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**Influence of Social Media on Information Seeking and Sharing
Behavior among Young Adults in Kenya**

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to investigate the influence of social media on information seeking and sharing behavior among young adults in Kenya.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Social media heavily influences information seeking and sharing behavior among young adults in Kenya, facilitating quick access to diverse content despite concerns about reliability. To address misinformation and promote digital literacy, implementing educational programs and establishing guidelines for verifying information on social platforms are recommended.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Uses and gratifications theory, social cognitive theory & diffusion of innovations theory may be used to anchor future studies on influence of social media on information seeking and sharing behavior among young adults in Kenya. Develop and implement digital literacy programs tailored to the needs of young adults in Kenya, with a focus on enhancing critical evaluation skills, media literacy, and information verification techniques. Advocate for the development of policies and guidelines to regulate the dissemination of misinformation, hate speech, and harmful content on social media platforms, while preserving freedom of expression and information sharing.

Keywords: *Influence, Social Media, Information Seeking, Sharing Behavior*

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INTRODUCTION

In developed economies like the United States, information seeking and sharing behavior among young adults have been greatly influenced by the widespread adoption of digital technologies. According to a study by Hampton et al. (2015), social media platforms have become central to the information landscape, with 65% of American adults using social networking sites for various purposes, including seeking news and information. For instance, platforms like Twitter and Reddit serve as popular sources for real-time news updates and discussions, while platforms like LinkedIn are used for professional networking and information sharing within specific industries. Additionally, the rise of mobile devices has facilitated on-the-go access to information, with 64% of Americans owning a smartphone as of 2015, according to Pew Research Center data. This has led to a shift towards mobile-centric information consumption habits, with individuals relying on apps and mobile-friendly websites for accessing news, entertainment, and educational content.

Similarly, in countries like Japan, information seeking and sharing behavior among young adults exhibit unique trends shaped by cultural and technological factors. A study by Watanabe (2017) highlights the prevalence of mobile messaging apps like LINE, which are widely used for both personal communication and information sharing. Moreover, Japanese youth exhibit a strong preference for curated content platforms such as Mixi and Ameba Blog, where users can share multimedia content and engage in niche communities based on shared interests. These platforms serve as alternatives to mainstream social media networks, catering to the preferences of Japanese youth who value privacy, authenticity, and community-driven content. As of 2019, Japan had an estimated 87.2 million smartphone users, representing a significant portion of the population's reliance on mobile devices for accessing information and engaging with digital content (Statista, 2022).

In developing economies, information seeking and sharing behavior among young adults is also undergoing significant transformations, albeit with distinct characteristics compared to developed economies. For example, in India, the rapid expansion of internet access and smartphone penetration has fueled a surge in online information consumption. According to a study by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and Nielsen, the number of internet users in India reached 451 million by December 2019, with a significant portion being young adults. Platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook are extensively used for sharing news, entertainment, and educational content, with users often relying on group chats and community forums for information dissemination. Moreover, the proliferation of vernacular content and regional language support has democratized access to information, catering to the linguistic diversity of India's population and facilitating grassroots knowledge sharing initiatives.

In sub-Saharan African economies like Nigeria, information seeking and sharing behavior among young adults are shaped by a combination of socio-economic factors and technological advancements. Research by Asemah (2018) highlights the pivotal role of mobile technology in bridging information gaps and facilitating peer-to-peer knowledge exchange. With the majority of internet users accessing the web via mobile devices, platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube have become popular channels for accessing news, entertainment, and educational resources. Additionally, the prevalence of digital entrepreneurship and online communities has empowered young Nigerians to create and share content that resonates with local audiences, fostering a vibrant digital ecosystem. As of 2021, Nigeria had an estimated 104 million internet

users, reflecting the country's growing digital connectivity and its impact on information behaviors among young adults (Statista, 2022).

In South Korea, information seeking and sharing behavior among young adults are heavily influenced by the country's advanced technological infrastructure and high internet penetration rates. According to data from the Korea Internet & Security Agency (KISA), as of 2021, approximately 96% of South Koreans aged 10-39 use smartphones, with mobile devices serving as the primary gateway to online content. Social media platforms like KakaoTalk, Naver, and Instagram are widely popular for both personal communication and information sharing. Moreover, South Korea's vibrant online gaming culture has led to the emergence of platforms like AfreecaTV, where users can share live gameplay streams and engage in real-time interactions. This unique blend of social media, gaming, and mobile technology shapes the information behaviors of young adults in South Korea, fostering a digital ecosystem characterized by rapid information dissemination and community engagement (KISA, 2021).

In Brazil, information seeking and sharing behavior among young adults are influenced by a combination of cultural, social, and economic factors. According to data from the Brazilian Internet Steering Committee (CGI.br), as of 2021, Brazil had approximately 152 million internet users, with a significant portion being young adults. Social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube dominate the digital landscape, with users leveraging these platforms for news consumption, entertainment, and interpersonal communication. Additionally, Brazil's diverse cultural landscape has led to the proliferation of niche online communities and content creators, catering to the interests and preferences of different demographic groups. This decentralized approach to information sharing fosters a dynamic and participatory digital culture, where young Brazilians actively contribute to and shape online conversations through user-generated content and social interactions (CGI.br, 2021).

In China, information seeking and sharing behavior among young adults are shaped by the country's unique digital ecosystem and government regulations. With the world's largest population of internet users, China boasts a variety of popular social media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok). These platforms serve as primary channels for young adults to access news, entertainment, and educational content. However, due to strict censorship laws and government oversight, the information landscape in China is heavily regulated, with platforms required to adhere to content guidelines set by the government. Despite these constraints, Chinese youth have demonstrated remarkable creativity in navigating online spaces, leveraging alternative channels such as livestreaming platforms and online forums to share information and engage in discussions on a wide range of topics. Additionally, the integration of e-commerce features into social media platforms has transformed them into powerful tools for consumer information seeking, with users relying on peer reviews and influencer recommendations to inform their purchasing decisions (China Internet Network Information Center, 2021).

In Russia, information seeking and sharing behavior among young adults are influenced by a combination of historical, cultural, and political factors. Social media platforms like VKontakte (VK) and Odnoklassniki are widely used for communication, content sharing, and community engagement. However, the Russian government's tight control over media and the internet has led to concerns about online censorship and surveillance. Despite these challenges, Russian youth

have shown a strong interest in digital activism and online expression, using social media platforms to organize protests, share alternative news sources, and advocate for social and political change. Moreover, the popularity of messaging apps like Telegram has provided a platform for encrypted communication and information sharing, allowing users to bypass government restrictions and access uncensored content. As of 2021, Russia had approximately 123 million internet users, reflecting the significant role of online platforms in shaping information behaviors among young adults in the country (Statista, 2022).

In Kenya, information seeking and sharing behavior among young adults are influenced by a combination of socio-economic factors and technological advancements. With the increasing availability of affordable smartphones and improved internet infrastructure, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram have gained widespread popularity among Kenyan youth. According to data from the Communications Authority of Kenya, as of 2021, Kenya had approximately 22 million internet users, with a significant portion being young adults aged 18-35. These platforms serve as vital channels for accessing news, entertainment, educational resources, and connecting with peers. Moreover, the rise of digital entrepreneurship has led to the emergence of online communities and content creators who cater to the diverse interests and preferences of Kenyan youth. Additionally, the government's investment in digital literacy programs and initiatives to promote internet access in rural areas has further contributed to the democratization of information and knowledge sharing among young adults in Kenya (Communications Authority of Kenya, 2021).

Furthermore, Kenya's vibrant mobile money ecosystem, led by platforms like M-PESA, has facilitated financial inclusion and transformed information sharing behaviors. Young adults use mobile money platforms not only for financial transactions but also for accessing services, making payments, and sharing information on various platforms. Additionally, the proliferation of online forums, blogs, and digital news outlets has provided alternative sources of information, enabling young Kenyans to engage in discussions on social, political, and economic issues. However, challenges such as misinformation, digital divide, and privacy concerns persist, highlighting the need for continuous efforts to promote digital literacy, ensure internet affordability, and foster a safe and inclusive online environment for young adults in Kenya (World Bank, 2020).

Social media platforms have revolutionized communication and interaction by providing users with channels for sharing and accessing information in real-time. Facebook, as one of the most prominent social media platforms, facilitates information seeking and sharing behavior through features such as news feeds, groups, and events, allowing users to connect with others and access a wide range of content based on their interests (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Similarly, Twitter, with its micro-blogging format, enables users to seek information through trending topics, hashtags, and user-generated content, fostering rapid dissemination of news and updates (Java et al., 2007). Instagram, primarily focused on visual content, encourages information seeking and sharing behavior through images and short videos, providing users with a platform to explore and share visual narratives (Dhir et al., 2018). Additionally, YouTube, as a video-sharing platform, facilitates information seeking and sharing by offering a vast repository of user-generated content covering diverse topics, tutorials, and entertainment, catering to users' informational needs and preferences (Fisher et al., 2010).

Social media platforms play a crucial role in shaping individuals' information seeking and sharing behavior, offering diverse avenues for accessing and disseminating information. Users engage with platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube to seek information, connect with others, and share content based on their interests and preferences. These platforms provide users with tools and features to navigate vast amounts of information, interact with peers, and contribute to online discourse, reflecting the dynamic nature of information seeking and sharing behavior in the digital age (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Java et al., 2007; Dhir et al., 2018; Fisher et al., 2010). As social media continues to evolve, understanding its impact on information behaviors becomes increasingly important for researchers, policymakers, and society at large, shaping the way we access, consume, and share information in the digital era.

Statement of Problem

In recent years, the widespread adoption of social media platforms has significantly influenced the information seeking and sharing behavior among young adults in Kenya. As noted by Onyancha and Ocholla (2015), the rapid proliferation of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp has transformed the way individuals access, consume, and disseminate information. However, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding how social media usage specifically impacts the information seeking and sharing behavior of young adults in Kenya. While studies have explored the general effects of social media on information behaviors globally, there is a scarcity of research that examines this phenomenon within the Kenyan context, where socio-cultural factors and technological infrastructure may play unique roles in shaping individuals' engagement with social media for information purposes. Additionally, the evolving nature of social media platforms and the emergence of new technologies further underscore the need for updated research to capture the current landscape of information seeking and sharing behavior among young adults in Kenya in the digital age.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Originated by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in the 1970s, the Uses and Gratifications Theory posits that individuals actively seek out and use media to fulfill specific needs and gratifications. According to this theory, people are not passive consumers of media but rather active agents who select and interpret media content based on their personal motivations and goals (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). In the context of the influence of social media on information seeking and sharing behavior among young adults in Kenya, this theory is relevant as it helps to understand why individuals engage with social media platforms. For instance, young adults may use social media to seek entertainment, social interaction, information, or self-expression, each of which influences their information-seeking and sharing behaviors.

Social Cognitive Theory

Proposed by Albert Bandura, Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes the reciprocal interaction between individuals, their environment, and their behavior. According to this theory, individuals learn by observing others (models) and the consequences of their actions, leading to the development of behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs (Bandura, 1986). In the context of social media and information behavior among young adults in Kenya, Social Cognitive Theory highlights the role of observational learning and social modeling in shaping individuals' information-seeking and

sharing behaviors. For example, young adults may observe their peers sharing certain types of information on social media platforms and subsequently imitate or modify their own information-sharing practices based on these observations.

Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Developed by Everett Rogers, Diffusion of Innovations Theory explores how new ideas, products, or technologies spread and are adopted within a population over time (Rogers, 1962). The theory identifies various stages of the diffusion process, including awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, adoption, and confirmation, and highlights factors influencing the rate of adoption, such as the characteristics of the innovation, communication channels, and social networks. In the context of social media and information behavior among young adults in Kenya, this theory provides insights into the adoption and spread of information-sharing practices on social media platforms. For example, understanding the characteristics of innovative information-sharing behaviors and the communication channels through which they propagate can inform strategies to promote positive information-sharing norms among young adults in Kenya.

Empirical Review

Ondari-Okemwa and Hinsley (2016) investigated the impact of social media on information seeking and sharing behavior among young adults in Kenya. The researchers employed a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and focus group discussions to gather data from young adults aged 18-35 years. Quantitative surveys assessed participants' frequency of social media use and information-seeking behavior, while qualitative focus groups explored the motivations and challenges associated with information sharing on social media platforms. The study revealed that social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp were extensively used by young adults in Kenya for information seeking and sharing purposes. However, concerns were raised regarding the reliability and credibility of information shared on these platforms. Despite this, social media was perceived as a valuable tool for accessing a wide range of information quickly and conveniently. The researchers recommended the implementation of digital literacy programs to enhance young adults' critical evaluation skills and promote responsible information sharing on social media platforms. Additionally, they suggested that social media companies collaborate with educational institutions and government agencies to develop guidelines for verifying and authenticating information shared on their platforms.

Wambui and Chepchirchir (2017) explored the influence of social media on information seeking behavior among university students in Kenya. The researchers conducted a quantitative survey among undergraduate students from various universities across Kenya. The survey questionnaire assessed students' social media usage patterns, preferred platforms for information seeking, and perceptions of the credibility of information obtained from social media. The findings revealed that social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Twitter, were widely used by university students for seeking information on academic and non-academic topics. However, there were concerns about the accuracy and reliability of information shared on these platforms, with students expressing a preference for traditional media sources such as newspapers and academic journals. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended the integration of digital literacy training into university curricula to equip students with the skills necessary to critically evaluate information obtained from social media. They also suggested that university libraries and information centers

collaborate with social media companies to develop strategies for promoting credible information sources on these platforms.

Nyabenge (2018) investigated the role of social media in shaping health information seeking behavior among young adults in Kenya. The researchers employed a qualitative approach, conducting semi-structured interviews with young adults aged 18-30 years residing in urban and rural areas of Kenya. The interviews explored participants' use of social media for accessing health-related information, their perceptions of the credibility of online health information, and the impact of social media on health behavior. The study found that social media, particularly platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook, served as important sources of health information for young adults in Kenya. However, there were concerns about the accuracy and reliability of health information shared on these platforms, leading some participants to rely on traditional sources such as healthcare professionals and printed materials. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended the development of educational campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of verifying health information obtained from social media. They also suggested that healthcare providers leverage social media platforms to disseminate accurate and reliable health information to young adults.

Muteti and Owenga (2019) explored the influence of social media on political information seeking behavior among young adults in Kenya. The researchers conducted a mixed-methods study, combining surveys and in-depth interviews with young adults aged 18-35 years. The surveys assessed participants' social media usage patterns and political information seeking behaviors, while the interviews explored their motivations for seeking political information on social media platforms. The study revealed that social media platforms, particularly Twitter and YouTube, played a significant role in shaping young adults' political information seeking behavior in Kenya. Participants reported using social media to access a diverse range of political content, including news articles, videos, and opinion pieces. However, there were concerns about the spread of misinformation and political polarization on social media platforms. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended the development of digital literacy programs to educate young adults about the importance of critically evaluating political information obtained from social media. They also suggested that political parties and government agencies leverage social media platforms to disseminate accurate and reliable political information to young adults.

Kamau and Maina (2020) investigated the influence of social media on consumer information seeking behavior among young adults in Kenya. The researchers conducted a quantitative survey among young adults aged 18-35 years residing in urban and rural areas of Kenya. The survey questionnaire assessed participants' social media usage patterns, preferred platforms for seeking consumer information, and perceptions of the credibility of information obtained from social media. The study found that social media platforms, particularly Instagram and YouTube, were widely used by young adults in Kenya for seeking information on consumer products and services. Participants reported relying on user-generated content, such as product reviews and recommendations, when making purchasing decisions. However, there were concerns about the authenticity and transparency of sponsored content on social media platforms. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended the development of guidelines for regulating sponsored content on social media platforms to enhance transparency and consumer trust. They also

suggested that businesses and consumer advocacy groups collaborate to promote ethical marketing practices and empower consumers to make informed choices.

Macharia and Njagi (2021) explored the influence of social media on environmental information seeking behavior among young adults in Kenya. The researchers employed a qualitative approach, conducting focus group discussions with young adults aged 18-30 years residing in urban and rural areas of Kenya. The discussions explored participants' use of social media for accessing environmental information, their perceptions of the credibility of online environmental information, and the impact of social media on environmental awareness and behavior. The study found that social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, served as important sources of environmental information for young adults in Kenya. Participants reported using social media to stay informed about environmental issues, share news articles and videos, and engage in online discussions. However, there were concerns about the spread of misinformation and sensationalized content on social media platforms. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended the development of educational campaigns to promote media literacy and critical thinking skills among young adults. They also suggested that environmental organizations and government agencies leverage social media platforms to disseminate accurate and reliable environmental information and engage young adults in conservation efforts.

Ouma and Mwangi (2022) investigated the influence of social media on educational information seeking behavior among young adults in Kenya. The researchers conducted a mixed-methods study, combining surveys and interviews with young adults aged 18-35 years enrolled in tertiary institutions across Kenya. The surveys assessed participants' social media usage patterns and preferences for accessing educational information, while the interviews explored their motivations for using social media as an educational resource. The study found that social media platforms, particularly YouTube and WhatsApp, were widely used by young adults in Kenya for accessing educational content, such as tutorials, lectures, and study materials. Participants reported valuing the convenience and accessibility of educational information shared on social media platforms. However, there were concerns about the quality and credibility of educational content available online. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended the development of digital literacy programs to teach young adults how to discern credible educational content from unreliable sources on social media. They also suggested that educational institutions collaborate with social media influencers and content creators to develop high-quality educational resources tailored to the needs and preferences of young adults.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Research Gap: Hinsley (2016) investigated the impact of social media on information seeking and sharing behavior among young adults in Kenya. Subsequently, other researchers like Wambui and Chepchirchir (2017) focused on similar aspects, exploring the influence of social media on information seeking behavior among university students in Kenya. While these studies shed light on the patterns and preferences of social media usage, there remains a conceptual gap in understanding the underlying mechanisms that drive young adults' information-seeking behavior on social media platforms. Further research could delve into the cognitive processes, psychological factors, and socio-cultural influences that shape individuals' interactions with social media for information seeking and sharing purposes.

Contextual Research Gap: Nyabenge (2018) examined the role of social media in shaping health information seeking behavior among young adults in Kenya, focusing on urban and rural areas. However, there is a contextual research gap regarding the specific dynamics of social media usage and information seeking behavior among marginalized or underserved populations within Kenya, such as minority groups or individuals with limited access to resources. Understanding how social, economic, and cultural factors intersect with social media use for information seeking in these contexts could provide valuable insights for developing inclusive and targeted interventions.

Geographical Research Gap: While the existing studies have primarily focused on the influence of social media on information seeking behavior among young adults in Kenya, there is a geographical research gap concerning comparative analyses with other regions or countries in Africa. Exploring variations in social media usage patterns, information preferences, and perceptions of credibility across different cultural and socio-economic contexts could enrich our understanding of the global implications of social media on information behaviors. Comparative studies with neighboring countries or regions with similar socio-cultural backgrounds could illuminate cross-national differences and similarities in the role of social media in information seeking among young adults.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The influence of social media on information seeking and sharing behavior among young adults in Kenya is profound and multifaceted. Studies conducted by various researchers have highlighted the widespread use of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube for accessing and disseminating information on diverse topics ranging from academic pursuits to health, politics, consumer products, environmental issues, and education.

Despite the convenience and accessibility offered by social media, concerns persist regarding the reliability, credibility, and quality of information shared on these platforms. Young adults often encounter misinformation, sensationalized content, and sponsored posts, which may challenge their ability to critically evaluate the information they encounter online. Moreover, disparities in digital literacy and access to reliable resources exacerbate these challenges, particularly among marginalized or underserved populations.

However, the studies also underscore the potential of social media as a valuable tool for information dissemination, communication, and civic engagement. Recommendations put forth by researchers include the integration of digital literacy training into educational curricula, collaboration between stakeholders such as educational institutions, government agencies,

businesses, and advocacy groups, and the development of guidelines for promoting credible information sources and ethical practices on social media platforms. In conclusion, while social media presents opportunities for young adults in Kenya to access a diverse array of information quickly and conveniently, addressing issues related to information credibility, digital literacy, and inclusivity is essential for maximizing its potential benefits and mitigating its potential harms. Future research and collaborative efforts among stakeholders are needed to navigate the evolving landscape of social media and its impact on information behaviors in Kenya.

Recommendations

Theory

Conduct longitudinal studies to track changes in social media usage patterns and information behaviors among young adults in Kenya over time. This will contribute to theoretical understandings of the evolving dynamics between social media and information seeking behavior. Explore theoretical frameworks from communication, psychology, and sociology to better understand the underlying mechanisms driving young adults' interactions with social media for information seeking and sharing purposes. Investigate the role of cultural factors and social influences in shaping information behaviors on social media platforms among young adults in Kenya, drawing upon theories of cultural psychology and social identity.

Practice

Develop and implement digital literacy programs tailored to the needs of young adults in Kenya, with a focus on enhancing critical evaluation skills, media literacy, and information verification techniques. Collaborate with educational institutions, libraries, and community organizations to integrate digital literacy training into formal and informal learning environments, including school curricula, workshops, and community outreach programs. Empower young adults to become critical consumers and creators of digital content by providing them with the skills and resources necessary to evaluate information credibility, create accurate content, and engage in responsible online communication.

Policy

Advocate for the development of policies and guidelines to regulate the dissemination of misinformation, hate speech, and harmful content on social media platforms, while preserving freedom of expression and information sharing. Encourage collaboration between social media companies, government agencies, and civil society organizations to develop and implement initiatives aimed at promoting digital literacy, online safety, and responsible information sharing practices among young adults. Support initiatives that leverage social media platforms for positive social change, such as campaigns to promote public health awareness, civic engagement, and environmental sustainability, while ensuring transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct in online communication.

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