employees use smartphones in the workplace impact the workplace positively and negatively.

2.7.3 Critiques of UGT

Some criticisms of the uses and gratifications theory suggest that gratifications and communication channels may be overstated. According to Lometi, Reeves, and Bybee (1997), this can lead to inaccurate information, such as overestimated gratifications from particular communication channels. Greenberg (1974) observed a strong likelihood that different age groups have varying motivations for using similar communication channels and may also experience distinct gratifications. Uses and gratifications are individualistic; therefore, collecting comprehensive data from respondents can be challenging, with most researchers relying primarily on respondents'

recollections rather than on collected data (Katz, Blumler, Gurevich & Michael 1973).

Despite its shortcomings, UGT remains the most pertinent approach in media and communication studies. UGT has assisted this research project in identifying the reasons for employees' smartphone engagement. The study will provide valuable resources, enabling management to make informed decisions about smartphone use in the workplace that support the well-being of their respective organisations. The following section presents a conceptual framework that examines both the positive and negative effects of smartphone use in the workplace. This conceptual framework can be conveyed in two distinct formats: narrative and/or graphic, comprising text-based representations and diagrammatic presentations of concepts (Ravitch & Riggan 2017; Crawford 2020). Within this conceptual framework, the narrative will be employed to emphasise the positive and negative effects of smartphones in the workplace.

Table 2.1: Representation of positive and negative impacts of smartphones in the workplace (Source: Mabaso 2025)

Positive Impacts	Smartphones	Negative Impacts
Assistance at the workplace		Interference and interruptions of smartphone addiction and Distraction
Availability		Waste of time
Knowledge, sharing and sociability		Loss of productivity
Communication and collaboration		Late night use of smartphones for work
Increased productivity		Availability
Employee performance		Manager's perception of smartphones overuse in the workplace
Work completion timeously		

2.8 SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEWED

The literature reviewed above shows that researchers agree that smartphones have become the most essential handheld device for navigating personal and professional life, with both positive and negative consequences in the workplace (De Jong et al. 2020; Saeed & Hassan 2020; Moon et al. 2022; Menon & Meghana 2021; Zondi 2021). Heitmayer (2020) views smartphone use as a distraction, noting that employees were no longer fully focused on their work, even in meetings, thereby showing disrespect to other attendees. The author reported that employees initiated 89% of interactions without external prompting. This situation posed a challenge, particularly for tasks requiring undivided attention or extended periods of focus (Heitmayer 2020; Trisha & Lin 2019; Ting 2022). However, limiting smartphone use in the workplace is not a solution, as it may have adverse consequences for employees in both professional and personal domains. Nevertheless, management can implement regulatory measures to effectively and efficiently manage its use (Heitmayer 2020).

The reviewed literature emphasised the limitations of the workplace's current smartphone management practices (Zondi 2021:39). Heitmayer (2020) suggests that, since both employers and employees can no longer do without smartphones, these devices should be regulated through policies, guidelines, or rules governing smartphone etiquette.

2.8.1 Alignment with research questions

The following research questions were asked in the context of the current study:

RQ1: How do staff members and management use the functionalities of smartphones in the workplace?

According to Molyneux (2014), Nason et al. (2015), Fawareh and Jusoh (2017), and Koyuncu and Pusatli (2019), smartphones are used for both personal and professional purposes. The use of smartphones by staff members and management, along with their functionalities, led to the following research question:

RQ2: What are the perceived gratifications sought by smartphone users in the workplace, including applications by staff members and management?

The literature reviewed indicates that employees and management utilise smartphones for both personal and professional purposes, which provides a source of perceived enjoyment for both groups. The majority of participants engage with smartphones for various reasons, including social connection, convenience, entertainment, and the pursuit or exchange of information (Menon & Meghana 2021; Ting 2022; Zondi 2021; Duke & Montag 2017).

The literature reviewed also indicated that staff members believed they did not use their smartphones more than necessary at work, whereas manager participants felt that excessive smartphone use was widespread (Kincade 2017; Moon et al. 2022; Zondi 2021; Menon and Meghana 2021; Kim 2018; Trisha & Lil 2019). To gather information on this finding, the following research question was proposed for the study:

RQ3: What are managers' perceptions of the use of smartphones by staff members at the workplace?

The literature reviewed highlighted differences in how management and staff perceived the use of smartphones in the workplace. Management believed that staff members squandered a significant amount of employer paid time on smartphones for personal matters, while staff members felt that the employer benefited primarily because they were accessible to management even outside working hours (Ifnedo 2016; Duke and Montag 2017; Kim 2018; Zondi 2021; de Jong et al. 2020).

2.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a review of the literature on smartphone use in the workplace, as outlined in the preceding section, which also summarised the main findings in relation to the research questions. The next chapter will discuss the methods used to achieve the objectives of the study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research methodology, including the research paradigm, design, population, sample, data collection, and data analysis. It concludes with the ethical considerations applied and observed throughout the study.

The study employed a qualitative approach, supplemented by descriptive statistics, to gain a detailed understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. While qualitative methods rely on non-numerical data, descriptive statistics present numerical findings typical of quantitative analysis (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler 2014:155). These two methodologies were integrated. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise quantitative data, while qualitative methods provided a contextual understanding of the phenomena behind the numbers. Data was collected using a self-administered online questionnaire comprising both open- and closed-ended items (see Annexure 4).

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The interpretivist paradigm was used in this study to analyse data related to the research topic and questions.

3.2.1 Interpretivism paradigm

Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2018:176) note that interpretivism emerged as a reaction to the dominance of positivism. In the mid-20th century, European scholars turned to interpretivism to challenge the prevailing positivist paradigm (Zondi 2021:44). Positivism holds that a single, objective reality exists independently of human perception. Rehman and Alharthi (2016:55) critique this view, arguing that individuals cannot be studied as objects because they actively construct meaning. Interpretivists contend that truth and reality are not pre-existing but are shaped through social processes,

thereby supporting the idea of multiple, socially constructed realities (Rehman & Alharthi 2016:55).

According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017:36), interpretivism seeks to understand the subjective nature of individuals' experiences by collecting, interpreting, and analysing data to uncover the meanings people assign to their social world. Researchers are not detached from the phenomenon under study; rather, they are inherently part of the social reality they investigate (Tombs & Pugsley 2020:54). This reflects interpretivism's ontological stance, which holds that the researcher actively experiences the reality under examination (Tombs & Pugsley 2020:55). Epistemologically, interpretivism aims for a deeper understanding of how people subjectively interpret social and physical objects, exploring how individuals perceive and engage with the social processes around them (Tombs & Pugsley 2020:55).

Interpretivist methodology requires understanding the event under study "from the participants' perspective rather than the researchers" (Tombs & Pugsley 2020:56). The objective is to understand the phenomenon through participants' lenses and within the framework of their circumstances. Interpretive researchers primarily use qualitative data collection techniques, though they may also incorporate numerical data (Rehman & Alharthi 2016:56).

According to Saunders et al. (2018:35), "interpretivism enables the researcher to experience diverse socio-cultural realities while comprehending a range of contexts and meanings". The aim of interpretivist research is to understand how people or groups interpret the social phenomena they encounter (Saunders et al. 2018:36). This approach was therefore well suited to investigating the benefits and applications of smartphones in the workplace.

To examine how employees and management at NERSA used smartphones in the workplace, this study adopted an interpretivist paradigm. The research integrated qualitative and quantitative components to fully address the research challenges. A mixed-methods approach was employed, using both

open- and closed-ended questions. Both methodologies contributed to a deeper understanding of the topic under study.

3.3 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design provided the framework for this study, serving as a roadmap (Zondi 2021:17). According to Faryadi (2019:776), the research design determines the methodology, the data to be collected, and the methods and approaches to be used. This exploratory study investigated the purposes and satisfaction derived from smartphone use among NERSA management and employees. The study employed a cross-sectional design, conducted at a single point in time (Dittrich 2020:8). Self-administered questionnaires, comprising both open- and closed-ended questions, served as the primary data collection method. Open-ended, qualitative questions were utilised for their potential to yield more comprehensive information (Zorhabi 2013:255). The questionnaire enabled respondents to express their views comfortably, supported by the assurance of anonymity (Rehman 2018:23).

Closed-ended questionnaires were used to collect demographic information from participants, complementing the qualitative data. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently. Although one approach typically predominates in mixed-methods research, the qualitative approach was primary in this study, with the quantitative approach playing a secondary, supplementary role (Leedy & Ormrod 2015:331).

3.4 RESEARCH APPROACHES/METHOD

According to Igwenagu (2016:14), the term "research method" refers to a systematic approach to analysing research methodology. The author further states that it involves applying specific scientific techniques to collect, analyse, and interpret data, thereby enhancing understanding of a particular phenomenon. Similarly, Booth (2018:36) defines research methods as the tools and procedures employed to gather information and gain a comprehensive understanding of a topic.

Igwenagu (2016:15) clarifies that while methodology provides a framework for selecting the most appropriate approach for a study, it does not offer solutions. "Method" and "methodology" are often used interchangeably in contemporary discourse; however, Olanike (2016) and Igwenagu (2016) caution that this practice can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations, thereby compromising the analytical rigor of a study. The authors emphasise that the epistemic implications of these concepts require them to be kept distinct. The key difference lies in their scope: methods refer to the specific strategies employed for data collection, analysis, and interpretation, whereas methodology is closely aligned with the overarching research paradigm (Olanike 2016; Igwenagu 2016).

There are three main types of research methodologies: quantitative (structured), qualitative (unstructured), and mixed methods (Zondi 2021:16). According to Mohajan (2017:23), the qualitative approach, rooted in the interpretivist paradigm, is an inductive method that relies on non-numerical data to generate new concepts and improve social systems. It offers deeper insights into how individuals perceive their interactions and construct their experiences within their social realities (Mohajan 2017:23). In contrast, quantitative research, grounded in the positivist and postpositivist paradigms, is a deductive method that uses statistics and numerical data to test hypotheses. Albers (2017:215) explains that in mixed-methods research, data and statistics must be analysed and synthesised to draw conclusions.

This study adopted a qualitative approach and incorporated descriptive statistics, as the researcher determined that a single method would not capture all relevant information (Heitmayer 2020).

3.5 TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLING

A population comprises all individuals residing in a specific area, whereas those selected to participate in a study constitute the target population (Zondi 2021:18). In this study, the target population comprised 220 NERSA employees, including both management and general staff. To be included, participants had to be NERSA employees, own a smartphone (either on

contract or permanently), and be proficient in English in reading, speaking, and writing. Individuals who did not own a smartphone or were unable to understand, read, or write in English were excluded from the study.

3.5.1 Sampling Procedure

A sample is a subset of individuals selected from a target population and categorised into two types: probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Ajimakin 2018:66). In probability sampling, each unit in the population has an equal chance of selection, whereas in non-probability sampling, not every unit has that opportunity (Ajimakin 2018:68). This study employed non-probability sampling, using a purposive approach to obtain the required sample (Ting 2022:37). The sample was selected to align with the organisation's target population of 220 employees.

3.5.2 Sample Size

Ajimakin (2018:68) maintains that a sample is a subset of the whole population. In this study, the sample comprised 220 employees. This was done in consideration of the fact that 220 employees constituted a small population. Given the population size, it was crucial to include the entire population in the study to ensure thorough and accurate results.

3.5.3 Demographic Information

According to Lim and Teo (2022), personal and environmental factors shape individual behaviour. The authors further state that "Individuals typically utilise their respective internal factors related to the self to process situations internally" (Lim & Teo 2022:10). Employees differ in characteristics such as age, mood, habits, gender, education, personality traits, and family background (Ting, 2022). These attributes distinguish individuals from one another. Some employees were more inclined to use their smartphones than others, a tendency Ting (2022) associates with factors such as age, job dissatisfaction, long-standing habits, and poor time management.

The study achieved a 40% response rate (88 of 220 staff members and management). The sample comprised 35 males (40%) and 53 females (60%)

participants, representing African, White, Coloured, and Indian racial backgrounds. The study also considered employment level (staff or management) and educational qualifications.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection is the systematic process of gathering information from a population for scientific inquiry (Ajimakin 2018). It enables researchers to obtain information from participants. There are numerous data collection methods, including “document review, focus groups, and in-depth interviews” (Ajimakin 2018:68). This study employed a self-administered questionnaire with closed- and open-ended questions.

3.6.1 Data collection method

The data collection instrument used was a self-completion questionnaire. An online link to the questionnaire was emailed to all 220 NERSA employees. The primary reason for choosing online self-completion questionnaires was to enable simultaneous distribution to all employees. Additionally, the online format offered flexibility in data collection, was mobile friendly, and allowed participants to respond at their convenience.

SurveyMonkey is “online survey software that allows users to create and run professional surveys and capture data directly from participants” (Blumberg et al. 2014:229). One advantage of this tool was that it prevented multiple submissions, ensuring respondents completed the questionnaire only once. The researcher and the statistician also conducted appropriate checks on the collected data to ensure that incomplete questionnaires did not influence the findings. A total of 88 out of 220 NERSA employees completed the questionnaires. According to standard practice, the results from the 88 responses could be used for analysis and to draw sound conclusions for the study (Bel et al. 2019). All incomplete questionnaires were excluded, and the study's response rate was 40% (88/220). The study was limited to completed questionnaires.

3.6.2 Data collection instrument

Ting (2022:41) asserts that a questionnaire's validity and reliability must be evaluated through piloting to ensure it collects the desired data. To enhance trustworthiness, the questionnaire was piloted with approximately 10% of the total population (20 participants) before full deployment. This process assessed its ability to elicit the intended data, confirmed that the questions were clearly understood, and identified any ambiguities or misconceptions.

Data relevant to the research objectives was collected via a self-administered online survey comprising both closed- and open-ended items. The questionnaire was distributed via a link sent to the email addresses of a purposively selected sample, who were instructed to complete and submit it by a specified deadline.

Questionnaires were distributed to 220 NERSA staff members and management. Of these, 88 employees completed and submitted usable questionnaires, becoming participants in the study. The remaining 132 comprised employees who declined to participate and those who submitted incomplete questionnaires. The online survey was sent to all ethnic groups, African, Indian, Coloured, and White, with participants ranging in age from 21 to 60 years. The sample included staff members, officers, senior officers, and management, such as department heads, executive management, and the chief executive officer, representing all levels of education.

3.6.3 Data collected from closed-ended questionnaires

Upon receipt of the completed self-administered online questionnaires, a statistician assisted in synthesising and analysing the demographic data from Part A of the questionnaire. SurveyMonkey generated graphs to visualise responses to closed-ended questions (Blumberg et al., 2014:229). This presentation of the data enabled the researcher to better understand the information collected in Part A.

3.6.4 Data collected from open-ended questionnaires

Ajimakin (2018:68) defines data collection as the systematic process of obtaining information from a defined population for scientific research. Techniques for surveying the population include in-depth interviews, content analysis, and focus groups. This study employed both closed- and open-ended questionnaires. Data from open-ended questions were analysed and presented (Zondi 2021:21). Two coders assisted in coding respondents' data to minimise bias. The information was categorised and coded according to established themes, which either emerged from the data or were developed from the analysed content.

Following the collection, both quantitative and qualitative datasets were integrated into the findings of the study. Although primarily qualitative, the study also used descriptive statistics. The quantitative component provided descriptive statistics for the 88 participants across five demographic variables: gender, age, race, employment level, and education level, gathered through closed-ended questions. This quantitative data complemented the qualitative data by offering descriptive statistics on participants' responses, thereby enhancing the findings and lending them greater substance.

Data was presented to the target audience in a simplified, appealing, and easily comprehensible format (Zondi 2021:21). Responses were illustrated using numbers or percentages in graphs, tables, text, and themes, thereby integrating both quantitative and qualitative data.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Zondi (2021:56) defines "data analysis" as the comprehension and interpretation of research sample data. In this study, thematic analysis was used to organise and code the collected data, enabling the coders to extract qualitative information from participants, including their experiences, opinions, and areas of competence. Two coders participated in the study and were trained by the statistician to code the data objectively and without bias. The training also covered how to identify themes in relation to the research

questions, revisit and refine them, and finally define and name them. With regards to the quantitative data, a graph and tables was utilised to integrate data gathered.

3.7.1 The thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method used to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within data (Ajimakin 2018:70; Maguire & Delahunt 2017:3352). Ajimakin (2018:70) identifies six stages of thematic analysis: “familiarisation with data, coding, searching for themes, revisiting themes, defining and naming themes and writing up”.

3.7.2 Familiarisation of data gathered

According to Ajimakin (2018:70), this phase is the initial stage in which the researcher begins to assimilate the information gathered. Familiarisation is achieved by reading and rereading the collected data, as well as listening to audio recordings (Ajimakin 2018:70). Maguire and Delahunt (2017:3355) similarly assert that it is essential for researchers to thoroughly familiarise themselves with all collected information and any relevant data prior to undertaking thematic analysis. In this study, after collecting data from the questionnaires, the coders reviewed responses to identify recurring themes. The data was then summarised according to the themes derived from the analysis.

3.7.3 Coding

The researcher then presented the data using essential labels derived from the dataset. At this stage, the focus was on identifying specific characteristics in the collected data that would address the study questions. Open coding was employed without preset codes; instead, the data was analysed line by line. As they worked through the data, coders developed and refined codes in response to the research questions (Maguire & Delahunt 2017:3355).

3.7.4 Themes searching

A theme is a pattern that captures a significant or compelling aspect of the data in relation to the research topic. While a research question may inform a

theme, the characteristics that define it are not predetermined. According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017:3356), a theme is distinguished by its importance in relation to the research question under investigation. It summarises information relevant to the research focus (Ajimakin 2018:71). At this stage, the researcher's task is to actively search for codes, comparing the collected data against predefined themes or research questions (Ajimakin 2018:71). Ajimakin (2018:71) emphasises the necessity for the researcher to have a thorough understanding of the research questions. In this study, the themes that emerged from the data were predominantly descriptive, illustrating patterns directly relevant to the research questions (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017:3356). The two coders established familiarity with the dataset and identified the themes.

3.7.5 Revision of themes

To ensure the identified themes were robust, they were reviewed to confirm they were supported by the data and grounded in the broader context of the data set (Maguire & Delahunt 2017:3358). The themes remained consistent throughout the investigation, and any overlapping concepts were clearly categorised and delineated (Maguire & Delahunt 2017:3358).

3.7.6 Defining and naming themes

Themes were named according to the researcher's judgement. This stage facilitated a detailed analysis of each identified theme, which was then documented. The analysis enabled the researcher to understand the narrative of each theme and to establish relationships across the dataset (Ajimakin 2018:71). Themes were refined to their final form to capture their core essence: What does the theme convey? How do subthemes interact with one another and relate to the main theme? In what ways are the themes interconnected? (Maguire & Delahunt 2017:33511). The two coders defined and named the themes, seeking consensus throughout the process. Where consensus was not reached, the coders continued interrogating the data until agreement was achieved. The thematic analysis process remained flexible

rather than rigid. The researcher's involvement in the process was minimised to reduce bias.

3.7.7 Writing up

According to Ajimakin (2018), the final stage of data analysis is arguably the most critical component of any research project. The author further explains that at this stage, "the collected data is systematically documented in textual form. The researcher contextualises the dataset, carefully evaluating it to identify which elements directly address the research questions." This process enabled the researcher to synthesise the findings into a comprehensive, well-analysed, and logically structured report. In academic research, this outcome typically takes the form of a journal article or dissertation (Maguire & Delahunt 2017:33511); for this study, the final product was a dissertation. Throughout the process, ethical considerations were carefully observed, and established standards were adhered to, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness and dependability of the research findings.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher ensured ethical conduct throughout the study. Ethical conduct was key to ensuring that the study had the rigor, trustworthiness, and credibility it deserved.

3.8.1 Trustworthiness

As the study adopted a predominantly qualitative approach, ensuring trustworthiness was critical to demonstrating the methodological soundness of the research. Trustworthiness concerned the rigor of the research process and the extent to which the findings accurately reflected the data collected (Abbasi 2018:61). According to Abbasi (2018:61), qualitative trustworthiness was evaluated using four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility concerns whether the data collection instrument effectively captured the phenomenon under investigation (Abbasi 2018:62). Data for this study was obtained through a self-administered questionnaire comprising both

open- and closed-ended questions. Before full-scale administration to the entire population of 220 NERSA employees, the questionnaire was pilot tested with 20 participants. This pilot process enabled the identification and correction of ambiguous items and ensured that the questions were interpreted as intended, thereby improving the accuracy and relevance of the collected data.

Transferability is the extent to which findings may be applicable beyond the study setting (Abbasi 2018:63). Participants were selected from NERSA employees for their relevance to the research objectives. Of the 220 employees approached, 88 returned completed, usable questionnaires, comprising staff and management. Rather than statistical generalisation, transferability relied on the degree of similarity between the research context and other settings (Abbasi 2018:62). Consequently, the findings may be transferable to organisations with similar operational and regulatory environments, provided comparable research designs are applied (Abbasi 2018:63).

Dependability focuses on the consistency and reliability of research procedures and findings, and requires that the research process be clearly articulated and systematically followed (Zohrabi 2013:258). The use of multiple data collection methods is often recommended to enhance dependability (Zohrabi 2013:258). This study relied on a single data collection tool, the questionnaire, divided into two sections: Part A, which collected demographic information, and Part B, which generated qualitative data to address the research questions. The integration of descriptive statistical analysis with qualitative findings produced a coherent, stable interpretation of the results.

Confirmability concerns the extent to which findings are shaped by participants' responses rather than by the researcher's personal views or assumptions (Abbasi 2018:64). Confirmability was supported by maintaining transparency in the link between the data and the interpretations drawn. Data from the 88 participants were analysed and presented in tables and graphs,

alongside a thematic analysis aligned with the research questions. This approach demonstrated that the conclusions are firmly grounded in the empirical data and open to verification by others (Abbasi 2018:64).

3.8.2 Other ethical considerations of the study

The study did not involve direct human participation and was considered low-risk. As no personal identifiers were collected, participants' confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout. The researcher ensured that all information gathered would remain confidential and that participants would be informed of the results.

The link was sent to the 220 participants' email addresses via the researcher's Unisa email account, which served as the official sender for all correspondence. During the data collection phase, a letter was issued to all participants, containing the following:

- Information about the research project (see Appendix 1 – participant information sheet).
- A request for consent to participate in the study (see Appendix 3).
- A self-administered questionnaire comprising both open- and closed-ended items (see Appendix 5).
- The CEO's consent to conduct the study at NERSA (see Appendix 6 – letter of approval from the CEO).
- The Research Committee's approval, including the reference number (see Appendix 7 – ethical clearance letter from the Unisa Ethics Committee).

After some participants had completed and submitted the questionnaires, polite email reminders were sent to increase the response rate and thereby enhance the reliability and validity of the study.

3.8.3 Measures to be taken by the researcher in the event of a conflict of interest arising

At the time the study was conducted, the researcher was affiliated with the Electricity Licensing, Compliance, and Dispute Resolution Department and did not work in the Human Resources (HR) Department. The researcher's portfolio did not involve day-to-day engagement with HR; instead, primary interactions were with the Electricity Pricing and Tariffs, Legal, and Technical Departments. The researcher's contact with HR was limited to personal matters. HR maintained strict protocols for employee information, which was

highly confidential and had to comply with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA).

The researcher followed a three-step process as part of measures to address potential conflicts of interest, ensuring adherence to ethical and procedural standards.

Step 1 – The researcher emailed HR to request demographic data after the CEO approved the study to be conducted within the company. The CEO's letter authorising the study was attached as proof. The requested demographic data comprised aggregate figures rather than individual records, covering categories such as gender, age, and race. The data was intended to capture additional details, including employment status and educational background.

Step 2 – The researcher consulted the Senior Statistician in the Electricity Pricing and Tariffs department, who provided statistical and research support within the organisation. The researcher used their Unisa email address to send the survey link to 220 participants, ensuring it appeared as the sender in all correspondence. After participants had completed and submitted the questionnaires, follow-up emails were sent to politely remind non-responders. This strategy proved effective, resulting in more completed questionnaires and thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the study.

Step 3 – Prior to distributing the questionnaire, all participants were required to sign an informed consent letter. This document outlined the research objectives and the nature of their expected involvement. Two additional letters were attached to the questionnaire: an approval letter from the CEO authorising the study within the organisation, and an ethical clearance letter confirming the data collection process.

Anonymity was strongly emphasised throughout the study. Participants' identities were kept confidential throughout the research project, thereby ensuring their anonymity.

To maintain professionalism and address potential conflicts of interest, the researcher ensured that all communication with participants remained formal. A detailed record of all correspondence related to the study was kept securely. All participants completed an informed consent form outlining the objectives of the study and the terms of their participation before the questionnaire was sent. The CEO's letter of authority authorising the study within the company and the ethical clearance validating the data-gathering procedure were attached to the questionnaire.

Anonymity was emphasised, and participants' names were not disclosed at any point. All participants remained anonymous throughout the study.

3.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the exploratory research design used in the study. It addressed the research paradigm, methodologies, design, target population, and sample size. Additionally, it covered key topics, including demographic information, the pilot study, and data collection processes. The ethical issues addressed throughout the research were discussed in depth in the chapter's conclusion. The outcomes of the data analysis and interpretation are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF DATA FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results, analysis, and interpretation of an exploratory study of smartphone use and gratifications at NERSA. It offers insights into the effects of smartphone use on workplace dynamics and employee satisfaction by systematically presenting the collected data and providing a thorough analysis of the findings.

Below are the results of Parts A, B, and C of the questionnaire analysis, in light of the objectives of the study, highlighting significant trends, patterns, and potential directions for future investigation.

PART A OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

A questionnaire was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. For the quantitative component, five demographic variables (gender, age, race, employment level, and education level) were collected from the study participants through closed-ended questions, forming Part A of the questionnaire. The statistician assisted with collecting and presenting the demographic data in graphs and tables.

Table 4.1: Gender of respondents

Category	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	35	40%
	Female	53	60%
	Total	88	100%

Source: Researcher: Mabaso & Mahlangu (2024)

The results from Table 4.1 showed that 40% (35 of 88) of respondents were male, compared with 60% (53 of 88) female. Female respondents participated in the study 20% more than male respondents, indicating that they dominated the study. Shabur and Jahan (2023) examined gender disparities in

smartphone app use and the influence of gender on social support and smartphone based social networks in Bangladesh. A total of 250 college students who owned at least one smartphone were invited to participate in an online survey. The results showed that while men were more likely to use applications and make phone calls, women were more likely to use their cell phones' cameras (Shabur & Jahan 2023).

Uses and gratifications of smartphones reveal the distinctive behaviours involved in maintaining interpersonal connections. Men were more likely to feel that bridging relationships expanded through text conversations. In contrast, women tended to believe that bonding connections strengthened through smartphone text communication (Shabur & Jahan 2024). Women were also more inclined to use their smartphones to reinforce strong connections, whereas men were more likely to utilise smartphones to enhance previously weak social relationships (Shabur & Jahan 2024).

Figure 4.1: Age group of respondents

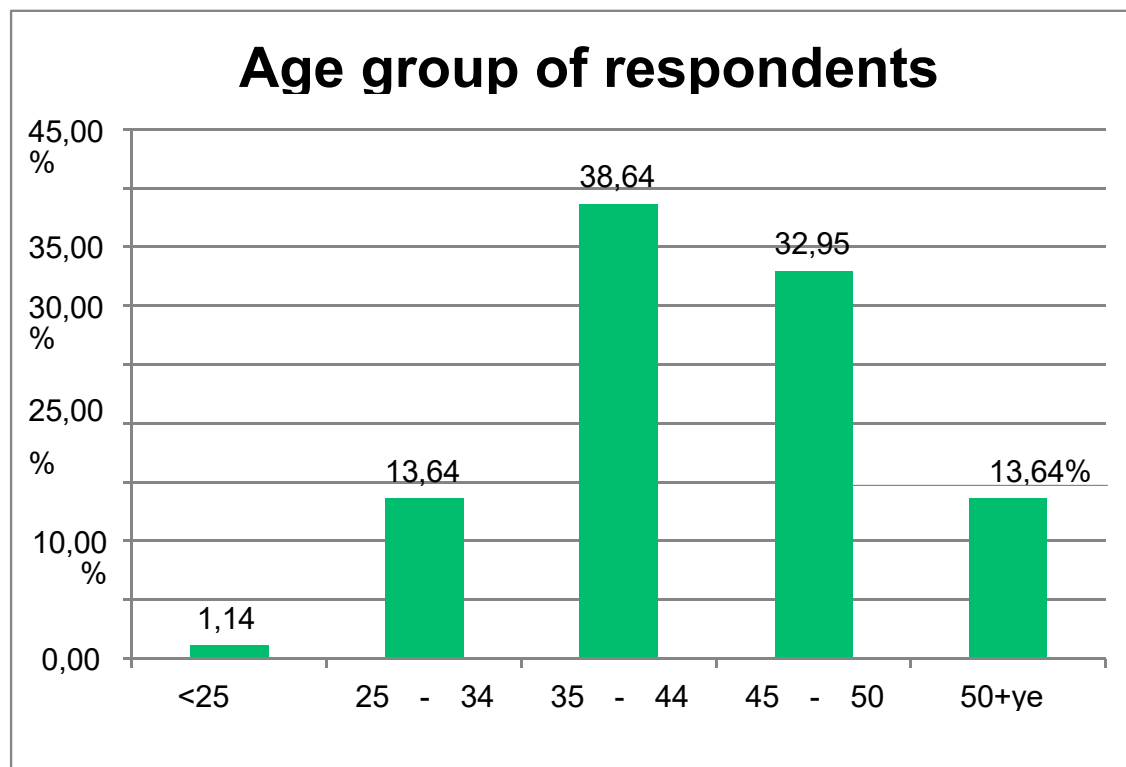


Table 4.2: Age group of respondents

Age of respondents	Respondents' responses	Numbers of respondents
<25 years	1,14%	1
25 – 34 years	13,64%	12
35 – 44 years	38,64%	34
45 – 50 years	32,95%	29
50+ years	13,64%	12
	Total	88

Source: Researcher: Mabaso & Statistician: Mahlangu (2024)

Respondents were also asked to select their age group. A total of 39% (35 out of 88) indicated that they belong to the age group "35–44 years", 32% (29 out of 88) to "45–50 years", 14% (12 out of 88) to "25–34 years", and 51+ years, respectively, while only 1% (1 out of 88) indicated that their age group is under 25 years.

The highest category of participants regarding smartphone use and gratifications in the workplace was ages 35–44 (39%), followed by ages 45–50 (33%). Consequently, the lowest smartphone use and gratifications were reported by respondents in the workplace: 14% aged 25–34, 14% aged 50+, and 1% aged <25.

Table 4.3: Race of respondents

Category	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Race group	African	83	94%
	Indian	0	0%
	Coloured	2	2%
	White	3	4%
	Total	88	100%

Source: Researcher: Mabaso & Statistician: Mahlangu (2024)

As shown in Table 4.3 above, the respondents' racial breakdown was as follows: 94% (83 of 88) were African, 2% (2 of 88) were Coloured, and 4% were White. No responses were received from the Indian group. African participants accounted for 94% of the study. Africans predominate in the

organisation, while Whites and Coloureds are in the minority. Nevertheless, all participants were NERSA employees.

Table 4.4: Level of employment of respondents

Category	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Level of employment	Management	7	8%
	Non-management	81	92%
	Total	88	100%

Source: Researcher: Mabaso & Statistician: Mahlangu (2024)

Table 4.4 shows that 92% (81 of 88) of respondents were non-management, whereas only 8% (7 of 88) were in management. The analysis indicated that the study predominantly comprised non management participants, with management represented in a smaller proportion. However, the data reveal that all participants were NERSA employees.

Table 4.5: Level of education of respondents

Category	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Highest qualification	Grade 12	2	2%
	Diploma/Undergraduate Degree	21	24%
	Post Graduate Degree	41	47%
	Masters	23	26%
	Doctorate	1	1%
	Total	88	100%

Source: Researcher: Mabaso & Statistician: Mahlangu (2024)

The above Table 4.5 shows that one of the study's factors was respondents' level of education, which they were asked to specify. Of the respondents, 47% (41 out of 88) reported a postgraduate qualification, 26% (23 out of 88) reported a master's degree, and 24% (21 out of 88) reported an undergraduate qualification or diploma. The Grade 12 and Doctorate categories had the fewest responses, at 2% (2 out of 88) and 1% (1 out of 88), respectively.

PART B AND C: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS ORGANISED BY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following open-ended research questions guided the collection of qualitative data for Parts B and C of the questionnaire:

- RQ1: How do staff members and management use the functionalities of smartphones in the workplace?
- RQ2: What are the perceived gratifications sought by smartphone users in the workplace (including applications)?
- RQ3: What are managers' perceptions of staff members' use of smartphones at the workplace?

Responses to open-ended questions were analysed thematically. Thematic analysis was used to identify keywords and patterns aligned with the research questions (de Jong et al. 2020:27). Two coders participated in the coding to reduce bias. The information gathered was categorised into themes that directly addressed each research question. For ease of reference, responses are coded as follows: SM denotes staff members, and M denotes management. The numbers indicate the responses for a particular theme (e.g., SM03, SM05, M04).

4.3 FINDINGS RELATED TO RESEARCH QUESTION 1: HOW DO STAFF MEMBERS AND MANAGEMENT USE SMARTPHONE FUNCTIONALITIES IN THE WORKPLACE?

This section presents findings from questions 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, and 12, which together address smartphone use at NERSA.

4.3.1 Usage Patterns: Personal, Work-Related, and Combined Use

Table 4.6: Question 5 - How do you use your smartphones at the workplace?

Category	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Use your smartphones	Personal purposes	38	43%
	Work purposes	38	43%
	Both	76	86%
	Total	88	100%

Source: Researcher: Mabaso, Hashe & Lepule (2024)

The results from Table 4.6 show smartphone use within NERSA. A total of 86% (76 of 88) of respondents reported using smartphones for both personal and work purposes, with 43% (38 of 88) for personal use and 43% (38 of 88) for work use. The participants' responses indicate that smartphone use and gratifications are equally distributed between personal and work purposes. The employer's time is shared between personal smartphone use and gratifications.

Theme 1: Dual-purpose smartphone utilisation in the workplace

The analysis revealed that smartphones are essential tools in both personal and professional contexts, with three distinct patterns of use emerging.

Sub-theme 1.1: Personal use at work

Within this theme, respondents reported using their smartphones to call and text family and friends. They also reported using their smartphones for banking, including Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT), online shopping, and accessing GPS services to find directions to various destinations. Some activities performed by employees on their smartphones included taking pictures, listening to favourite music, watching films, and reading news online. Some of the responses included:

"I mostly use my phone for personal calls, WhatsApp for sending and receiving messages and Google search." SM5

"To check Facebook content – sending and receipt of messages. Also for smartphone banking and calls, etc." SM5

"In most cases, it is when I chat or call my family and friends, and for other purposes such as reading news." SM6

The analysis showed that smartphone use in the workplace is an integral part of employees' personal lives; they cannot do without them, so employers need to take this into account and act accordingly.

Sub-theme 1.2: Work-related use

Respondents reported that WhatsApp groups are used for instant, effective communication. Messages can be sent and received on the go. They also indicated that WhatsApp groups are an efficient way to communicate remotely with colleagues. Some responses from respondents:

"We are working hybrid, so most of the time, communication is through e-mail or WhatsApp." SM06

"For work purposes, I communicate with the team members, mostly about work and convey important messages to them via WhatsApp." SM04

"We use smartphones to chat as a team and take pictures whilst conducting electricity distribution audits." SM02

The analysis of the snapshot above shows that smartphone use in the workplace plays an important role. The use of smartphones kept the workflow moving even outside the office, helping to achieve the set organisational objectives.

Sub-theme 1.3: Integrated personal and work-related use

Within this sub-theme, respondents reported sending and receiving messages instantly for personal and professional purposes. They noted that smartphones are used for various reasons: engaging with social media platforms, conducting Google searches, and making calls for work and personal matters. Smartphones enable employees to work remotely from home while staying in touch with colleagues in the office. Some expressed the following:

"I work from home, so I must always be available to my colleagues. Since having a mobile phone is essential for carrying out my responsibilities when I'm not in the office, my employer also provides me with a smartphone and a

data allowance. Additionally, I use the phone for personal matters to address issues that cannot wait until after work." SM10

"Communication is mostly regarding urgent matters, requesting managers to sign documents and reminding colleagues of meetings and deadlines, among others." SM07

"Team messages and responding to colleagues." SM08

The analysis of the findings demonstrated that employees effectively balance smartphone use at work for both personal and work purposes.

4.3.2 Time Spent on Smartphone Use for Work Purposes

Table 4.7: Question 6 – If you use a smartphone for work or personal purposes, indicate for what reasons. Kindly explain

Category	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Average time on smartphones for work purposes	0 – 1 hour	31	35%
	2 – 3 hours	25	28%
	3 – 4 hours	14	16%
	4+ hours	18	21%
	Total	88	100%

Source: Researcher: Mabaso & Coders: Hashe & Lepule (2024)

Table 4.7 above presents the time categories for respondents' smartphone use for work. Approximately 35% (31 of 88) of respondents reported using their smartphones for "0 – 1 hour" at work, 28% (25 of 88) reported "2 – 3 hours," and 21% (18 of 88) reported "4+ hours." Only about 16% (14 of 88) reported using their smartphones for "3 – 4 hours" at work.

Theme 2: Work-related smartphone engagement patterns

Responses indicated that most time was spent on the WhatsApp application for urgent work matters within this theme. WhatsApp group calls, emails, and message exchanges between Officers and Regulator Members were prevalent, particularly WhatsApp conference calls when Microsoft Teams was dysfunctional. Smartphones offer a quicker, more efficient way to reach

colleagues, given their popularity within the organisation compared with other applications.

Smartphones provide essential support for the organisation's ongoing operations. Respondents highlighted activities such as conducting desktop research, participating in virtual meetings, communicating with service providers, and monitoring social media coverage and comments about the organisation. As the company continues to work from home due to the COVID-19 outbreak, other respondents noted that smartphones have become essential for staying in touch with co-workers. Here is a sampling of the responses:

"Most hours I spend them on work WhatsApp groups and responding to or sending colleagues messages and calls, and Google search." SM10

"I use WhatsApp to communicate with colleagues for urgent matters or to sensitise them to respond to certain matters. I also have my emails on my smartphone." SM08

"Typically, I inform my manager of emails awaiting her approval. I discussed her schedule and availability with her. I check my work email on my phone when I am away from my laptop or have just stepped out of the house." SM06

The results showed that 16% of respondents used their smartphones for 3 to 4 hours, while 21% used them for over 4 hours for work. The analysis of smartphone use and gratifications indicated a significant dependence on smartphones for work activities. In contrast, 35% of participants who used their smartphones for 0 to 1 hour and 28% for 2 to 3 hours showed less reliance on smartphones for work activities.

4.3.3 Time Spent on Smartphone Use for Personal Purposes During Work Hours

Table 4.8: Question 8 – Explain the selection above (type of activities and applications accessed)

Category	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Applications used mostly	WhatsApp	69	43%
	Facebook	12	8%
	Instagram	14	9%
	Twitter	18	12%
	LinkedIn	26	16%
	Tok-Tok	5	3%
	Other	15	9%
	Total	159	100%

Source: Researcher: Mabaso & Coders: Hashe & Lepule (2024)

The results in Table 4.8 show the time categories for how respondents use their smartphones for personal purposes during working hours. The majority of respondents, 55% (48 of 88), reported using their smartphones for "0–1 hour" for personal purposes during working hours. This compares with 17% (15 of 88) who utilised their smartphones for "2–3 hours" or "4+ hours" for the same purposes during working hours. Only 11% (10 of 88) reported using their smartphones for "3–4 hours" for personal purposes during working hours.

The analysis of the findings indicated that 55% of participants used their smartphones for personal purposes for an average of 0–1 hour, whereas the average time spent on work-related smartphone use during the same period was 35% (as shown in Table 4.7). The use of smartphones during this hour is lower for work than for personal use. In general, both personal and work use amount to almost the same percentage in each category, even when split by hours.

Theme 3: Personal smartphone engagement during working hours

Under this theme, some respondents reported primarily using their smartphones for personal calls, Gmail, WhatsApp group messages, social media, web browsing, and banking applications. They also use them to verify information and acquire new skills for home projects. Other uses include LinkedIn for connecting with industry professionals for advice on work and personal matters; TikTok and mindfulness apps for a daily reset; music; Facebook, Instagram, and other activities and applications accessed by employees. Moreover, respondents noted that smartphones offer a range of features, from banking to social media, including access to Bible apps. Smartphones are part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), and respondents noted that these devices enable employees to communicate and engage with family and friends instantly, anywhere in the world. Some respondents expressed themselves as follows:

"I check my phone for personal reasons when I need to take a few minutes away from work-related matters." SM10

"I use WhatsApp to communicate with colleagues regarding urgent matters or to prompt them to respond to specific issues. I also have my emails on my mobile phone." SM08

"I use social media, stream, read the news, and check my emails." SM03

The analysis revealed that 55% of participants used their smartphones for "0–1" hours a day for personal purposes. They primarily used their smartphones during work breaks to unwind and manage urgent personal matters. Conversely, 11–17% of participants reported using their smartphones for "2–+4" hours. They mainly chatted with family and friends, posted and responded to social media content, and stayed informed about the latest developments in their areas of interest.

4.3.4 Types of Applications Accessed

Table 4.9: Question 8 – Explain the selection above (type of activities and applications accessed)

Category	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Applications used mostly	WhatsApp	69	43%
	Facebook	12	8%
	Instagram	14	9%
	Twitter	18	12%
	LinkedIn	26	16%
	Tok-Tok	5	3%
	Other	15	9%
	Total	159	100%

Source: Researcher: Mabaso & Coders: Hashe & Lepule (2024)

Table 4.9 shows that WhatsApp is the most widely used application, accounting for 43% of responses, followed by LinkedIn at 16%. The remaining applications received responses ranging from 5% to 18%, while the "Other" category accounted for 9% of responses.

Theme 4: Primary applications and their purposes

In this theme, respondents reported that WhatsApp was the most frequently used application for communicating with family, friends, colleagues, and external stakeholders on both personal and work-related matters. Additionally, LinkedIn and Twitter were used to keep respondents informed about news relevant to them personally and professionally, as well as the latest developments in the energy sector. Other applications were used for desktop research, banking, and for work and personal videos and music. Some respondents shared their views as follows:

"Communication with colleagues, friends and family." SM12

"I use WhatsApp to communicate with colleagues regarding urgent matters or to prompt them to respond to specific issues. I also have my emails on my mobile phone." SM06

"I use it for family emergencies and checking up on my kids." SM07

The findings revealed that WhatsApp was the most commonly used application for both personal and work-related purposes, accounting for 43%. The least utilised application was TikTok, with merely 3%. The implication is that WhatsApp is predominantly used for both personal and professional purposes; therefore, it is very beneficial for both spheres of life.

4.3.5 Preference for Work-Related vs. Personal Use

Theme 5: Comparative analysis of work-related versus personal smartphone use

Respondents emphasised the importance of smartphones in both spheres of life. In the workplace, smartphones are particularly important; for example, when the IT server experiences downtime, smartphones become essential for both personal and work-related use as employees face network connectivity issues. Study participants also noted that using smartphones for both purposes has become indispensable in this new era, allowing access to work emails and WhatsApp documents, maintaining workflow, and connecting to meetings via Microsoft Teams outside the office. Some of the responses were as follows:

"Smartphones are mostly utilised for personal purposes. Throughout the day, the smartphone rings, a continuous interruption of messages coming in." SM15

"Browsing the internet and social media platforms all day, including various applications. Some participants continue to argue that most colleagues spend more time on Facebook, Twitter and other applications for personal purposes, and therefore, their work is mostly half-baked." SM01

"Smartphones are used mostly for personal purposes compared to work related purposes." SM10

The interpretation of the findings was that smartphones are primarily used for personal rather than professional purposes, which will ultimately do more harm than good to the organisation.

4.3.6 Smartphones for Internal Communication

Table 4.10: Question 12 - Can it be possible for cell phones to be utilised in the office for internal communication?

Category	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Can smartphones be utilised in the office for internal communication?	Yes	78	89%
	No	10	11%
	Total	88	100%

Source: Researcher: Mabaso & Coders: Hashe & Lepule (2024)

The results in Table 4.10 above showed that 89% (78 of 88) of respondents believed smartphones could be used in the office for internal communication, while only 11% (10 of 88) disagreed.

Theme 6: Smartphones as internal communication tools

This theme indicates that smartphones are primarily used in the workplace for internal communication. The analysis of the results shows that the majority of participants are comfortable using smartphones for internal communication in the office. Office use of smartphones is beneficial for office communication and is preferred.

Theme 7: Rationale for using smartphones in internal communication

Under this theme, the analysis also showed that study participants were intrigued by smartphones' flexibility. For example, they could join Team Meetings or Zoom meetings from their smartphones wherever they were, even after working hours. Respondents also emphasised smartphones' primary role in facilitating hybrid working. Without smartphones, working from home during COVID-19 would be extremely difficult, if not impossible. Other respondents argued that smartphones are personal devices unless provided by an organisation. They further argued that all employees have smartphones

and receive monthly phone and data allowances for the employer's convenience, enabling the employer to reach employees as and when needed. Other responses included:

"We have Teams applications on our phones, which can be used to join meetings when we cannot do so on our laptops." SM09

"For reminders or urgent communication. This will ensure that colleagues on leave are kept abreast about what is happening at work while they are away." SM11

"Yes. Whenever I leave my workstation, I usually have my smartphone with me, making it easier for co-workers to reach me. When the Internet is down at work, we can use WhatsApp as a communication tool because it is free. Thirdly, you can set up your work email address on your phone." SM15

The data collected indicated that using smartphones for internal purposes was already standard practice in the workplace. Smartphones were the preferred means of communication due to their speed of message delivery. Most participants carried smartphones, enabling immediate communication among colleagues. Using smartphones for internal communication enables more effective, efficient workflows, helping achieve organisational objectives.

4.4 FINDINGS RELATED TO RESEARCH QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE THE PERCEIVED GRATIFICATIONS SOUGHT BY SMARTPHONE USERS IN THE WORKPLACE?

This section presents findings from questions 9 and 10, which examine the gratifications respondents derive from smartphone use.

Theme 8: Types of gratifications derived from smartphone use

Under this theme, respondents derived gratification from instantly connecting with others via calls, texts, or social media, and from interacting through apps such as WhatsApp and Instagram. Participants can also access local and

international news and research content of interest with a button. Smartphone notifications deliver real-time events, messages, and news updates. Showmax, DStv, YouTube, and Google search are used to stream news, lifestyle shows, and telenovelas, and to support online shopping (clothing, furniture, groceries), house hunting, and holiday bookings, all of which provide gratification. Some participants noted the importance of guarding against these gratifications, as they can easily lead to addiction; thus, setting boundaries on smartphone engagement is paramount. Some of the respondents' replies were:

"Communication: I can instantly connect with others through calls, texts, or social media. Access to information: I can obtain data at the click of a button, including news, research, and notifications. Smartphones assist in receiving real-time updates on events." SM06

"I use my smartphone to communicate swiftly and stay updated with emails." SM05

"WhatsApp, X, and Instagram for social interaction; Showmax, DStv, and YouTube for streaming news, lifestyle shows, and telenovelas; Internet Explorer for shopping (clothing, furniture), house hunting, and booking holidays." SM08

The findings were interpreted as indicating that life without smartphones is practically impossible, which might suggest addiction. Some respondents found gratification in using their smartphones for leisure after work. LinkedIn, YouTube, and Twitter were mentioned as platforms that helped participants destress. LinkedIn connects industry professionals in the same field by sharing information and tips to enhance their skills and improve in various ways.

Theme 9: Applications that elicit gratification

The theme that emerged showed that respondents found satisfaction in using a range of applications that provide gratification while engaging with others: Google Search, Google Scholar, WhatsApp, Gmail, Twitter, email via Microsoft Outlook, Instagram, DStv, Showmax, Facebook, LinkedIn, Chrome, YouTube, Wikipedia, TikTok, as well as calendar and calculator applications to access information and stay updated on a wide range of developments related to their interests. Information is readily accessible. Most social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp and ChatGPT, were highlighted as the primary applications offering gratification for some participants using their smartphones. Additionally, other respondents noted that purchasing electricity through an electricity supplier application is another convenient tool that alleviates life's stresses. Some respondents mentioned the following:

"Google, WhatsApp, Gmail and Twitter." SM10

"Emails via Microsoft Outlook." SM05

"Internet Explorer, Instagram, Showmax and X." SM10

"Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc." SM04

According to the findings, it is almost impossible to imagine life without a smartphone. People's lives now revolve around their smartphones because they are so commonplace. The uses and gratifications of smartphones in both spheres of life are endless.

4.5 FINDINGS RELATED TO RESEARCH QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE MANAGERS' PERCEPTIONS OF STAFF MEMBERS' USE OF SMARTPHONES AT THE WORKPLACE?

This section was directed solely at management. Of the 88 respondents, only 8% (7 of 88) were at the management level at the time of the study. The following open-ended questions were part of this section.

Theme 10: Management's overall perceptions of employee smartphone use

This theme indicated that management had no objection to staff using smartphones in the workplace for personal and professional purposes. Management merely asserted that, when used appropriately, smartphones would enhance productivity and streamline workflows, thereby fulfilling organisational objectives.

Smartphones are the most effective tools for work when used appropriately. Management appreciates their use, as they provide easy access to colleagues, thereby facilitating the attainment of set targets for various projects. Management also expresses gratitude for smartphone use in the workplace while remaining mindful of the potential for overuse. Some feedback from participants included the following:

"I cannot say, I almost feel like smartphones are a normal way of life." M04

"If used correctly, it will increase productivity as work-related communication will reach them instantly, etc." M06

"It is a good tool to use and makes communication fast." M05

"No problem, as long as the set targets are met." M06

The management's responses were analysed and interpreted, indicating that smartphone use in the workplace is a normal facet of modern life. Smartphones should be utilised for the organisation's greatest benefit while remaining mindful of excessive use, which could harm overall performance.

Theme 11: Perceived organisational benefits of smartphone use

What emerged from this theme was that management valued the use of smartphones, as they enhanced visibility and accessibility to colleagues even outside working hours. Easy access to information, such as using LinkedIn and WhatsApp to share documents, facilitates instant communication and

saves far more time than sending emails. Some of the responses were as follows:

"Visibility and accessibility." M05

"Easy access to information." M07

"Use of LinkedIn and WhatsApp for sharing documents." M04

"Easily accessible and cuts down on the time spent sending emails." M05

The management's responses were analysed and interpreted to demonstrate that smartphones are valuable tools for the organisation's well-being, as they facilitate workflow processes. Smartphones can optimise the organisation's performance if applications are developed and enhanced to deliver optimal results.

Theme 12: Perceived disadvantages and need for regulation

Under this theme, management explained that all employees should be fully responsible for their smartphone use and that policies would be needed to regulate it in the workplace. Misuse or excessive use of smartphones is seen as a threat that could lead to addiction, thereby hindering the organisation's objectives.

Once policies, guidelines, or regulations are formulated and implemented, managers can oversee smartphone use in the workplace. Employees' smartphone use should be regulated to ensure the efficient and effective operation of the organisation. According to managers, disciplinary measures should be enforced against employees who fail to comply with the established rules and procedures. Some of the responses cited by managers:

"Can be time consuming when interacting with social media." M03

"None, as long as there is a policy on smartphone usage and workshops for training provided to all staff." M04

"No, as all employees must take responsibility when using smartphones at work." M05

"Not easy to manage." M06

"Abuse of cell phone usage can lead to addiction, and if it results in targets not being met, it can become disastrous. Smartphone usage is, however, hard to manage, especially while workers are working from home." M06

The analysis and interpretation of management's responses indicated that smartphones can be very time-consuming when employees waste the employer's time on social media. Some managers suggested that smartphone use in the workplace should be discussed and developed through workshops, followed by the formulation of a policy or guidelines that should have received buy-in from all employees before implementation.

4.6 DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Discussion of the findings of any research project is crucial for drawing conclusions. Bavdekar (2015:16) notes that debates about research findings should compare previous and current studies. The following section will discuss the results and the insights they provide, and will also compare the findings of prior research with the three objectives of the current study to demonstrate how the current study fits within the broader field.

4.6.1 Research Objective 1: To investigate how staff members and management utilise smartphone functionalities at work

The first objective was to investigate how management and employees use smartphone features at work. The analysis of the findings revealed that staff members and management utilise smartphone features equally for both personal and work purposes. Looking at the literature reviewed, the results of the current study were broadly consistent with the findings of the previous studies mentioned below:

Molyneux (2014) examined whether smartphone features used by newspaper reporters and editors in the USA enhanced the quality of their work. The results showed that smartphones were used for both personal and professional purposes. Business applications on journalists' smartphones accounted for 52%, while 48% were used for personal purposes.

Fawareh and Jusoh (2017) conducted a study at the University of Northern Border in Saudi Arabia, involving 66 professors with smartphones who were randomly selected to complete the questionnaire. Features and functions of smartphones, such as email and social media applications, contributed to increased organisational productivity, as most information was accessible with a tap. Smartphones saved academic time by enabling students to engage in other activities, resulting in significantly more work being completed in a shorter period. The university also benefited from cost savings associated with employing fewer personnel.

Despite these benefits, academics report that smartphones negatively affect work related attention, with disruptive notifications creating continuous "check habits" (Fawareh & Jusoh 2017). Sixty-one percent (61%) admit to feeling incomplete when they do not have their smartphones (Fawareh & Jusoh 2017). This finding further supports the positive role of smartphones in academics' lives, both at work and at home. However, the results of this study are inconsistent with the findings of the current study to a certain extent. Sixty-one percent (61%) of academics admit to positive advantages derived from using smartphones' functionalities, while 39% admit to negative effects of using smartphones' functionalities at the workplace.

Masarweh and Afndy (2018) conducted a qualitative study in South Arabia to identify factors that impact smartphone utilisation in workplaces in a developing country. The study found both positive and negative effects. The functionalities of smartphones kept employees accessible and engaged even after working hours, supporting the achievement of set organisational goals (Masarweh & Afndy 2018). Conversely, some employees used employer-funded time on their smartphones for personal matters, thereby compromising

or failing to meet the organisation's objectives (Masarweh & Afndy 2018). Additionally, the study found that smartphone use at work led to poor performance and disrespect, as some employees continued to use their devices during meetings. The results indicated that smartphones undermined organisational culture, as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of the entity (Masarweh & Afndy 2018). The results of this study differed from those of the current study, which showed serious negative effects of smartphone functionality use in the workplace.

Zondi (2021) found that "54% of the participants indicated that smartphone functionalities negatively impacted workflow and profitability significantly, 46% of participants expressed favourable use of smartphone functions in the workplace". Participants believed smartphones are a nuisance because of the numerous distractions they create, which hinder focus on tasks and prolong task completion. Some managers believe that certain workers are dependent on their smartphones for work-related purposes. To address this problem, some of these managers have stepped up oversight (Zondi 2021). The findings led the company to implement smartphone etiquette guidelines to control smartphone use at work and protect the organisation's health (Zondi 2021). The results of this study are consistent with the current study; 54% of participants expressed negative opinions about using smartphone features at work, whereas 46% expressed favourable opinions about this practice (Zondi 2021).

Most authors agree that smartphone functions have produced both positive and negative outcomes for personal and work purposes. Therefore, management should consider enacting regulations, guidelines, policies, or smartphone etiquette measures to counteract the negative implications of smartphone use in the workplace when the negative impacts outweigh the benefits. As a result, sustainability and superior organisational performance will be ensured.

4.6.2 Research Objective 2: To explain the perceived gratifications sought by smartphone users, including applications in the workplace

Objective two aimed to describe the perceived gratifications sought by smartphone users, including the applications used by NERSA staff and management.

The analysis demonstrated that the respondents derived gratification primarily from using applications that provide instant gratification, i.e., instant connection with others through calls, texts, and social media interactions via WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Google search, and Twitter, among others. Banking applications and buying prepaid electricity online were also among the instant gratifications enjoyed by the participants.

While other respondents indicated that life without smartphones is no longer possible, this statement may suggest addiction. Some participants emphasised the need to guard against these gratifications and to set boundaries on when and how smartphones are used. Below are the findings of the literature review on this objective.

Leung and Louis (2013) examined "the roles of the uses and gratifications sought" using a sample of 596 social media users via a telephone survey. The most widely used SNSs were Facebook, blogs, forums, and smartphone applications. The telephone survey found that the uses and gratifications of SNSs varied: posting social content, being sociable, making warm gestures, releasing unwanted emotions, entertainment, self-actualisation, and achieving recognition, among others (Leung & Louis 2013). The study also revealed that other social media users used social media to express self-love, egocentrism, and self-centredness (Leung & Louis 2013). The results of this study were largely consistent with those of the current study, except that the current study did not select any gratifications sought by the respondents for expressing self-love, egocentrism, or self-centredness from the responses.

Ifredo (2016) conducted a survey study using the UGT and Social Influence frameworks, involving 797 undergraduate students from four countries: the

USA, Canada, Mexico, and Argentina. The study found that students' uses and gratifications for SNSs primarily include social interaction, communication, staying connected, establishing new relationships, keeping abreast of events in their respective areas, and gaining information from family, friends, and fellow students. Ifredo (2016) argued that the uses and gratifications theory holds that consumers will remain engaged with SNSs as long as their needs and wants are satisfied by these communication channels. The findings of this study align with those of the current study.

Koyuncu and Pusatli (2019) surveyed smartphone users' awareness of "different security-related parameters". The study was conducted across user groups classified by demographic data. The project also included participants from varying age groups, education levels, and levels of IT security awareness. Koyuncu and Pusatli (2019) argued that the gratifications elicited by smartphones are applications, which consist of a small set of programming statements installed on a handheld device. The findings showed that most users find smartphones indispensable, raising the question of how they managed their lives before smartphones were invented.

Based on the literature reviewed, the results of the current study were generally consistent with those of earlier studies. Zondi (2021) asserts that smartphones have revolutionised people's daily lives in almost every aspect: socially, health-wise, economically, politically, and financially. Among other benefits, one gratifying aspect of smartphone use is the wide variety of applications available. An impressive range of applications can be downloaded from the Play Store in seconds, including shopping, social media, banking, films, music, health, education, fitness, calendars, and reminders, substantially enhancing people's daily experiences. The benefits and applications of smartphones highlighted in this study closely align with the results of the current study.

4.6.3 Research Objective 3: To investigate management's viewpoints regarding employees' use of smartphones within the company

Objective three examined management's perspective on staff members' smartphone use. Based on the analysis and interpretation of the gathered data, management appreciated staff members' smartphone use, as smartphones provided them with accessibility and visibility outside working hours. However, management also highlighted the drawbacks of smartphone use at work, which could reduce the organisation's effectiveness and productivity if employees don't use their devices sensibly.

The results showed that although they appreciated the benefits of smartphone use in the workplace, measures were needed to regulate employees' use of smartphones. Below are the findings of the literature review addressing this objective.

Wahla and Awan (2014) examined the relationship between office productivity and smartphone use in Pakistan. The results indicated that some participants valued smartphones at work and reported positive experiences, while others argued that smartphone use negatively affected the workplace. A small number of participants suggested that management should impose a ban on smartphone use. In contrast, others recommended implementing regulatory measures, policies, or etiquette rather than imposing a ban (Wahla & Awan 2014). The findings of this study align with the current study to a certain extent, in that smartphone use at the workplace yields both positive and negative effects, and measures should be put in place to curb overuse, which might have detrimental effects on the organisation's sustainability.

Masarweh and Afndy (2018) conducted a study in Saudi Arabia examining employees' smartphone use in developing countries. The results showed that most employers lacked regulatory or etiquette measures to govern smartphone use at work. Nonetheless, the study recommended implementing such measures to address the challenges posed by new technology and its associated risks. This study does not advocate a ban on smartphone use in the workplace; instead, it supports the establishment of regulations, policies,

or guidelines to enhance the organisation's efficiency and effectiveness (Masarweh & Afndy 2018). The results of this study are, to a certain extent, consistent with those of the current study. The current study recognises the benefits of smartphone use, but measures are needed to guard against overuse, which can easily jeopardise the organisation's sustainability.

Fahed and Kmeid (2019) investigated the unsuitability of smartphone use in the workplace in Lebanon. According to the research, the majority of Lebanese workers abused their smartphones at work (Fahed & Kmeid 2019:4). Instead of giving their jobs their full attention, they used their iPhones to discuss personal issues. This extensive smartphone use significantly reduced company productivity (Fahed & Kmeid 2019). Positive smartphone use at work was overshadowed by negative repercussions. The findings indicate that management should take immediate action to curb smartphone abuse to maintain the organisation's viability. Furthermore, it was suggested that management enact rules, guidelines, policies, or etiquette practices to reduce workplace smartphone overuse (Fahed & Kmeid 2019). The results of this study differ from those of the current study but are similar in examining measures to regulate smartphone use in the workplace.

Zondi (2021) conducted a qualitative investigation in a service-oriented organisation in KwaZulu-Natal. The study examined the extent to which smartphone use at work affects profitability and productivity. The results showed that while 54% of participants reported that smartphones severely hampered productivity and profitability, 46% reported a positive impact on the workplace. To safeguard the company's interests, these findings prompted the employer to implement smartphone use policies and etiquette guidelines (Zondi 2021). The results of this study are consistent with the current study, as smartphone use in the workplace yields both positive and negative effects.

4.7 DISCUSSION

The implications of the findings for current practice are largely applicable to non-profit organisations, such as NERSA.

4.7.1 Research Objective 1: To investigate how staff members and management utilise smartphone functionalities at work

The first objective of the study was to examine how both management and employees use smartphone features in the workplace. The analysis of the findings indicated that both groups use smartphone features to a similar extent for both work-related and personal activities.

Molyneux (2014), in a study of newspaper reporters and editors in the United States, reported that journalists predominantly used smartphone applications for work-related activities (52%), while the remaining 48% used them for personal purposes. Fawareh and Jusoh (2017) found that the use of smartphone features in the workplace resulted in 61% positive outcomes for organisations, with 39% negative. Similarly, Masarweh and Afndy (2018) examined employee smartphone use in Saudi Arabia, a developing-country context. Their findings indicated that many organisations had implemented measures to control and regulate smartphone use in the workplace. In addition, Zondi (2021) reported mixed perceptions: 54% of participants indicated that smartphones significantly reduced productivity and profitability, while 46% believed smartphones had a positive effect on the workplace.

The implications of the above findings for current practice indicate that organisations cannot permit situations in which employees' working time is equally divided between organisational tasks and personal matters. Employees are remunerated to devote their working hours entirely to job-related activities, not to allocate a significant portion of paid time to personal use. Consequently, employers should implement appropriate measures, such as policies, regulations, guidelines, or rules governing smartphone use in the workplace, to ensure that smartphone use primarily supports organisational objectives and contributes to outcomes that benefit the employer.

4.7.2 Research Objective 2: To explain the perceived gratifications sought by smartphone users, including applications in the workplace

Objective two sought to explain the perceived gratifications that smartphone users pursue, including the specific applications used by both staff and management at NERSA.

Leung and Louis (2013) found that the uses and gratifications associated with social networking sites (SNSs) vary according to the type of gratification users derive. Their study further demonstrated that users consistently rely on smartphones to obtain the gratifications they seek. Similarly, Ifnedo (2016) found that students primarily use SNSs for social interaction, communication, maintaining connections, and forming new relationships. The study also highlighted that users remain continually engaged with their smartphones because of the gratifications derived from their use. In addition, Koyuncu and Pusatli (2019) concluded that consumers will continue to use smartphone applications as long as these applications meet their needs, interests, and desires. According to Zondi (2021), smartphones and their applications have transformed everyday life across multiple dimensions, including social, health, economic, political, and financial spheres. One of the most significant sources of gratification is the wide range of applications available to users.

In conclusion, uses and gratifications theory suggests that consumers will continue to engage with SNSs as long as these platforms meet their needs, wants, and interests.

4.7.3 Research Objective 3: To investigate management's viewpoints regarding employees' use of smartphones within the company

Objective three examined management's views on employees' smartphone use in the workplace. Analysis and interpretation of the data showed that management generally valued employees' smartphone use, as it enhanced accessibility and visibility beyond normal working hours. However, management also noted that inappropriate or excessive smartphone use could undermine organisational efficiency and productivity if not managed responsibly.

Wahla and Awan's (2014) findings revealed mixed perceptions among participants: some viewed smartphone use at work positively, citing beneficial experiences, while others believed it had adverse effects on the workplace. A few participants supported banning smartphones at work, whereas others favoured introducing regulatory measures, policies, or etiquette rather than a complete prohibition. Similarly, Masarweh and Afndy (2018) found that most organisations lacked formal regulations or workplace etiquette for managing smartphone use. Their study did not recommend banning smartphones but instead advocated developing policies, regulations, or guidelines to improve organisational efficiency and effectiveness.

In contrast, Fahed and Kmeid (2019) reported that the negative consequences of workplace smartphone use outweighed the benefits. They argued that management should take decisive action to curb smartphone misuse to safeguard organisational sustainability. Likewise, Zondi (2021) found divided opinions: 54% of participants reported that smartphones significantly reduced productivity and profitability, while 46% believed they had a positive effect on the workplace.

Overall, the collective findings of these studies suggest that although management recognises the advantages of smartphone use in the workplace, effective regulatory measures are necessary to manage employee use and safeguard organisational interests.

4.8 CONCLUSION

The data collected was analysed primarily through engagement with the literature reviewed in the preceding chapters. Smartphones have become integral to everyday life worldwide and are likely to remain a permanent feature of modern society. Nevertheless, their use in the workplace requires careful regulation to mitigate potential negative effects in specific organisational contexts while promoting efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability. In comparison with prior research, the findings of this study largely align with those of earlier studies, thereby strengthening their

credibility. The conclusions of the study, together with recommendations for future research, are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This final chapter brings together the discussions and results presented in the earlier sections. Its main purpose is to highlight the central insights gained from this investigation, emphasise how this study contributes to current knowledge in the field, and suggest potential avenues for further exploration (Ajimakin 2018:98). The research outcomes concerning the attitudes, viewpoints, thoughts, and opinions of NERSA personnel will be synthesised. Furthermore, this chapter acknowledges the study's constraints, a vital step in establishing trustworthiness and resonance with the intended readers (Zhou & Jiang 2023:34). The conclusions reached are directly supported by the research questions, aims, and the data collected, offering a complete overview of the study's results.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS OF THE OBJECTIVES

This research examined how NERSA employees use smartphones and the satisfaction they derive from their interactions with these devices. The study's aims centred on understanding the uses and gratifications associated with smartphone use in a work context. The findings are outlined below.

5.2.1 Conclusion on Research Objective One: To investigate how management and employees utilise smartphone features at work

The purpose of this objective was to examine how management and employees use smartphone features at work. The analysis of the findings produced several important conclusions.

The evidence gathered in this study conclusively demonstrates that NERSA employees and management utilise smartphone features for both work and personal purposes to a similar extent. The data revealed that 86% of respondents reported using their smartphones for both personal and work-related activities, with usage almost equally divided between the two domains. This finding confirms that smartphones are deeply embedded in NERSA's

daily workflow, serving as essential tools that facilitate communication, collaboration, and task execution.

The study found that work-related smartphone use at NERSA is primarily conducted through applications such as WhatsApp, which employees use for instant communication with colleagues, team coordination, and maintaining workflow continuity, particularly in the hybrid working environment that emerged following the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees reported using smartphones to attend virtual meetings, conduct desktop research, communicate with service providers, and monitor the organisation's social media presence. The research further revealed that 21% of employees spend over 4 hours daily on work related smartphone use, indicating significant dependence on these devices for professional responsibilities.

Regarding personal use during working hours, the study found that employees use their smartphones for various non work activities, including communicating with family and friends, conducting banking transactions, online shopping, accessing GPS services, and consuming entertainment content such as music and films. The finding that 55% of respondents spend up to one hour daily on personal smartphone use during work hours, while a smaller but noteworthy proportion (17%) spend two or more hours on personal activities, suggests that personal smartphone use occupies a meaningful portion of the working day.

The implications of these conclusions for the employer are significant. As employees receive full remuneration for work during contracted hours, the substantial time spent on personal smartphone use may constitute a diversion from organisational priorities. The study concludes that while smartphones offer undeniable benefits for workplace efficiency and communication, the current pattern of use at NERSA, characterised by an equal split between personal and professional purposes, warrants management attention. This conclusion aligns with the findings of Molyneux (2014), Fawareh and Jusoh (2017), and Zondi (2021), who similarly documented the dual-use nature of smartphones in various organisational contexts.

Therefore, the study concludes that NERSA should implement appropriate measures to ensure that smartphone use optimally supports organisational objectives. Such measures could include developing clear policies, regulations, or guidelines for smartphone use in the workplace, developed collaboratively with employees to ensure practical relevance and commitment. These regulatory frameworks should aim to preserve the productivity benefits of smartphone connectivity while minimising the risk of excessive personal use that could compromise the achievement of organisational goals.

5.2.2 Conclusion on Research Objective Two: To describe the perceived gratifications sought by smartphone users in the workplace

The second objective sought to describe the perceived gratifications that smartphone users at NERSA pursue, including those derived from specific applications. The analysis yielded comprehensive insights into the motivational factors driving smartphone engagement in the workplace.

The study conclusively established that NERSA employees derive multiple forms of gratification from their smartphone use, primarily through applications that enable instant connectivity, access to information, and entertainment. The research identified WhatsApp as the most frequently used application, accounting for 43% of all application usage reported by participants. This finding underscores the paramount importance of social connectivity as a source of gratification, with employees valuing the ability to communicate instantly with colleagues, family, and friends through calls, texts, and group interactions.

Information seeking emerged as another significant gratification category. Employees reported using applications such as Google Search, Google Scholar, LinkedIn, and Twitter to access news, research content, and professional developments relevant to their personal interests and work responsibilities. The ability to obtain information "at the click of a button" was consistently highlighted as a gratifying aspect of smartphone use, enabling employees to stay informed about local and international events, energy sector developments, and topics of personal interest.

Entertainment gratifications were also prominently featured in the findings. Participants reported using applications such as YouTube, Showmax, DStv, and various social media platforms to stream content, watch films and telenovelas, and access music. These activities were described as providing relaxation and stress relief, particularly during work breaks or after working hours. The study concluded that entertainment gratifications play an important role in helping employees manage work-related stress and maintain work-life balance.

The research further revealed that practical applications, including banking apps, online shopping platforms, and services such as prepaid electricity purchases, contribute significantly to employees' perceived value of smartphones. These applications enable employees to manage personal affairs efficiently during breaks or outside working hours, reducing the need to attend to such matters outside working hours.

Importantly, the study concluded that the gratifications derived from smartphone use are sufficiently compelling that many participants found it difficult to imagine life without these devices. This finding raises questions about potential smartphone dependence or addiction, with some respondents acknowledging the need to set boundaries to prevent excessive engagement. The study's conclusions align with the theoretical framework of Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that individuals actively select media to satisfy specific needs (Severin & Tankard 1997; Menon & Meghana 2021). The findings corroborate earlier research by Leung and Louis (2013), Ifnedo (2016), and Koyuncu and Pusatli (2019), who documented similar gratification patterns across diverse populations.

Based on these conclusions, the study recommends that NERSA consider leveraging the identified gratifications to enhance organisational effectiveness. Developing a dedicated organisational application to address customer complaints across the electricity, piped gas, and petroleum pipelines sectors could harness employees' engagement with smartphone technology for productive purposes. Such an application could provide automated complaint

confirmation, progress updates, and direct communication channels, potentially improving service delivery while aligning with employees' existing smartphone usage patterns.

5.2.3 Conclusion on Research Objective Three: To investigate management's viewpoints regarding employees' smartphone usage within the company

The third objective was to explore management's perspectives on staff members' smartphone use at NERSA. The analysis of management responses yielded nuanced conclusions about how organisational leaders perceive this phenomenon.

The study concluded that management at NERSA generally appreciates and values employees' smartphone use, recognising the significant benefits these devices bring to organisational operations. Managers consistently highlighted the enhanced accessibility and visibility smartphones provide, enabling them to reach employees outside conventional working hours when urgent matters arise. This accessibility was seen to facilitate project completion and target achievement, with smartphones enabling seamless communication regardless of physical location.

The research found that management views smartphones as effective tools that, when used appropriately, increase productivity by enabling instant work-related communication and rapid information sharing. Applications such as LinkedIn and WhatsApp were specifically cited for facilitating document sharing and professional networking, thereby improving workflow efficiency. Management respondents characterised smartphones as "normal" aspects of contemporary work life, indicating acceptance of these devices as integrated workplace tools.

However, the study also concluded that management has significant concerns about the potential negative consequences of uncontrolled smartphone use. Managers identified time spent on social media as a primary disadvantage, with employees potentially wasting productive hours on non-work-related

activities. The risk of smartphone addiction was explicitly raised as a concern that could jeopardise organisational performance if it leads employees to fail to meet established targets. Notably, management acknowledged the difficulty of monitoring and managing smartphone use, particularly in hybrid and remote working arrangements.

A critical conclusion from the analysis is that management recognises that effective regulation of smartphone use requires formal organisational mechanisms. Several managers explicitly recommended developing policies, guidelines, or rules governing smartphone use, complemented by employee workshops to ensure understanding and buy-in. This conclusion reflects an understanding that while smartphones offer substantial benefits, their potential for misuse necessitates structured approaches to maintaining appropriate usage boundaries.

The study further concluded that management expects employees to exercise personal responsibility in their smartphone use, while recognising that organisational support through policy frameworks is essential. This dual expectation, individual accountability supported by institutional guidance, represents a balanced approach to addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by smartphone technology in the workplace.

These conclusions align with findings from previous research, including studies by Wahla and Awan (2014), Masarweh and Afndy (2018), and Zondi (2021), which documented similar management perspectives across diverse organisational contexts. The consistency of these findings across studies suggests that the challenges and opportunities associated with workplace smartphone use are broadly similar across organisational types and geographical locations.

Based on these conclusions, the study recommends that NERSA management engage employees in collaborative discussions to develop appropriate regulatory mechanisms. Establishing a joint project team comprising management and staff representatives could facilitate the

development of a project plan with clear timelines for implementing smartphone usage guidelines. Workshop sessions should address current usage patterns, objectives, desired outcomes, and the evaluation of potential regulatory options, including policies, regulations, rules, guidelines, or etiquette measures. The chosen approach should be subject to periodic review to ensure continued effectiveness in regulating smartphone use while supporting organisational objectives.

5.3 THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This research contributes to the current scholarly understanding by presenting a distinct viewpoint from a governmental, non-profit entity, NERSA. Unlike much of the prior work on smartphone use and the gratifications derived from it, which has largely focused on for profit businesses, this study offers significant insights from a non-profit context. The findings of this investigation can serve as a useful guide for organisations similar to NERSA, helping them make informed decisions about managing smartphone use in their day-to-day activities. By identifying and strategically applying specific smartphone features, organisations can enhance efficiency and fully capitalise on the benefits of smartphone integration. Furthermore, this study illuminates how smartphones are utilised within NERSA, providing a basis for subsequent advancements and strategic development.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

According to Zhou and Jiang (2023:34), recognising and openly discussing the limitations of a study significantly shapes how the target audience perceives, evaluates, and ultimately accepts the research findings. Moreover, Zhou and Jiang (2023:36) emphasise that addressing potential significant limitations is an essential element of scientific inquiry and a crucial aspect of thorough academic discussion. By openly recognising these constraints, researchers can strengthen the trustworthiness and dependability of their work, thereby promoting greater confidence and involvement within the scholarly community.

According to Dittrich (2020:18) and Kincade (2017:1), millennials are individuals born in the digital age, aged 18 to 30, who share a particularly close relationship with their smartphones. Given their deep familiarity with this technology, it is reasonable to assume they possess valuable insights that could help management leverage smartphones more effectively and efficiently in the workplace (Dittrich 2020:18; Kincade 2017:1). However, only 12% of the study participants were millennials, which limited the data collected from this demographic. This presents a significant gap, as millennials are expected to remain active in the workforce longer than older generations. Gathering more information from this group could provide critical insights for both current and future generations, particularly in understanding how smartphones can be utilised in the workplace without compromising employee well-being or productivity due to excessive personal use.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies should investigate employees' perspectives on regulating personal smartphone use in the workplace, particularly the balance between productivity and well-being. Samples should target the digital generation, whose familiarity with smartphone usage patterns positions them to provide meaningful insights. Research should identify management strategies that align organisational objectives with employee preferences, examining approaches such as flexible use policies, designated break times, or technological restrictions during working hours. Such an inquiry could yield practical recommendations for workplace environments that support both productivity and employees' connectivity needs.

As Kincade (2017:3) notes, smartphone regulations vary across organisational contexts, with profit-oriented entities typically enforcing stricter measures due to potential financial repercussions, whereas non-profit organisations may experience compromised service quality. Further investigation should extend across labour market sectors, particularly government entities such as the Nuclear Regulator, Railway Regulator, Banking Ombudsman, Competition Commission, and National Credit

Regulator. These recently established organisations, employing predominantly millennial workers, remain unexplored in the existing literature. Research in these settings could inform employer approaches to managing workplace smartphone use.

As smartphone integration in professional environments is likely to intensify, understanding the digital generation's perspective becomes increasingly pertinent. The current study's sample of 12 participants between the ages of 18 and 35 reflects this demographic. Dittrich (2020:18) suggests that individuals with strong smartphone affinity typically fall within the 18–30 age range. This generation's comprehensive understanding of smartphone functionality for both personal and professional purposes makes their insights valuable for individual well-being, organisational effectiveness, and future workplace practices.

5.6 CONCLUSION

This research explored how and why employees use smartphones in their work environment at NERSA, using a mixed-methods approach to gather as much pertinent information as possible. Data was collected through a self-completion questionnaire distributed to employees via email. Participants were asked to complete and return the questionnaire by a specified date. The study involved 88 individuals, comprising 77 staff members and 11 in management positions.

Overall, the findings indicate that smartphones have become integral to the workplace, with participants viewing them as standard tools. The study shows that smartphones are used equally for professional and personal activities. Specifically, during the 0–1 hour period, participants spent an average of 35% of their time on work-related tasks, while 55% was dedicated to personal use. This indicates that personal smartphone use in the workplace exceeds work-related use by 15%. Employers should note the significant time spent on personal activities, as this can impact organisational productivity, hinder achievement of targets, and compromise the realisation of long-term goals.

The prevalence of smartphones is expected to continue rising as they remain central to everyday life. Employers must take proactive steps to regulate their use in the workplace. Clear, comprehensive policies should be established to define acceptable smartphone use, ensuring alignment with organisational goals and productivity standards. However, simply imposing rules is not enough. Employers should also engage employees in open dialogue, through workshops or collaborative discussions, to identify effective strategies for managing smartphone use. In addition to encouraging employee buy-in, this inclusive approach ensures that policies are realistic and sensitive to the workforce's needs. Ultimately, these measures should allow reasonable personal use while safeguarding the organisation's efficiency and effectiveness against potential disruptions caused by excessive or inappropriate smartphone use.

KEY TERMS

applications; employees; gratifications; networking sites uses; perspectives; smartphones; workplace

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Ethics clearance reference number: **Reference #: 7311869_CREC_CHS_2023**

Research permission reference number (if applicable): N/A

Title: An exploratory study on the uses and gratifications of smartphones in the workplace: A Case Study for NERSA

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Fikile Mabaso, and I am doing research towards a MA degree in Communication Science at the University of South Africa. You are invited to participate in a study entitled “An exploratory study on the uses and gratifications of smartphones in the workplace: A Case Study for NERSA”.

What is the purpose of the study?

I am conducting this research to explore and describe the ways in which adults working at NERSA use smartphones and the gratifications elicited from engagement with these mobile handheld devices.

Why am I being invited to participate?

You are invited to participate as you are an employee of NERSA, the organisation being studied. As a participant, you will need to meet the inclusion criteria: own a smartphone and understand, speak, read and write English.

What is the nature of my participation in this study?

You will be required to complete a questionnaire, which will have about twenty-one questions. Answering the questionnaire should take about 45 minutes of your time at the most.

Can I withdraw from this study even after having agreed to participate?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to participate, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw during the data collection phase and without giving a reason. There are no consequences for withdrawing.

Once the questionnaire is submitted however, it will not be possible to withdraw but please be assured that all questionnaires are anonymised – the researcher won't know which one is yours; the questionnaire will not indicate the identity of the participant. All participants will remain anonymous throughout the study.

What are the potential benefits of taking part in this study?

The findings from this research will be shared with respondents (staff and management) through a link to the dissertation. NERSA, other organisations and researchers will thus have a resource on the uses of smartphones in the workplace.

Are there any negative consequences for me if I participate in the research project?

There are no foreseen dangers in participating in the study. All participants will remain anonymous throughout the study.

Will the information that I convey to the researcher and my identity be my identity be kept confidential?

Anonymity and confidentiality of potential participants is guaranteed, and no individual identifiers will be made available.

The information obtained from the study may be used for a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings. Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained all the way; participants will not be named in such a report or academic article.

Will I receive payment or any incentives for participating in this study?

There will be no remuneration received for participating in this research study, participation will be voluntary. Participants are allowed to exit the study or decline participation at any point without any ramifications.

Has the study received ethics approval?

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Department of Communication Science, Unisa. Copies of the approval letters can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish of the following:

- Ethics clearance reference number: **Reference #:**
7311869_CRECHS_2023; and
- Permission to conduct the study at NERSA granted by Adv. Nomalanga Sithole, NERSA Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

How will I be informed of the findings/results of the research?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Fikile Mabaso on 0815401675 or email: 7311869@myLife.unisa.ac.za. The findings are accessible for five years.

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Fikile Mabaso, 0815401675, 7311869@myLife.unisa.ac.za. Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Prof R A Smith, Supervisor, 011 717 4619, drasrsa@gmail.com. You may also contact Mr SM Mfuphi, Chairperson: Ethics and Scientific Review Committee, 012 429 3111, mfuphsm@unisa.ac.za, if you have any ethical concerns.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Consent to participate in the study:

I consent to participate in the study

I am not interested to participate in the study

APPENDIX 2: RESEARCHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM

RESEARCHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM

An exploratory study on the uses and gratifications of smartphones in the workplace: A Case Study of the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA)

Researcher:

Fikile Maud Mabaso

Hereby, I, Fikile Maud Mabaso, ID number 6711240323085, in my personal capacity as a Researcher, acknowledge that I am aware of and familiar with the stipulations and contents of the following:

- Unisa Research Policy
- Unisa Ethics Policy
- Unisa IP Policy

and that I shall conform to and abide by these policy requirements.

Signature: Fikile Mabaso

Date: 15 February 2023

APPENDIX 3: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

An exploratory study on the uses and gratifications of smartphones in the workplace: A Case Study for the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA)

Researcher: Fikile Maud Mabaso

I, _____, confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time. I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Prof RA Smith, Supervisor, 011 717 4619, drasrsa@gmail.com. You may also contact Mr SM Mfuphi, Chairperson: Ethics and Scientific Review Committee, 012 429 3111, mfuphsm@unisa.ac.za if you have any ethical concerns.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant's name and surname: _____

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's name and surname: Fikile Mabaso.

Researcher's signature: Fikile Mabaso Date: 04 August 2023

APPENDIX 4: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION LETTER TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Permission Letter to Conduct Research

An exploratory study on the uses and gratifications of smartphones in the workplace: A Case Study for the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA)

Researcher: Fikile Maud Mabaso

04 August 2023
Adv. Nomalanga Sithole
Chief Executive Officer
NERSA
526 Kulawula House
012 401 4600
Nomalanga.Sithole@NERSA.org.za

Dear Adv. Sithole

Kindly receive a request for permission to conduct a study entitled “An exploratory study on the uses and gratifications of smartphones in the workplace: A case study of NERSA”. I, Fikile Maud Mabaso, am conducting this research towards an MA in Communication Science at the University of South Africa.

The aim of the study is to explore and describe how employees at NERSA use smartphones and the gratifications they derive from engaging with them.

This organisation has been selected because one is an employee of NERSA, and it is convenient in terms of access to the population, sampling and also obtaining cooperation from the colleagues.

The target population of the study will be NERSA’s 220 employees. The composition of the employees will include people of different genders, staff and management, across age groups, comprising participants of all races and

academic levels. Participant selection is based on their willingness to participate in the research project.

The study will use a non-probability sampling technique to select participants, who will be purposively selected. The study will employ mixed methods, using both self-administered questionnaires with open- and closed-ended questions to supplement each other.

The benefits of the study will include the organisation's access to the dissertation and the ability to make informed decisions based on the findings regarding the uses and gratifications of smartphones in the workplace.

The research will culminate in a dissertation towards a Master's qualification, as well as journal publications and/or conference proceedings. The identity of the study participants will be kept confidential.

The Research Proposal is attached.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Prof R A Smith, Supervisor, 011 717 4619, drarsa@gmail.com. You may also contact Mr SM Mfuphi, Chairperson of the Ethics and Scientific Review Committee, at 012 429 3111, mfuphsm@unisa.ac.za, if you have any ethical concerns.

Yours sincerely

Fikile Mabaso

Fikile Mabaso

Unisa Masters' student

Senior Dispute Resolution Officer, NERSA

APPENDIX 5: QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE WITH BOTH OPEN AND CLOSED-ENDED QUESTIONS

RESEARCH TOPIC

An exploratory study on the uses and gratifications of smartphones in the workplace: A case study for the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA)

The questionnaire has three parts: A, B and C

Part A: Demographics information

Mark your response with an **X**

Please indicate your gender

Male Female Other category

2. Please indicate your age

<25 years 25 - 34 years 35 - 44 years 45 – 50 years
 50+years

Please indicate your race

African Indian Coloured White

Other category

Please indicate the level of your employment

Staff member Manager

5. Please indicate your education level

Grade 12 Diploma/Undergraduate Degree Post Graduate Degree
 Master's degree Doctorate degree

Part B: Uses and gratifications of smartphones by staff members and managers - Open ended questions for both staff members and management

1. How do you use your smartphones at the workplace?

Personal purposes Work purposes Both

2. If you use your smartphones for work or personal purposes, kindly explain the reasons for this?

3. How much time do you think on average you use your smartphones per day for work purposes at work?

0 – 1 hour 2 – 3 hours 3 – 4 hours 4+hours

4. Explain the selection above, including the type of activities and applications accessed.

5. How much time do you think on average you use your smartphones per day for personal purposes during work hours?

0 – 1 hours 2 – 3 hours 3 – 4 hours 4+hours

6. Explain your above selection above, including the type of activities and applications accessed.

7. Which applications do you use mostly?

WhatsApp Facebook Instagram Twitter LinkedIn
TikTok

Other, please specify:

8. For what purpose/s are you using the application/s selected above, please explain?

9. What kind of gratifications do you derive from using your smartphones including applications?

10. Kindly mention the application/s that elicit gratification when using them.

In your opinion, do you think smartphones are used more often for work related or personal purposes? Kindly explain.

Could smartphones be used for internal communication purposes in the workplace? Yes or No.

11. If yes, explain why or if no, explain why not?

Part C – Managers' Questions

Only answer this question if you are at the management level position.

1. What is your opinion/perception regarding smartphones usage by the staff members at the workplace?

2. What are some of the possible benefits that could be derived by the organisation in the use of smartphones and applications at work?

3. Are there any disadvantages to the use of smartphones at work?

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact my supervisor: Prof R Smith and Mr Siyabonga M Mfuphi, Chairperson: Ethics and Scientific Review Committee, 012 429 3111, mfuphsm@unisa.ac.za, if you have any ethical concerns.

APPENDIX 6: PERMISSION



Kulawula House
526 Madiba Street
Arcadia 0083
Pretoria, SOUTH AFRICA

PO Box 40343
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Tel: +27(0)12 401 4600
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@NERSA_ZA

@NERSAZA

MEMORANDUM

Received: 20/10/2023
07:00

TO : NOMALANGA SITHOLE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

FROM : FIKILE MABASO
SENIOR DISPUTE RESOLUTION OFFICER

DATE : 02 OCTOBER 2023

SUBJECT AT : REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY
THE WORKPLACE

NERSA	
FTRM Office:	CEO Office
Received by:	Izanne /Bonolo
Date:	06 October 2023 10:36
	09 October 2023 12:49
Security Classification:	GLC
QC:	Izanne Martin

1. PURPOSE

1.1. To obtain permission to conduct a research project at NERSA as part of my studies.

2. BACKGROUND

"An exploratory study on the uses and gratifications of smartphones in the workplace: A Case Study of NERSA". I, Fikile Maud Mabaso, am currently conducting this research project towards MA Communication Science degree with the University of South Africa.

The aim of the study is to explore and describe the manner in which adults working at NERSA use smartphones and the gratifications elicited from the engagement with these mobile handheld devices.

Regulator Members:

Ms Z Mpungose (Chairperson) *Adv NP Sithole (Chief Executive Officer)
*Mr N Gumede *Ms N Maseti *Mr MW Mkhize
*Full-Time Regulator Members

NERSA is a Regulatory Authority established in terms of the National Energy Regulator Act, 2004 (Act No 40 of 2004)

NERSA has been selected because one is an employee of NERSA and is convenient in terms of access to the population, sampling also obtaining cooperation from the colleagues.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1. The study will use mixed method research: qualitative and quantitative to supplement the validity and reliability of information gathered and the reading thereof. The use of this method will ensure to a large extent that pertinent information to the study is collected, analysed and synthesised thereby providing a holistic picture of the findings. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To explore how smartphones users in the workplace make use of its functions.
- To describe the perceived gratifications of smartphones usage, including applications, by staff members and management.
- To explore management's perspective on the uses of smartphones by the staff members in the organisation.

3.2 The target population of the study will be NERSA's 220 employees. The composition of the employees will include different genders, staff, management and will be across all age groups, comprised of all races, and also all academic levels of the participants. The selection of participants is dependent on their willingness to participate in the research project.

The study will use a non-probability sampling technique in selecting participants, who will be purposively selected. As the study will employ mixed methods, both self-administered questionnaires with open and closed-ended questions will be used to supplement each other.

3.3 The study does not involve direct human participation and is low risk level. The only foreseeable risk of harm is the potential for minor discomfort or inconvenience; therefore, this research will not pose a risk above the everyday norm. The anonymity and confidentiality of potential participants is assured as no individual identifies will be made available. Data collected will be kept confidential and the final output will be shared with the participants.

The benefits of the study will be the organisation will have access to the dissertation and can make informed decisions based on the findings with regards to uses and gratifications of smartphones in the workplace.

The research will culminate in a dissertation towards a Masters qualification, journal publications and/or conference proceedings. The identity of the study participants will be kept confidential. The Research Proposal is attached for more information.

I therefore request your permission to allow one to approach NERSA employees to participate in the research project entitled: *“An exploratory study on the uses and gratifications of smartphones in the workplace: A Case Study of NERSA”*.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. It is recommended that the CEO grants permission for Fikile Mabaso to conduct a study which seeks to explore the uses and gratifications of smartphones in the workplace towards completion of her NERSA funded studies.

Initiator:

Fikile Mabaso

Fikile Mabaso

Senior Dispute Resolution Officer

Date: 02 October 2023

Supported/ Not Supported



Date: 04 October 2023

Welile Mkhize

HoD: ELC & Dispute Resolution

Recommended/Not Recommended

ZMavuso

Zingisa Mavuso

5 October 2023

Executive Manager: Electricity Regulation

Date: 3

Permission request to conduct a Research Project in the workplace – Fikile Mabaso

Recommended/Not Recommended

Lufuno Nematswerani

Mr Lufuno Nematswarani
Chief Human Capital Officer
DATE: 06/10/2023

Approved/ ~~Not Approved~~



Adv. Nomalanga Sithole
Chief Executive Officer

Date: 20/10/2023

APPENDIX 7: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER



COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

27 September 2023

Dear Ms Fikile Maud Mabaso

NHREC Registration # :

Rec-240816-052

CREC Reference # :

7311869_CREC_CHS_2023

Decision:

**Ethics Approval from 27 September
2023 to 27 September 2024**

Researcher(s): Name: Ms. F. M. Mabaso
Contact details: 7311869@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Supervisor(s): Name: Prof R. A. Smith
Contact details: rene.smith@wits.ac.za

Title: An exploratory study on the uses and gratifications of smartphones in the workplace: A case study of the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (Nersa)
Degree Purpose: Masters

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of Human Science Ethics Committee. Ethics approval is granted for one year.

The **low-risk application** was reviewed by College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the



University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.
7. No fieldwork activities may continue after the expiry date (**27 September 2024**). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

*The reference number **7311869_CREC_CHS_2023** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Yours sincerely,

Signature: 

Prof. KB Khan
CHS Research Ethics Committee Chairperson
Email: khankb@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429 8210

Signature: PP 

Prof ZZ Nkosi
Executive Dean: CHS
E-mail: nkosizz@unisa.ac.za
Tel: 012 429 6758

APPENDIX 8: EDITING CERTIFICATE



Unit 3 West Square Business Park
407 West Avenue
Randburg
2194

5 April 2026

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This serves to confirm that I have edited and made the necessary corrections and emendations to the study:

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE USES AND GRATIFICATIONS OF
SMARTPHONES IN THE WORKPLACE: A CASE STUDY OF THE NATIONAL
ENERGY REGULATOR OF SOUTH AFRICA (NERSA)**

by

FIKILE MAUD MABASO

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J Musi".

J Musi
Editor