# Electronic Mentoring in the Digital Age: The Role of social media as a "Game Changer" In Mentoring Practices within Higher Education

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## Abstract

This paper problematises novice lecturers' experiences in integrating themselves into University life against a background of challenging new developments in the South African Higher Education sector. The primary aim of the study was to investigate their experiences and perceptions of mentoring practices and how it contributed to their social learning in a university context. The study was framed by two theories, firstly, mentoring theory- particularly the work of Kram (1984) and Lave and Wenger's (2002) model of Social learning. To determine the academics' conceptions of mentoring experiences or the lack thereof, the study adopted an interpretivist paradigm, using discourse-oriented interviews, to solicit data from 20 purposively sampled newly appointed academic staff in the first two years of their academic careers- at a South African university. Data was coded, analysed into categories and finally three themes emerged from the transcribed and coded data. The most significant theme to emerge from the data analysis revealed that the neophyte appropriated electronic mentoring platforms- of which WhatsApp and YouTube featured prominently. Resultingly, neophytes enhanced their social learning and successfully assimilated into the academe. The study recommends broader, intensive, institutional discussion of conceptual issues around electronic mentoring and its benefits for both the institution and the novice lecturer. Indeed, the use of social media platforms offers a window of what 4IR tools could offer and arguably, it is a crucial "game-changer" by taking traditional mentoring as we know it, into the digital age.

**Keywords**: Electronic mentoring; informal learning; mentoring; neophytes; Virtual communities of practice