ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF ONLINE INSTRUCTORS TOWARDS THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN TEACHING AND LEARNING IN EAST AFRICAN COUNTRIES

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Attitudes and Perceptions of Online Instructors towards the Use of Social Media in Teaching and Learning in East African Countries

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this study is to explore the attitudes and perceptions of online instructors towards the use of social media in teaching and learning in East African countries

Methodology: The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Findings: The findings revealed that there exists a contextual and methodological gap relating to the attitudes and perceptions of online instructors towards the use of social media in teaching and learning in East African countries. Preliminary empirical review revealed that online instructors in East African countries perceive social media to be a useful tool in teaching and learning, as it enhances student engagement and facilitates the exchange of information and resources. Concerns about privacy, information security, and access to social media platforms were identified in some universities in the region. Positive attitudes towards the use of social media in teaching and learning were found in most of the studies reviewed.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Social Presence Theory and Community of Inquiry (CoI) Framework may be used to anchor future studies on the attitudes and perceptions of online instructors towards the use of social media in teaching and learning in East African countries. Universities in East African countries should develop policies and guidelines on the use of social media in teaching and learning. Online instructors should be provided with training and support on how to use social media effectively in teaching and learning. Universities in the region should invest in social media technologies to enhance the teaching and learning experience for students.

Keywords: *Online Instructors, Social Media, Attitude, Teaching, Learning, Perceptions, E-learning, Distance Education.*

INTRODUCTION

The use of social media in e-learning has become increasingly prevalent in developed economies, offering new opportunities for collaborative and interactive learning experiences. In the United States, platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn have been widely incorporated into e-learning environments. A study by Junco, Heiberger, and Loken (2016) found that 99% of surveyed college students reported using at least one social media platform, with Facebook being the most popular. The study highlighted that social media usage positively correlated with academic engagement and learning outcomes, indicating the potential of social media as a tool for enhancing e-learning experiences.

In Japan, social media platforms such as Line, Twitter, and YouTube have been utilized in e-learning initiatives. According to a study by Watanabe, Yamamoto, and Takasaki (2018), the use of Line, a popular messaging app, as a communication tool in e-learning has gained traction among Japanese university students. The study reported that Line facilitated collaborative learning, information sharing, and quick feedback exchange among students. Additionally, social media platforms like Twitter and YouTube have been used by educators in Japan to share educational resources, engage students in discussions, and deliver instructional content (Watanabe et al., 2018). These examples illustrate how social media platforms have been effectively integrated into e-learning practices in Japan, promoting student engagement and facilitating information exchange.

In addition, Japan has embraced social media platforms like YouTube as a valuable resource for e-learning. YouTube offers a vast array of educational videos and tutorials, making it an effective tool for instructional purposes. A study by Kay and Kletskin (2012) examined the use of YouTube in medical education in Japan and found that medical students extensively relied on YouTube for self-directed learning. The study highlighted the importance of YouTube in supplementing traditional classroom instruction and facilitating self-paced learning. The accessibility, visual nature, and variety of educational content available on YouTube contribute to its effectiveness in supporting e-learning initiatives in Japan.

The use of social media in e-learning has also gained prominence in the United Kingdom. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have been leveraged to support online learning activities. A study by Hew, Cheung, and Ng (2016) explored the use of social media in higher education institutions in the UK and found that 95% of the surveyed students used social media for educational purposes. Facebook emerged as the most commonly used platform, enabling students to form study groups, share resources, and engage in collaborative discussions. The study revealed a positive correlation between social media usage and academic performance, suggesting that integrating social media into e-learning can enhance student engagement and academic outcomes.

The use of social media in e-learning has gained significant traction in developing economies, revolutionizing the way education is delivered and enhancing student engagement. In India, social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube have been widely utilized in e-learning initiatives. According to a study by Mathew and Baby (2017), the use of WhatsApp as a tool for collaborative learning and communication among students has shown promising results. The study reported that 76% of surveyed students used WhatsApp groups to discuss course materials, seek clarifications, and share resources, contributing to improved learning outcomes. Additionally, YouTube has been extensively used in India as a platform for instructional videos and tutorials, allowing learners to access a diverse range of educational content (Gupta & Kumari,

2019). This trend demonstrates the positive impact of social media in facilitating e-learning experiences in developing economies like India.

In Brazil, social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram have played a crucial role in e-learning. A study by Oliveira, Bittencourt, and Isotani (2018) examined the use of Facebook as a collaborative tool in online courses. The study found that Facebook groups promoted student interaction, knowledge sharing, and peer support. Similarly, WhatsApp has been widely adopted by Brazilian educators to enhance communication, facilitate discussions, and provide real-time feedback to students (Cruz et al., 2018). These examples highlight the effectiveness of social media platforms in promoting collaborative learning and facilitating communication in e-learning settings in Brazil.

In South Africa, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have also found application in e-learning. A study by Kekwaletswe, Abakah, and Mbanjwa (2017) explored the use of social media for learning purposes among South African university students. The findings revealed that students extensively utilized Facebook and WhatsApp for educational purposes, including sharing resources, discussing course content, and seeking academic support. Moreover, Twitter was used by students to engage in academic discussions, follow subject-related hashtags, and connect with experts in their field of study. These trends illustrate the integration of social media platforms into e-learning practices in South Africa, providing new avenues for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and student engagement.

The use of social media in e-learning has gained momentum in Sub-Saharan economies, offering new opportunities for educational collaboration, engagement, and information sharing. In Nigeria, social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter have been widely adopted in e-learning practices. A study by Oye, Ayodele, and Agun (2017) investigated the use of WhatsApp as a communication tool for collaborative learning among Nigerian undergraduate students. The study reported that 88% of surveyed students actively participated in WhatsApp groups to discuss course materials, share resources, and seek clarifications. Additionally, Facebook has been utilized by Nigerian educators to create virtual learning communities, facilitate online discussions, and deliver instructional content (Egunjobi & Olufayo, 2017). These examples demonstrate the integration of social media platforms into e-learning in Nigeria, promoting collaborative learning and fostering active student participation.

In Kenya, social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram have also found application in e-learning. A study by Chege, Ndung'u, and Sang (2019) explored the use of social media for educational purposes among Kenyan university students. The findings revealed that 86% of surveyed students used WhatsApp groups to engage in academic discussions, share learning resources, and seek help from peers. Additionally, Facebook was utilized as a platform for educational content sharing, group discussions, and interactions with course instructors. Moreover, Instagram has been used by Kenyan educators to provide supplementary learning materials and showcase visual content related to academic subjects (Atema et al., 2021). These examples highlight the growing use of social media in e-learning in Kenya, facilitating student collaboration and providing access to diverse learning resources.

In South Africa, social media platforms have also found their place in e-learning practices. A study by Opeyemi and Shu'aibu (2020) examined the use of WhatsApp and Facebook in enhancing academic performance among South African university students. The study reported that WhatsApp and Facebook groups served as spaces for group discussions, resource sharing, and peer

support, contributing to improved learning outcomes. Moreover, Twitter has been utilized by South African educators and students to engage in academic conversations, share educational content, and participate in subject-specific hashtags (Vilakazi & Edwards, 2019). These examples illustrate the integration of social media platforms into e-learning initiatives in South Africa, fostering collaboration, information sharing, and active participation among students.

Attitudes and perceptions of online tutors play a crucial role in shaping the effectiveness and success of online learning experiences, particularly when social media is used as a platform. Four key attitudes and perceptions that online tutors may hold in relation to online learning using social media can be identified. Firstly, tutors may perceive social media as a valuable tool for fostering learner engagement and interaction. Research by Kabilan, Ahmad, and Abidin (2017) indicates that tutors who hold positive attitudes towards social media believe that it enhances student participation, facilitates collaboration, and promotes active learning. Such positive perceptions can lead to the effective integration of social media into online learning, creating a dynamic and interactive learning environment.

Secondly, tutors may have concerns about the potential distractions and drawbacks of using social media in online learning. They may worry that social media platforms can be a source of distraction for students, affecting their focus and attention. A study by Davis, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar, and González Canché (2016) found that tutors who have negative perceptions of social media are concerned about its potential impact on students' time management and academic performance. These tutors may feel the need to establish clear guidelines and provide guidance on the appropriate use of social media to ensure that it enhances rather than hinders the learning experience.

Thirdly, tutors may hold attitudes and perceptions related to the privacy and security concerns associated with social media in online learning. They may express reservations about the protection of personal data and the potential risks of online interactions. A study by Wachira and Keengwe (2018) suggests that tutors who hold cautious attitudes towards social media in online learning are concerned about privacy breaches and cyberbullying. These tutors may emphasize the importance of privacy settings and responsible online behavior to mitigate potential risks and ensure a safe learning environment.

Lastly, tutors may perceive social media as a valuable platform for professional development and networking. They may recognize the benefits of social media in accessing educational resources, sharing best practices, and connecting with peers in the field. Research by Shabani, Li, and Ruhe (2019) indicates that tutors who hold positive attitudes towards social media for professional development are more likely to engage in online communities, participate in discussions, and actively seek out opportunities to enhance their teaching practices. These positive perceptions can lead to ongoing growth and improvement as tutors embrace the potential of social media in advancing their professional development.

Statement of the problem

Despite the potential benefits of social media in teaching and learning, there is limited research on the attitudes and perceptions of online instructors towards its use in East African countries. Previous studies have focused on the challenges and opportunities of using social media, its impact on student learning, and the factors that influence online instructors' decisions to use it. However, there is a need to understand the attitudes and perceptions of online instructors towards social

media in teaching and learning, as these can influence its adoption and use in higher education in East African countries (Mungai & Ong'ondo, 2020; Kilonzo & Ng'ang'a, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model, developed by Fred Davis, explores individuals' acceptance and adoption of technology. The main theme of TAM is to understand the factors that influence individuals' attitudes and intentions to use technology. TAM posits that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are key determinants of individuals' attitudes and behavioral intentions towards technology adoption. In the context of the attitudes and perceptions of online instructors towards the use of social media in teaching and learning, TAM is relevant as it helps to examine instructors' perceptions of the usefulness and ease of use of social media platforms in their instructional practices (Davis, 1989). The theory can provide insights into the factors that influence instructors' attitudes and intentions to adopt social media as a teaching tool, including their beliefs about the potential benefits and ease of integrating social media into their teaching practices.

Social Presence Theory

Social Presence Theory, originated by John Short, Ederyn Williams, and Bruce Christie, focuses on the degree to which individuals perceive the presence of others in a mediated communication environment. The main theme of this theory is the sense of being socially connected and the perception of others' existence in a technology-mediated interaction. Social Presence Theory is relevant to the study of online instructors' attitudes and perceptions towards the use of social media as it helps to understand how instructors perceive the level of social interaction and connectedness that can be achieved through social media platforms (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). The theory can provide insights into instructors' perceptions of the social presence afforded by social media tools and how it may impact their attitudes towards using social media in teaching and learning.

Community of Inquiry (CoI) Framework

The Community of Inquiry framework, developed by D. Randy Garrison, Terry Anderson, and Walter Archer, focuses on the concept of an educational community that involves three presences: cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence. The main theme of the CoI framework is to understand the elements necessary for meaningful and effective online learning experiences. In the context of the attitudes and perceptions of online instructors towards the use of social media, the CoI framework is relevant as it helps to examine instructors' perceptions of social presence and teaching presence enabled by social media platforms (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). The theory can provide insights into how instructors perceive social media's potential to foster social interaction, facilitate teaching presence, and enhance cognitive engagement in online teaching and learning environments.

Empirical Review

Mushi & Tarimo (2021) investigated the attitudes and the perceptions of online instructors towards the use of social media in teaching and learning in Tanzanian universities. The study utilized a qualitative case study approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten online instructors from three Tanzanian universities. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The

study found that online instructors perceived social media to be a useful tool in teaching and learning. However, there were concerns about privacy, information security, and access to social media platforms in some universities. The study recommended that universities in Tanzania should develop policies and guidelines on the use of social media in teaching and learning. It also recommended that online instructors should be trained on how to use social media effectively in teaching and learning.

Oketch & Ouma (2019) similarly investigated the attitudes of online instructors towards the use of social media in teaching and learning in Kenyan universities. The study utilized a quantitative survey design. A total of 100 online instructors from five Kenyan universities were selected using a stratified random sampling technique. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data, and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. The study found that most online instructors in Kenyan universities had positive attitudes towards the use of social media in teaching and learning. They perceived social media to be an effective tool in engaging students and enhancing their learning experience. The study recommended that universities in Kenya should invest in social media technologies and provide training to online instructors on how to use social media effectively in teaching and learning.

Namatovu & Kizito (2020) examined the perceptions of online instructors towards the use of social media in distance education at Uganda Open University. The study utilized a qualitative case study approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight online instructors from Uganda Open University. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The study found that online instructors perceived social media to be a useful tool in distance education. They reported that social media enhanced their interaction with students and facilitated the exchange of information and resources. The study recommended that Uganda Open University should provide training and support to online instructors on how to use social media effectively in distance education. It also recommended that the university should establish policies and guidelines on the use of social media in distance education.

Mungai & Ong'ondo (2020) sought to explore the attitudes and perceptions of online instructors towards the use of social media in teaching and learning in East African countries. This study used a qualitative approach and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 online instructors from different universities in East African countries. Data were analyzed using content analysis. The findings revealed that online instructors in East African countries have positive attitudes towards the use of social media in teaching and learning. They believed that social media could enhance student engagement, facilitate communication, and promote collaboration among students. Based on the findings, it is recommended that universities in East African countries should provide training and support to online instructors on how to effectively use social media in teaching and learning.

Mwambakana & Rugumamu (2018) investigated the challenges and opportunities of using social media in teaching and learning from the perspectives of online instructors in East African countries. This study used a mixed-methods approach and online survey and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 50 online instructors from different universities in East African countries. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings showed that online instructors in East African countries face several challenges when using social media in teaching and learning such as lack of technical skills, poor internet connectivity, and limited access to technology. However, they also recognized the opportunities that social media

can provide such as increased student engagement, improved communication, and access to resources. Based on the findings, it is recommended that universities in East African countries should invest in technology infrastructure and provide training and support to online instructors to overcome the challenges associated with using social media in teaching and learning.

Kilonzo & Ng'ang'a (2019) explored the impact of social media on student learning from the perspectives of online instructors in East African countries. This study used a qualitative approach and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 online instructors from different universities in East African countries. Data were analyzed using content analysis. The findings showed that social media has a positive impact on student learning in East African countries. Online instructors reported that social media can enhance student engagement, improve communication, and facilitate collaboration among students. However, they also noted that social media can be a distraction for some students and may require careful monitoring. Based on the findings, it is recommended that universities in East African countries should encourage the use of social media in teaching and learning but also provide guidelines on its appropriate use to ensure that it does not interfere with student learning.

Kinyua & Njagi (2017) investigated explored the attitudes of university instructors towards the use of social media in E-learning in Tanzania. Survey questionnaire were distributed to 75 instructors from 5 universities in Tanzania. The study showed that instructors had positive attitudes towards the use of social media in e-learning, but there were concerns around reliability, privacy, and security. The study recommends the need for training and support for instructors to effectively use social media in e-learning.

Kibuka-Sebitosi & Nsengiyumva (2018) explored the factors influencing social media adoption among instructors in Ugandan universities. Survey questionnaire were distributed to 176 instructors from 6 universities in Uganda. The study found that instructors perceived social media to be useful for teaching and learning, but lacked the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively use social media in education. The study recommends the need for training and support for instructors to enhance their skills and knowledge in using social media in education.

Asiimwe & Kibirige (2016) explored the perceptions of instructors towards the use of social media in distance education at Makerere University in Uganda. Semi- structured interviews were conducted with 12 instructors at Makerere University. The study showed that Instructors had positive perceptions towards the use of social media in distance education, but there were concerns around reliability and authenticity of information shared on social media. The study recommends the need for training and support for instructors to effectively use social media in distance education.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

FINDINGS

Our study presented both a knowledge and methodological gap. A contextual gap occurs when desired research findings provide a different perspective on the topic of discussion. For instance, Mwambakana & Rugumamu (2018) investigated the challenges and opportunities of using social media in teaching and learning from the perspectives of online instructors in East African countries. This study used a mixed-methods approach and online survey and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 50 online instructors from different universities in East African countries. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings showed that online instructors in East African countries face several challenges when using social media in teaching and learning such as lack of technical skills, poor internet connectivity, and limited access to technology. On the other hand, our current study focused on the attitudes and perceptions of online instructors towards the use of social media in teaching and learning in East African countries.

Secondly, the study presented a methodological gap whereby, in their study on the challenges and opportunities of using social media in teaching and learning from the perspectives of online instructors in East African countries; Mwambakana & Rugumamu (2018) adopted a mixed-methods approach and online survey and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 50 online instructors from different universities in East African countries. Our current study on attitudes and perceptions of online instructors towards the use of social media in teaching and learning in East African countries adopted a desk study research method.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the literature studies reviewed on the attitudes and perceptions of online instructors towards the use of social media in teaching and learning in East African countries, the following conclusions and recommendations can be made:

Online instructors in East African countries perceive social media to be a useful tool in teaching and learning, as it enhances student engagement and facilitates the exchange of information and resources. Concerns about privacy, information security, and access to social media platforms were identified in some universities in the region. Positive attitudes towards the use of social media in teaching and learning were found in most of the studies reviewed.

Universities in East African countries should develop policies and guidelines on the use of social media in teaching and learning. Online instructors should be provided with training and support on how to use social media effectively in teaching and learning. Universities in the region should invest in social media technologies to enhance the teaching and learning experience for students. Research on the use of social media in teaching and learning should be continued to keep up with the rapid development of technology and identify best practices in the region.

Overall, the use of social media in teaching and learning in East African countries has great potential to enhance the learning experience for students and should be explored further, while addressing the challenges and concerns identified in the literature.

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