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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTH: A STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE AMONG THE YOUTH IN UGANDA

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#### ABSTRACT

Social media platforms have become a source of discussion, idea sharing and connection, fore fronting national issues that were previous undermined. This study was conducted to understand the impact of social media among youth in Uganda, especially the positive impact. Real data was collected through a questionnaire. 300 youth actively participated in filling the survey, which adapts the theoretical framework of Uses and Gratification theory. From the observation, there is increasing use of social media, mainly to share information, links and entertainment. The results show that Facebook is the most used social media platform among the youth, then Instagram follows. Different ways of using social media to educate and inform society are highlighted. On the other hand, the increase in the spread of pornography is believed to cause moral decay among the youth and have a negative impact on their education and personal life.

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## INTRODUCTION

The most recent evolution in technology has remodeled the ways of living, communicating, sharing, texting, and conveying information. (Magee et al., 2013). Interestingly, as internet usage increases, youth are getting more addicted to social media (Lenhart et al., 2011). Forever changing the ways of childhood, the majority of them currently are occupied with personal cell phones holding social media platforms. This study tends to understand the effect of social media use among youth in Uganda. A transforming technology for information sharing beyond people's vicinities, as described by (Loiseau & Nowacka, 2015), facilitating the creation of online activists and bloggers who have sophisticated content creations into hashtags. Equally saying, social media is a tool that can reconnect or reunite homeless youth to their parents. Given their life context, before social media became accessible, the youth had difficulties to reconnect with their family and friends. The interactive and informative nature of social media creates an environment that enables learning and improves confidence and self-empowerment (Rice & Barman-Adhikari, 2014).

The enormous impact of social media has extended to the study field, as scholars continue to use social media in their work and publications (Rowlands, Nicholas, Russell, Canty, & Watkinson, 2011). Social media can be defined as user-driven platforms that enable users to share videos, generate content and even publish their ideas. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Myspace have managed to shift to mainstreaming which have built community (Smith, 2009).

**Effects of Social Media use on Youth:** The vast impact of social media on youth life is observed as both positive and negative. Firstly, it enables connections with family and friends. Besides, it has also become more accessible for movie lovers to watch movies on their phones. Television stations has also shifted to digital platforms so that they can catch up with the growing digital world (Fair, 2017). The development of simplified communication gadgets, like tablets and smartphones, has made social media accessibility more convenient. The collaboration among youth has become more convenient because of secure information sharing on platforms like Facebook, Instagram etc. Besides, this has made education simpler as many students now communicate with their school via online platforms. Many schools and students are publishing content on a daily bases (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016).

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Centuries passed when most youth exhibit low-interest levels in political involvement (Bennett, 2008; Dalton, 2008). However, the presence of social media has changed the political landscape. Social media is playing a significant role in generating new political actions and expressions. The great transformation in communication flow has lowered the cost of accessibility. New news and blogging sites are being created on a daily basis, which has turned into a hub for many citizens to get information rapidly (Theocharis, 2011). Social media users keep in touch in case of any action or social movements; they keep sharing information among themselves. Thus social media widen political involvement for the youth because of continuous interaction, thus gaining inspiration to gather for common issues that might be affecting them (Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2012). Social media are now holding an active role in developing youth travel policies, products and marketing campaigns (Bizirgianni & Dionysopoulou, 2013).

**Uses and Gratifications theory:** Uses and Gratifications (U&G) is the theoretical framework used to investigate the reason people use media, what people do with media, as opposed to what it does to them (Hauser, 1999). It also suggests that users' are conscious consumers of their media choice, actively seeking to fulfil their needs from various platforms (Katz, 1974). Due to U&G theory being an axiomatic theoretical approach, it can be applied to the majority of mediated communication mediums from both traditional and new media.

U&G has been pivotal in understanding the shifts in focus by social media users and their agency in the area of media studies. U&G origin from studies of radio listeners in the 1940s. Since then, it has gone through several stages of evolution with each phase addressing the introduction of new mediums (Habermas, 1989). U&G's relevance has increased as a tool for understanding how we, as individuals with various generations, connect with the technologies around us. Modern media habits have transformed mediums such as Facebook groups into a U&G cross-medium platform that places users within virtual public spheres capable of gratifying their needs.

In a research study on the effect of social media use on youth in Uganda, 300 youth were asked about their level of agreement to specific statements about the impact of social media. A drawback of this theory is that it assumes that the users seek gratification. For example, research conducted on social media has attributed to social media users, message sharing behaviours (Leung, 2013). These motivations stem from the need for self-enhancement, based on four variations of multi-dimensional narcissistic personality types. They are feeling authoritative or superior over a frequent hunger for vanity (Leung, 2013).

### Hypotheses of the Study:

**H1.** Social media use facilitates the creation of awareness among the youth for the betterment of their lives.

**H2.** Social media use is the hub of information and entertainment for youth's interest

**H3.** Social media has an overall positive effect on youth

**Research Questions (RQ):** The following research questions were answered in this study:

**RQ1:** What are the motivations of youth in Uganda to use Social media?

**RQ2:** Does social media have a positive impact on youth in Uganda?

### METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The methodology of the study is descriptive. A survey of the research was conducted using a questionnaire. Respondents' task is to discriminate about the social media impact on youth, developing various statements basing of women's life and community, including research design, study population and sample size. Besides, data collection methods, data analysis, and variables are discussed.

**Research Design:** The study was conducted using a descriptive research method; it enables the research to get more opinions from the data collected from the participants.

**Study Population:** Mugenda (2003) defines a population as an entire group of individuals, events, or objects having a similar observable characteristic. The population of the study includes youth in Uganda who are using social media.

**Sample Size:** 300 youth were selected based on none random sampling, including male and female youth.

**Data Analysis:** A computer software known as SPSS, which is a statistical package for social sciences, was used. The data that was collected from the participants were entered into SPSS to analysis it. The final output for data analysis is presented after performing a statistical test. The frequency was calculated as:

$$((fSA = 5) + (fA = 4) + (fUnc = 3) + (fDa = 2) + (fSDA = 1)) / f_{total}$$

SA is strongly agree

A is agree

Uncisuncertain,

DA is disagree

ADA is strongly disagree

### RESULTS

The participants were asked to select the social media platforms they use frequently. We found that facebook is the most frequently used social media platforms among youth in Uganda. Table 1 presents the most used social media platforms. 49.3% use Facebook, while 38.6% use Instagram. In addition, 8.6% use Twitter, 1.4% use YouTube and 0.3% use Snapchat.

**Table 1. Most Liked social media platform**

Social Media platforms	f	%
Facebook	143	49.3
Instagram	112	38.6
Twitter	25	8.6
YouTube	4	1.4
Snap Chat	1	.3

**Table 2. Social media use is significant in youth Education**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Social Media Use is significant in Education	Strongly Disagree	5	1.7
	Disagree	10	3.4
	Uncertain	37	12.8
	Agree	126	43.45
	Strongly Agree	106	36.65

**Table 3. Social media use including chatting, sharing and connecting is just time wasting for the youth**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Social Media Use, including chatting, sharing, and connecting, is just time wasting for the youth.	Strongly Disagree	6	2.1
	Disagree	33	11.4
	Uncertain	55	19.0
	Agree	119	41.0
	Strongly Agree	69	23.8

**Table 4. Social media use has shifted the sociability ways of many youths.**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Social Media Use has shifted the sociability ways of many youths	Strongly Disagree	4	1.4
	Disagree	26	9.0
	Uncertain	48	16.6
	Agree	114	39.31
	Strongly Agree	85	29.31

**Table 5. Significant social media use for youth**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Significant social media use for youth.	Strongly Disagree	18	6.2
	Disagree	18	6.2
	Uncertain	39	13.4
	Agree	127	43.80
	Strongly Agree	79	27.2

**Table 6. Social media use is a negative factor in youth studies**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Social Media Use is a negative factor in youth studies	Strongly Disagree	3	1.0
	Disagree	10	3.4
	Uncertain	42	14.5
	Agree	139	47.9
	Strongly Agree	85	29.3

**Table 7. Social media facilitates the sharing of pornographically materials and un decent images among youth.**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Social media facilitates the sharing of pornographically materials and indecent images among youth.	Strongly Disagree	11	3.8
	Disagree	20	6.9
	Uncertain	40	13.8
	Agree	110	37.93
	Strongly Agree	98	33.79

**Table 8. Helpfulness of social media on decision making**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Social Media Use is affecting negatively on a study of youth	Strongly Disagree	8	2.8
	Disagree	15	5.2
	Uncertain	45	15.5
	Agree	122	42.1
	Strongly Agree	93	32.07

**Table 9. Negative social media posts affect users**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Table 9: Negative social media posts affect users.	Strongly Disagree	20	6.9
	Disagree	3	1.0
	Uncertain	30	10.3
	Agree	167	57.6
	Strongly Agree	58	20.0

**Table 10. Social media use is worsening physical communication among people**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Social media use is worsening physical communication among people.	Strongly Disagree	11	3.8
	Disagree	16	5.5
	Uncertain	64	22.1
	Agree	118	40.69
	Strongly Agree	74	25.52

**Table 11. Social media use is holding a significant percentage in youth**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Social media use is holding a significant percentage in youth.	Strongly Disagree	9	3.1
	Disagree	13	4.5
	Uncertain	43	14.8
	Agree	125	43.10
	Strongly Agree	93	32.07

**Table 12. Social media use improves knowledge among users for a different aspect of life**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Social media use improves knowledge among users for a different aspect of life.	Strongly Disagree	10	3.4
	Disagree	25	8.6
	Uncertain	74	25.5
	Agree	110	37.93
	Strongly Agree	63	21.72

**Table 13. There is ethical and moral decay among the youth who users social media**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
There is ethical and moral decay among the youth who users social media.	Strongly Disagree	9	3.1
	Disagree	7	2.4
	Uncertain	52	17.9
	Agree	130	44.83
	Strongly Agree	82	28.28

**Table 14. Social media use has a key role in the betterment of society**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Social media use has a key role in the betterment of society.	Strongly Disagree	3	1.0
	Disagree	6	2.1
	Uncertain	68	23.4
	Agree	137	47.24
	Strongly Agree	67	23.10

**Table 15. Social media is a key factor in fostering political empowerment among youth**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Social Media is a key factor in fostering political empowerment among youth.	Strongly Disagree	4	1.4
	Disagree	14	4.8
	Uncertain	55	19.1
	Agree	139	47.93
	Strongly Agree	71	24.48

**Table 16. Social media use has changed the mode of advertising and business perspective that have boosted youth involvement**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Social Media Use has changed the mode of advertising and business perspective that have boosted youth involvement.	Strongly Disagree	3	1.0
	Disagree	22	7.6
	Uncertain	51	17.6
	Agree	116	40.0
	Strongly Agree	86	29.7

**Table 17. Social media platforms have smoothened the connecting between families, friends and business**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Social Media Platforms have smoothened the connection between families, friends, and business.	Strongly Disagree	8	2.8
	Disagree	22	7.6
	Uncertain	45	15.5
	Agree	141	48.62
	Strongly Agree	60	20.7

**Table 18. Social media use can create development awareness among youth**

Statement	Response	f	%
Social Media users can create development awareness among youth.	Strongly Disagree	8	2.8
	Disagree	17	5.9
	Uncertain	56	19.3
	Agree	146	50.34
	Strongly Agree	49	16.90

**Table 19. Social media use affects youth involvement in physical activities**

Statement	Response	f	%
Social Media Use affects youth involvement in physical activities.	Strongly Disagree	1	0.3
	Disagree	12	4.1
	Uncertain	91	31.4
	Agree	77	26.55
	Strongly Agree	93	32.07

**Table 20. Social media incite curiosity for youth to participate and connect around the world**

Statement	Response	f	%
Social media incite curiosity for youth to participate and connect around the world.	Strongly Disagree	12	4.1
	Disagree	6	2.1
	Uncertain	29	10.0
	Agree	148	51.03
	Strongly Agree	87	30

**Table 21. Social media is a useful tool for learning as it can facilitate instantaneously exchange of information globally**

Statement	Response	f	%
Social media is a useful tool for learning as it can facilitate the exchange of information instantaneously globally.	Strongly Disagree	10	3.4
	Disagree	9	3.1
	Uncertain	32	11.0
	Agree	141	48.62
	Strongly Agree	89	30.69

**Table 22. Social media use enables more quick accessibility to information instantly.**

Statement	Response	f	%
Social media use enables more quick accessibility to political information instantly.	Strongly Disagree	6	2.1
	Disagree	12	4.1
	Uncertain	43	14.8
	Agree	134	46.21
	Strongly Agree	88	30.34

**Table 23. Social media use improves my political understanding which gives youth the ability to discuss in more informed ways**

Statement	Response	f	%
Social media use improves my political understanding that gives youth the ability to discuss in more informed ways.	Strongly Disagree	4	1.4
	Disagree	14	4.8
	Uncertain	38	13.1
	Agree	148	51.03
	Strongly Agree	75	25.86

**Table 2:** Respondents were asked about the importance of social media use in education, and 80.1 % agreed or strongly agreed that social media use is significant in education, while 5.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The percentage difference between those who agreed and those who did not agree signifies that social media use is a key in education among youth in Uganda. **Table 3:** 64.8% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media use is just time-wasting. 13.5 % disagreed or strongly disagreed. This indicates that the importance of social media is not clear to the youth. 68.6 % agreed or strongly agreed that social media use has shifted the sociability ways of the current generation. 16.6% are uncertain, 9.0% disagreed and 1.4% strongly disagreed with the statement.

Table 5: 12.4% of the respondents strongly disagree or disagree that social media is not significant to youth, 13.4 % are uncertain while the majority (71%) agree or strongly agree that social media is significant to youth. Table 6: 77.2% agree or strongly agree that social media has a negative impact on youth's studies. Very few (4.4%) disagree or strongly disagree. The results show that most youths understand the negative impact social media may have if it is not well utilised. Table 7: 71.7 % of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media facilitate the sharing of pornography. 14% are uncertain about it, while 10.7% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. The high agreement testifies to that social media currently facilitate the sharing of indecent images and video among the youth.

According to Table 8, 8% of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree that social media is helpful for decision making. 5.2 % are uncertain, while around three quarters agree or strongly agree. According to Table 9, 58% agreed that social media posts, for example, anti-religious statements, create a negative feeling among the users. 20% strongly agreed with the statement, meaning misusing social media can generate pain and hatred among the users. Table 10 shows that 66% agreed or strongly agreed that social media use is affecting the physical communication among people, while only 9% disagreed or strongly disagreed. According to Table 11, 75% agreed or strongly agreed that social media is part and parcel among the youth currently, signifying the increased use of social media among youth in Uganda.

Table 12 shows that social media use to increase the understanding of different aspect of life, like politics. Almost 60% agreed or strongly agreed, while 25% are uncertain. Only 12% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. 73% agreed or strongly agreed that social media use has an impact on ethics and morals among the users, for instance, because it exposes the users to pornography (Table 13). Only 5.5 % disagree or strongly disagree. 70% of recognise the role of social media in the betterment of society (Table 14). 23.4% are uncertain about the role of social media to improve society. Very few (3.1%) disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. 72% agree or strongly agree that social media is a key factor in fostering political empowerment among youth (Table 19). Confirming that most political up rises are managed by youth, for example, the opposition leader known as "Bobi Wine" has utilised social media to create political empowerment among many youths in Uganda.

According to Table 16, 70% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media had changed the mode of advertising. 7.6% disagreed, and only 1% strongly disagreed. According to Table 17, the majority (69%) agreed or strongly agreed that social media had smoothened the connection between families, friends and businesses.

According to Table 18, two-thirds of the youth agree or strongly agree that social media use has the ability to create development awareness among the youth. With its viral nature, it connects masses in different areas at the same time. Table 19 shows that 59% agree or strongly agree that social media use affects youth involvement in physical activities. Only 4% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The increased time the youths spend on their phone is likely to reduce their activity level and incentive to go out and meet friends. According to Table 20, 81% agreed or strongly agreed that social media incite curiosity for youth to participate and connect globally. 10.0% are uncertain, 2.1 disagree, and 4.1% strongly disagree. According to Table 21, 79% agreed or strongly agreed that social media is a tool for learning and increasing in knowledge because of instantaneously exchange of information among the youth. 7.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, while the remaining 11% were uncertain. According to Table 22, 77% agreed or strongly agreed that social media provides quick access to political information. While 15% are uncertain, 4.1 disagree, and 2.1 strongly disagree with the statement. According to Table 23, 77% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media had improved their political understanding and helped them to discuss related political matters in an informed way. 13.1% were uncertain, 4.8% disagreed and 1.4 % strongly disagree with the statement.

## Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of social media use among youth in Uganda through a survey on social media platforms. 300 respondents answered the questionnaire, which consisted of 31

questions. The female participants were higher than men, which may indicate the females are more active users of social media. Among the social media platforms mentioned in the survey, Facebook is found to be the most used (49.3%), followed by Instagram (36%), Twitter (9%), Youtube (1.4%) and Snapchat (0.3%). The analysis was done based on respondents' five-level opinions from strongly disagree to agree in line with the Likert scale strongly. The majority of the respondents live in urban areas, reflecting that most people in rural areas are not accessing social media. The majority of the participants were 18 to 30 years old, and most of them were students in higher education. The study revealed that social media users share pornographic images and videos, which affects education. Secondly, the respondent agreed that they mainly use social media to chat with their families or friends, rather than using it for educational purposes. The impact of social media on individuals' lives and their social lives has been studied. It verifies social media's role as the source of news and information. However, social media contribution to society and its impact on users engagement are not so far significantly associated with the development of the person.

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