

**EVALUATION OF THE MOST POPULAR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS USED
BY STUDENTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON ACADEMIC NEEDS:A CASE STUDY
OF MBARARA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

RONALD ATUZARIRWE

J23MO2/027

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN
ORGANISATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF UGANDA CHRISTIAN
UNIVERSITY**

February, 2026



**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
UNIVERSITY**

A Centre of Excellence in the Heart of Africa

DECLARATION

I, Atuzarirwe Ronald, affirm that this Thesis titled “Evaluation of the most popular social media platforms used by students and their impact on academic needs: A case study of Mbarara University of Science and Technology” is my original work and has not been previously submitted to any institution of higher learning for any purpose or award.

Name: RONALD ATUZARIRWE



Signature:

20th. FEBRUARY. 2026

Date:

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the Almighty God, my mother, brothers and to all my friends and colleagues.

APPROVAL

I certify that this dissertation, entitled “EVALUATION OF THE MOST POPULAR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS USED BY STUDENTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON ACADEMIC NEEDS IN MBARARA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY,” has been under my supervision and is now ready for submission.

Name: Nicholas Kalyebara, Ph.D.

Signature: 

Date:February 27th, 2026.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my erudite supervisor, Dr. Nicholas Kalyebara, for his invaluable guidance and unwavering dedication throughout the course of this study. I am also deeply appreciative of the academic staff at the Department of School of Business at Uganda Christian University, whose exceptional willingness to assist and offer guidance was invaluable. Furthermore, I extend my sincerest thanks to the students of the Mbarara University of Science and Technology who participated in this study, generously sharing their time and insights with me. I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to my Family for their energy-giving support and motivation. I would like to express my special appreciation to Ag. Assistant Commissioner Eria Kaduli, my immediate supervisor at my workplace at Uganda Revenue Authority, who ensured that I completed assignments on time. Without his support, completing this master's program would have been much more complicated.

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

DECLARATION	ii
DEDICATION	iii
APPROVAL	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	viii
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	x
ABSTRACT	xi
CHAPTER ONE	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of the study	1
1.3 Statement problem	3
1.4 Purpose of the study	4
1.5 Objectives of the study	4
1.6 Research questions	4
1.7 Justification of the study	5
1.8 Significance of the study	5
1.8 Scope of the study	6
1.8.1 Content scope	6
CHAPTER TWO	7
2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	7
2.2 Concept of Social media platforms	7
2.3 Literature on the various social media sites that college students mostly utilize	8
2.4 University students' experiences using social media	10
2.5 Research gap	12
2.6 Theoretical Framework	13
2.6.1 The Uses and Gratification Theory	13
2.7.3 Cultivation theory	14
CHAPTER THREE	16
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	16
3.1 Introduction	16
3.2 Research design	16
3.3 Research approach	18
3.4 Study population ,.....	18

3.5 Sample size determination.....	19
3.6 Sampling techniques and procedure	20
3.7 Data collection methods.....	22
3.7.1 In-depth interviews	22
3.7.2 Focus Group Discussion Guide.....	23
3.8 Data analysis.....	25
3.10 Ethical considerations.....	26
3.11 Limitations of the study.....	27
CHAPTER FOUR.....	28
PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS.....	28
4.0 Introduction.....	28
4.1.1 Qualities of the respondents.....	28
4.1.2 RQ1.....	31
Effects of university students' favourite social media platforms	35
4.1.3 RQ2: Effective use of social media platforms by students in the classroom.....	38
4.1.4 RQ3: Students' methods for utilizing their favourite social networking sites effectively in the classroom.	41
CHAPTER FIVE	44
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.....	44
5.1 Introduction.....	44
5.2 .1 Platforms for social media Students at universities use most.	44
5.2.2 Students' Use of the Social Media Sites They Prefer.	45
5.2.3 Students' efficient usage of the social media sites they prefer for academic purposes. ...	50
CHAPTER SIX.....	52
6.0 CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND FURTHER AREAS OF RESEARCH	52
6.0 Introduction.....	52
6.1 An overview of the study's results	52
6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS.....	54
Policy makers	54
6.3 Further Areas of Research.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
REFERENCES.....	58
Appendix I: Consent Form for Field Data Collection	64
Appendix II: Data Analysis Sample sheet in excel form	65
Appendix III: Sample of the filled Questionnaire Guide	66
Appendix IV: Guide for Focus Group Discussions.....	67
Appendix V: KEY INFORMANTS GUIDE (in-depth interview).....	69

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

F2F: Face-to-Face

FAST: Faculty of Applied Science and Technology

FBMS: Faculty of Business and Management Sciences

FGDs: Focus Group Discussions

KIIs: Key Informant Interviews

MoES: Ministry of Education and Sports

MUELE: Mbarara University E-Learning Environment

MUST: Mbarara University of Science and Technology

SMT: Social Media Technology

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Summary of the distribution of FGDs per faculty.

Table 2: shows the number of respondents from each group in a faculty during focus group discussions.

Table 3: shows the number of respondents for each group in a faculty during focus group discussions.

Table 4: Timeline of Research.

Table 5: Work Plan for Researchh

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The respondents' gender distribution

Figure 2: Respondents' age group

Figure 3: The responders' faculty members' names

Figure 4: Program category and respondents' year of enrolment

Figure 6: Respondents' frequent use of social media

Figure 7: Frequency of use of media Platforms by responders

Figure 8: Justifications for using the most popular social media site

ABSTRACT

This study examined the social media platforms most frequently used by university students and how these platforms support their academic needs, focusing on a case study of Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST). The study aimed to identify the most commonly used platforms, explore the purposes for which students use them, examine their experiences, and provide recommendations for enhancing their academic utilization.

Qualitative study was conducted using focus group discussions (FGDs) with the selected students from the Faculty of Business and Management Sciences and other four Faculties that included Faculty of Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Applied Science and Technology, Faculty of Computing and Informatics in Mbarara University of Science and Technology as well as the identified key informants from the University. The data were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns and insights.

The findings revealed that students primarily use platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. These platforms were used for communication, accessing educational materials, information sharing, networking, entertainment, and staying updated with current affairs. The results further indicate that students actively select and engage with social media platforms that best satisfy their academic and social needs.

The study concludes that while social media platforms serve multiple functions, their academic potential can be enhanced through more structured and intentional use within university learning environments.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter includes a broad explanation of the study about an assessment of the social media sites students use most and how they use them. Students from the Faculty of Business and Management Science and other four Faculties that included Faculty of Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Applied Science and Technology, Faculty of Computing and Informatics at Mbarara University of Science and Technology participated in this study. This comprises the background, problem statement, research objectives, hypothesis, scope, rationale, significance, and conceptual framework of the study.

1.2 Background of the study

Social media simply implies the types of communication that may be created, stored and shared through computerized devices using the internet. Athique (2013) also defines social media as the communication/information that focuses primarily upon computer technologies while others underline the cultural forms and situations in which technologies are used for example, art, film, commerce, science and above all the Internet. He emphasizes that today, “networked media”, “online media”, and “social media” have come to the fore as distinct extensions of digital media.

The naming of various domains of media activity is both a practically informative matter as well as being culturally coded. The rise of social media has had both helpful and bad repercussions on society. As a result, the use of social media platforms has been fully adopted in many nations. In the context of development, social media accessibility is commonly viewed as the answer to the issue of the social media divide between developed and developing countries (Pierson, 2021, p.355). But the social media divide encompasses more than just discrepancies in social media access; it also includes variations in how these platforms are used, especially in higher education institutions (Liang, 2017, p. 10)

Communication, learning, research, and education generally, have altered and been impacted by social media platforms (Benedek et al., 2020, p. 210). Social media platforms have become the most innovative and alluring way to connect people worldwide among the many available online communication tools (Aghazamani, 2010, p. 732). Web-based and mobile apps that enable people and organizations to develop, engage with, and share new user-generated or existing material in digital environments through multi-way communication are referred to as social media technology (SMT) (Davis, 2010, p. 24).

These platforms allow individuals and groups to create profiles, share, and exchange information on a variety of hobbies and pursuits. Social media offer unique properties in that they can be accessed through mobile devices and smartphones as well as desktop or laptop computers, making it highly accessible and simple to use. Website and mobile application examples of these social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and blogs, among others (De Wever et al., 2015, p. 39).

The number of social media users worldwide has increased during the last several years, reaching 3 billion by 2021 (Benedek et al., 2020, p. 213). For example, Facebook became the first social media platform with one billion active monthly users by the first quarter of 2017. As part of the social media platforms, social media channels have been utilized for a wide range of aims, including politics, healthcare, business and education (Chen et al., 2017, p. 627). Even though a large body of research has demonstrated beneficial connections between the use of social media platforms and students' learning processes, there is still a dearth of studies that have tried to examine the most used social media platforms by students and how they use these social media platforms particularly in developing nations like Uganda (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016, p. 8). Students at universities use a variety of social media sites to interact with their classmates and exchange information. This is because these platforms promote, enable, and make it feasible for people to easily and successfully share

knowledge via a range of methods (Benedek et al., 2020, p. 215). Individual projects, group debates, brainstorming meetings, and research undertakings are just a few of the forms and levels at which knowledge is produced in universities. Once the knowledge generated has been documented for whatever objectives, it must still be disseminated and dispersed both inside and outside of the educational setting (Sudha & Kavitha, 2016).

Most social media users in Uganda are young individuals, notably students in higher education who are motivated to utilize these platforms for communication, study and other objectives (Mirembe et al., 2019, p. 13). According to the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoEs, 2022) there are 32 Universities in Uganda as of 2022 and these universities have around 110,000 students enrolled. The need to conduct this specific study among universities in Uganda was necessitated by the fact that, despite the large number of university students and the increasing use of social media platforms, there are currently no studies that have been conducted to determine the most popular social media platforms used by these students and what they use them for in Ugandan universities specifically.

1.3 Statement problem

Social media platforms have become a vital element of the current society. There are universal social media networks with user bases larger than the population of most countries. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp and the recently established TikTok are some of the major social media sites that are being used in Uganda. Statistics by Data Social media Report (2022) show that Uganda has about 2.8 million social media users equivalent to 5.9% of Uganda's total population as of January 2022 and a big portion of these are youths especially University students who have access to smartphones and sometimes internet (Yeboah & Nyagorme, 2022, p. 65).

Additionally, because technology is always evolving, there are currently few or no studies that have been done to determine which social media platforms are most popular

among university students and how they utilize them. This is due to the fact that the majority of the existing research by academics, such as Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 59; Koehler & Parrell, 2010, p. 101, has concentrated on how social media platforms support business, mental health, and social life, among other things. This left a gap that made it necessary to carry out this study in order to determine which social media platforms are most popular among students and how they use them in Ugandan higher education institutions.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The study's goal was to determine which social media sites university students use most frequently and how they do so in Uganda's higher education institutions.

1.5 Objectives of the study.

- i. To determine which social media sites are most popular among university students.
- ii. To explore the unique ways in which university students utilize the social media platforms for.
- iii. To investigate how University students could use social media platforms for educational purposes.
- iv. To advise how university students might successfully use their most favoured social media sites for educational purposes

1.6 Research questions.

The primary issues this study intended to address were:

- i. What are the different social media sites mostly used by university students?
- ii. How do university students utilize their most popular social media platforms for especially in academia?
- iii. What way could the students use their most chosen social media sites successfully for academic needs?

1.7 Justification of the study

The literature review on students' use of their most social media platforms have explored a wide range of themes, including the connection between social media and communication, academic outcomes, learning styles and best practices, and students' engagement online. Al-Rahmi et al. (2022, p. 7) and Price et al. (2018, p. 33) have also examined the impact of social media networks on students' attitudes on the sharing and collaborative management of educational resources. Even though a large body of research has demonstrated beneficial relationships between the use of social media platforms and students' learning processes, there is still little data on the social media platforms that university students use most frequently and how they use them, leaving a gap that makes this study necessary.

As a result, the results of this study can help identify the social media platforms that students use most frequently and facilitate the development of educational policies that incorporate cutting-edge methods of teaching and learning with these social media platforms, particularly when countries are recovering from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic that worsened the economies of countries like Uganda and thus embrace the use of social platforms for e-learning in educational institutions.

1.8 Significance of the study.

The study's conclusions and suggestions may be helpful to stakeholders, particularly university administration, since they will give them accurate and trustworthy information about the most popular social media sites among students and how to improve them to better suit their needs, particularly academic ones. In addition, the study findings will also be of great benefit to the students as they will offer them with information on the most used social media platforms by their peers and how best they can use their most preferred platforms in order meet their educational, social and economic demands.

Lastly, the results can be used by future researchers as a source of information about how university students use different social media platforms for future reference, or they can add to the body of knowledge already in existence regarding the most popular social media platforms used by university students and how they use them to satisfy their needs, particularly in academics, particularly at Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Uganda. Such information can also lead to further research on the usage of social media platforms by university students by future academics who are interested in undertaking a study on a similar issue.

1.8 Scope of the study

1.8.1 Content scope

The study's primary goal was to determine which social media sites university students use most frequently and how they use them to meet their needs in higher education. It particularly concentrated on identifying the various social media platforms that college students use most frequently, analysing the particular uses of these platforms, researching the experiences of university students using their preferred social media platforms and making recommendations for how college students could more effectively use these platforms for educational purposes. The researcher also picked for a case study of Mbarara University of Science and Technology because of its ability to reach a big audience, particularly the diverse communities of the students that use these social media platforms.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Over the past few decades, the idea of social media use has continued to garner attention on a global scale. Finding out which social media platforms university students choose and how they utilize them to meet their demands, particularly those in Ugandan higher education institutions have raised awareness of this topic on a global scale. As a result, other literary works are covered in this chapter. In order to compare, confirm, and highlight differences, it is crucial to take a closer look at similar studies conducted on the most popular social media platforms used by students and how they use these platforms in higher education institutions. Additionally, some relevant literature should be reviewed. As a result, the review of numerous works deemed pertinent to the research is intended to be included in this chapter.

2.2 Concept of Social media platforms.

Boateng and Amankwaa (2016) define social media as programs that let users interact and communicate with each other. People employ them as an online platform to build or sustain connections with people for a variety of objectives like information gathering, connecting, sharing, and interacting with each other. According to Menkhoff et al. (2014), social media is an online platform that enables users to build relationships or social networks with others who share similar interests, hobbies, backgrounds, or ties in their professional or personal lives. It is consequently a platform of interaction between people where they develop networks and share information and ideas (Baguma et al., 2019, p. 99). Thus, social media can be regarded as tools that facilitate social connection, make collaboration possible, and permit discourse among people at the global level. Furthermore, Internet-based services that enable users to create a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate

a list of other users with whom they share a connection and navigate their list of connections as well as those made by others within the system are referred to as social media by (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 222). According to Ali et al. (2016), social media refers to a collection of applications, such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and YouTube, that link people as they exchange information. According to Junco et al. (2011), p. 11, social media is a collection of websites, services, and activities on the Internet that promote community building, participation, and sharing.

2.3 Literature on the various social media sites that college students mostly utilize.

Facebook: Facebook is a prospective resource for usage in educational contexts. It facilitates the integration of multimedia content, such as student-created photos and videos and URLs to other texts, onto a platform that many students are already familiar with. It enables for both asynchronous and synchronous, open discourse via a known and commonly used medium (Baguma et al., 2019, p. 101). Baguma adds that Facebook offers a chance of building Facebook groups which has enabled students to organizing group conversations to engage with their peers. It also allows students to ask less important questions that they might not otherwise feel motivated to bring up in person during office hours (Moody, 2010, p. 15). Students are also given the ability to create their own privacy settings, and frequently do so by updating those that they have already established as registered users (Susanti & Tarmuji, 2016, p. 28). Twitter: Twitter as another social media site that students utilize, stimulates social interactions. It can be employed to increase critical thinking and interpersonal communication. In order to improve classroom conversations, Domizi (2013, p. 43), employed Twitter in a graduate course that demanded weekly tweets from students. To evaluate the association between social media use and student involvement and social media and students' grades, (Junco et al. 2011, p. 12) conducted a study with 132 students. Students were divided into two groups; one group used Twitter, while the other did

not. Twitter was used to communicate with students, organize study groups, post class notices, and have discussions about the subject matter. YouTube: For video lectures, YouTube is the most widely used social media site in classrooms (Moran et al., 2012, p. 1). Students can have access to watch class recorded videos on YouTube at their convenience time, react to questions, and debate the topic matter.

According to Moran et al. (2012, p. 1), YouTube also gives teachers the chance to have live video conversations with their students virtually during class time, which enhances the students' learning results. According to Sherer & Shea (2011, p. 1), YouTube increases participation, productivity, and personalization. YouTube provided opportunities for peer learning and problem-solving while also improving students' digital literacy. Videos conveyed course information, piqued students' interest, and maintained it (Ovute, 2015a, 2015b). Instagram: People who appreciate sharing photographs of their experiences are lured to Instagram. The social network is open to folks who adore selfies and photography. It displays users' most treasured images, such as their own reflections in the bathroom mirror, the same delicious Chinese cuisine, or suburban sunsets (Durgungoz, 2022a, 2022b, p. 1). Faculty students will update their Instagram mates on how they live their lives and are typically inspired by the novelty of photographing every moment worth mentioning. This deadly temptation may force people to purchase pricey lipsticks, so they can snap a silly photo or to race in the morning to show off their expensive shoes and Apple watches (Almogheerah, 2020, p. 1). Snapchat: The useful and fun app altered how social media operates on mobile devices. Snapchat primarily concentrates on flashy stickers, augmented reality products, and other fun features to attract contented and imaginative people. This is why they like talking with friends. Snapchat was first designed to allow users to share images with their pals. However, the program was eventually enhanced with additional features, which led to its wide acceptance and great reviews (Yeboah & Nyagorme, 2022, p. 1).

TikTok: TikTok, which was released in 2018, is no longer new on the block. Their video-based software swiftly reached 1 billion downloads in its first year of operation. With over 1 billion active users each month, TikTok is currently one of the most successful social media networks in the world. TikTok has an advantage over websites like Facebook that were initially developed with a restricted age range in mind as younger users can download and access this app more readily (Durgungoz, 2022a, 2022b, p. 1). Pinterest: Pinterest is a social networking site that functions as a bookmarking tool for DIY projects, recipes, sewing patterns, travel itineraries, interior design, brand marketing, and everything in between. Customers of many different brands commonly describe this platform as a vital component of their product discovery process. With more than 433 million monthly users, Pinterest has one of the most concentrated female audiences of any social media platform (Benedek et al., 2020, p. 110). With a very even distribution of users between the ages of 18 and 29, 30 and 49, and 50 and above, women make up over 80% of their regular users (Fattah, 2015). LinkedIn: LinkedIn is a professional networking website that was launched in 2003. It has gained a lot of popularity recently, with 200 million members globally (Almogheerah, 2020, p.330). Similar to Facebook, LinkedIn lets users build an online profile, connect with other users, and engage with those people directly (Ryan & Jones, 2009, p. 53). LinkedIn is a networking website that enables users to build professional profiles and engage with other business professionals (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 228).

2.4 University students' experiences using social media.

Griesemer (2014, p. 9), contends that social media platforms are affecting how teachers convey knowledge to their pupils. Wikis and other social media platforms, according to Griesemer, facilitate communication between educators and students. Users can create a personalized searchable internet by saving and archiving entire web pages using technologies like social bookmarking. According to a number of studies, social networks are

developing into educational platforms that enable student groups to communicate with peers and teachers during the learning process (Kumar & Gupta, 2017). Numerous advantages of using digital media for learning have been found by researchers.

According to a Tiene (2000, p. 373), adopting social media boosted both the quantity and quality of students' discussion engagement. The findings were attributed by the author to the degree of convenience that social media provides students, the arguments in which they choose to engage at a given time, and the consequent capacity to articulate their viewpoints in more carefully thought-out and structured ways. In agreement with (Tiene, 2000, p. 374) findings, (Deng & Tavares, 2013, p. 169) also concluded that online dialogues between students and instructors as well as among peers can assist students enhance their capacity for reflection and their capacity for critical thought. When compared to face-to-face (F2F) interaction, it has been discovered that online discussion allows underprivileged students to join in conversations without feeling self-conscious. According to Apeanti and Danso (2014, p. 5), pupils considered that using social media by their lecturers would be amusing.

As a result of the usage of social networks in the teaching and learning processes, researchers have identified a number of student benefits in relation to learning outcomes. Yunus et al., (2013, p. 1), students who used social media sites like Facebook and Twitter boosted their vocabulary and improved their writing abilities. Asad et al. (2012, p. 10) and Musah (2015, p. 1) claim that the sharing of assignments, resources, and discussions about academic work and other subjects on social networks enhanced students' adherence to deadlines. According to studies by Salvation and Adzharuddin (2015, p. 78) and Musah (2015, p. 12), incorporating social media into instruction enhances students' academic performance. Menkhoff et al. (2015, p. 1) and Wheeler (2010, p. 1), stated that social media platforms, such as Twitter and blogs, allow both instructors and students to actively and

promptly participate in educational activities. These findings are corroborated by Dzvapatsva et al. (2014, p. 15) who believe that social media platforms can boost conventional teaching and learning approaches in higher education institutions.

Additionally, Menkhoff et al. (2015, p. 16) found that Twitter provides students with "a voice, to be more engaged, and to interact more freely with both their peers and the instructor via knowledge sharing and Twitter discussions." This finding came from an investigation into the tweeting habits of undergraduate students at certain Singaporean university. This means that traditional teaching systems' expectant hostages are increasingly given the option to give instructors immediate feedback, a factor addressed by (Schroeder & Greenbowe, 2009). Additionally, as noted by De Wever et al. (2015, p. 42) and Terrell et al. (2011), social media is filling pedagogical gaps in higher education by enabling open publishing, new communication styles and texts, expressing personal identity and experience, co-creation and collaboration, and content management. According to Calli et al. (2013), users' perceptions of the value of the content were significantly influenced by its efficacy. According to Lee and Faulkner (2011), the inquiry model of e-learning has highlighted material richness as an extrinsic component. They also noticed that scenarios and examples actively improve learner motivation, resulting to superior learner outcomes. As a result, social media offer a multitude of knowledge in diverse formats, and the different points of view help pupils grasp things better.

2.5 Research gap

The following literature review on student use of social media addresses a wide range of themes, including the connection between social media and academic outcomes, learning styles and best practices, and student participation online. Additionally, some prior research like Chugh & Ruhi (2018); Price et al. (2018), have looked at how social

media networks alter students' views regarding sharing and maintaining educational resources in a collaborative manner. Even though a large body of research has demonstrated beneficial relationships between the use of social media platforms and students' learning processes, there is still little or no data on the social media platforms that University students use most frequently and how they use them in especially in Uganda, leaving a gap that makes this study essential.

2.6 Theoretical Framework.

In examining how media influences audience behaviour, it is important to draw on theoretical frameworks that explain both the effects of media exposure and the motivations behind media use. The Cultivation Theory and the Uses and Gratifications Theory were selected for this study because they offer complementary perspectives. Cultivation Theory helps to understand the long-term effects of media content on perceptions and beliefs, while Uses and Gratifications Theory focuses on why individuals actively select and engage with specific media to satisfy personal needs. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive lens for analysing both the influence of media and the audience's role in shaping their own media experiences.

2.6.1 The Uses and Gratification Theory.

The last several decades have seen a genuine shift in our lives because of technology. One of the major shifts have possibly taken place in media in society were basically non-existent before the industrial revolution. However, as technology developed further, social media styles evolved, and media spread in all directions. Every decade of the 20th century saw the introduction of novel theories in the field of social media (Koblin, 2010, p. 26). The Uses and Gratification Approach was first developed by Elihu Katz who claimed that people consume the different forms of social media for their own advantages. The

viewpoint started to take shape in the early 1970s as Katz, together with his two collaborators Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch maintained refining the concept. Because it ran opposite to past theories that presupposed the audience to be a passive bunch, this thought was cutting edge. According to the Uses and Gratifications Approach, the audience is engaged and actively seeks out particular media in order to reach particular outcomes or gratifications that suit their own needs (Bryant & Miron, 2004, p. 662). These two assumptions about social media users are the cornerstone of the uses and gratifications theory it portrays media consumers as being proactive in the social media platforms they choose to utilize. From this angle, social media use by people is not passive. The uses and gratifications theory apply to this study because according to Blumler and Katz, (1974, p.9) audiences have a free will to choose which medium to utilize for their media needs for example, for communication needs or information needs. In addition, uses & gratification theory provides the uses & dependence mass model suggesting that the individual level of reliance is exploiting media (Blumler & Katz, 1974, p.9).

Individuals/students depend on their most favoured social media platforms to gratify their media needs including communication, information gathering and sharing, social interactions among others. On the other hand, Raacke and John (2008) remark that uses, and gratifications theory posits that the audiences deliberately choose various media platforms like Facebook according to their gratifications.

2.7.3 Cultivation theory

Gerbner (1960) proposed cultivation theory in the 1960s as part of the Cultural Indicators Project to examine the influence of television on viewers. Cultivation theory states that long-term exposure to media influences how the consumers of media perceive the world and conduct themselves. The cultivation hypothesis suggests that the more individuals in this example students utilize social platforms; the more likely they are to adopt

a vision of reality that is closer to these platforms' depiction of reality (Van Dijck, 2013, p.507). Therefore, cultivation theory is a communication theory that proposes that repeated exposure to media messages, over time, can mold individuals' perceptions of social reality and impact their attitudes and behaviours. According to this idea, media material provides a "cultivation" of common understandings and attitudes among audiences, encouraging people to adopt certain beliefs, values, and expectations about the world around them (Gerbner&Gross, 1976, p. 1).

The idea implies that heavy users of media are more likely to be influenced by the media texts, as they are exposed to them more frequently and over longer periods of time than lighter users. This idea suggests that exposure to media over time can affect individuals' views of reality and influence their attitudes and behaviours. The Cultivation theory was used in the study as a subsidiary theory to bolster the primary theory. It analyses how students' regular use of their preferred social media platforms could grow their opinions or values related to information communication technology in society (Iyengar & Kinder, 2010). In the context of the research topic of assessing the social media platforms students use most and how they use them, cultivation theory could be applied to investigate how students' frequent use of social media platforms may be cultivating certain beliefs or values related to communication, technology, or society. For example, repeated exposure to social media platforms that prioritize self-presentation, personal branding, and quick satisfaction may cause students to embrace values of self-promotion, image maintenance, and online validation-seeking (van Dijck, 2013, p. 507). According to Iyengar and Kinder (2010), kids may develop views of cynicism, skepticism, and indifference toward social and political issues as a result of frequent exposure to news media that highlight sensationalism, conflict, and negativity.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methods that were used in conducting the research. It outlines the procedures for carrying out the study. The chapter comprises the selection of the appropriate sample size as well as the study design, environment, and data sources. Additionally, it covers sample techniques, study variables, data collection instruments and methodologies, the validity and reliability of instruments, data processing, data analysis, ethical issues, and the study's limits. Throughout this chapter, all these methodological approaches are discussed in line with the aims and objectives of the study.

3.2 Research design

This study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the social media platforms most commonly used by university students and how these platforms support their academic needs. The design was considered appropriate because it allows for a systematic description of patterns, behaviours, and perceptions within a specific population without manipulating variables.

A qualitative approach was employed to collect data from university students regarding their preferred social media platforms, patterns of usage, and the extent to which these platforms contribute to academic engagement. The descriptive design enabled the researcher to analyse trends and relationships between platform usage and academic needs, thereby providing evidence-based insights into how social media can be effectively utilized in higher education contexts.

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), qualitative research includes designs, techniques and measures that do not produce discrete numerical data. They state that more often the data is in the form of words rather than numbers. Furthermore, the researcher used an explanatory research design for the study. This design is developed to explore a phenomenon that had not been studied before or had not been well explained previously in a proper manner (Lelisa, 2018, p. 13). Explanatory research design is a form of qualitative research that focuses on the study of an individual's lived experiences, which this study squarely falls under, and is the most appropriate method when exploring life experiences or phenomena that are sensitive or socially complex (Creswell, 2013). Its main intention was to provide details about where to find a small amount of information (Patrick & Ugo, 2019, p. 20).

This design also helped in ascertaining how and why a phenomenon occurred and further predicted future occurrences. Lastly, it helped in investigating patterns and trends in the existing data that haven't been previously investigated (Leedey & Ormrod, 2013, p. 17). The design has been used in various studies to explore the relationships between variables and provide a deeper understanding of complex phenomena (Patrick & Ugo, 2019, p. 22). Therefore, in the context of this research on assessing the social media platforms students use most, and how they use them, an explanatory research design was used to identify, explore and explain the relationships between different variables that may affect students' social media use habits and behaviors. The researcher used a case study of Mbarara University of Science and Technology to ascertain the social media platforms that students use most and how they use them. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2013, p. 141), case studies are conducted when a researcher needs to understand or explain a phenomenon. And interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data from the selected students of the Faculty of Business and Management Science and other four Faculties that included Faculty

of Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Applied Science and Technology, Faculty of Computing and Informatics of Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Uganda.

3.3 Research approach

The qualitative research approach was used in the study, and it refers to the understanding of human beings' experiences (Creswell 2017, p. 154). The study used a qualitative approach, which not only employs different knowledge claims, but also different strategies of inquiry and data collection methods and analyses as portrayed by (Creswell 2017, p. 154). In addition, according to Gunter (2000), qualitative researchers develop knowledge by primarily collecting verbal data through intensive study of instances, and consequently subjecting these data to analytic induction. Qualitative study was conducted using focus group discussions (FGDs) with the selected students from the Faculty of Business and Management Science and other four Faculties that included Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Applied Science and Technology, Faculty of Computing and Informatics, in Mbarara University of Science and Technology as well as the identified key informants from the university. The justification for using a qualitative research approach was that it provided a more contextualized understanding of the topic under study. It also enabled exploring students' media use behaviors from a participant-centered perspective, and to gain rich and detailed insights into their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes towards social media for academic purposes (Patrick & Ugo, 2019, p. 22).

3.4 Study population,

According to Wimmer and Dominick (2014, p. 92), research study population refers to a group of class of subjects, variables, concepts, or phenomena from which a sample to be studied is drawn. More so, Ahuja (2009) defines the study population as all people or items with the characteristic one wishes to understand, which may be tangible or

intangible. The study population is important in this study since it will be used to determine the sample size for the study. In this case, the researcher aimed at assessing the social media platforms that university students use most and how they use them for Mbarara University of Science and Technology. The researcher purposively selected the Faculty of Business and Management Science and other four Faculties that included Faculty of Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Applied Science and Technology, Faculty of Computing and Informatics for the study and the faculties that equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to understand the complexities of social media platforms, their societal implications, and the ways in which they influence students in their academics.

3.5 Sample size determination

Creswell (2017, p. 1) defines sample size as a subgroup, which is a representative of the target population from whom the findings can be generalized about the population. Additionally, Wimmer and Dominick (2014, p. 92) also define sample size as a subset of the population that is representative of the entire population. It is concerned with the selection of a subset of individuals from within a population to make an inference (estimate characteristics) of the whole population. The study employed a purposive sampling technique to select participants from the Faculty of Business and Management Sciences and other four Faculties that included Faculty of Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Applied Science and Technology, Faculty of Computing and Informatics. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which participants are deliberately selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the study (Tongco, 2007). This approach was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to identify and recruit students who possessed adequate knowledge and experience regarding social media use within the university context. By selecting information-rich participants, the study ensured the collection of relevant and meaningful data aligned with the research objectives.

Furthermore, the study involved a total sample of 80 student respondents drawn from different faculties of the university. Of these, 22 were from the Faculty of Business and Management Sciences, 19 from the Faculty of Science, 15 from the Faculty of Medicine, 12 from the Faculty of Applied Science and Technology, and 12 from the Faculty of Computing and Informatics. In addition to the student respondents, the study also interviewed three key informants from the university.

3.6 Sampling techniques and procedure

This researcher employed a purposive sampling procedure to conduct interviews of the Key Informants to select the respondents/participants. This procedure enabled the researcher to Select the participants with knowledge and experience related to the research objectives of the study. Tongco (2007) defines purposive sampling as a type of non-probability sampling that is most effective when one needs to study a certain domain within the participants. Tongco explains that for the researcher to minimize error, the sample size has to be bigger, and diminishing returns can sometimes set in if the size is too big.

Therefore, in this sampling procedure, the participants (Interviewee A, B, and C) were selected by virtue of their knowledge and experience in the context of the research study on ascertaining the most used social media platforms by university students and how they use these platforms.

Furthermore, for the Focus Group Discussions, the study used the Snowball sampling method. Snowball sampling is one of the most popular methods of sampling in qualitative research, central to which is the characteristic of networking and referral (Hansen et al., 1998, p. 265). Baltar & Brunet (2012, p.57) state that the researcher usually starts with a small number of participants who fit the research criteria and upon agreement, these initial participants recommend other participants that fit the criteria and are invited to become part

of the research study. Therefore, this kind of sampling method enabled the researcher to depend on the enrolled research participants to assist in identifying other potential subjects for the study.

During the initiation of the study, the researcher proposed conducting the focus group discussions, each consisting of ten respondents from the selected faculties. However, during the execution of the study, the respondents went beyond the planned number in each focus group discussion. Out of the 80 respondents who participated in the study from the selected Faculties, the following faculties were engaged in the study. FGDs were selected per faculty and coded with various numbers ranging from 1, 2, 3, etc. Coding is referred to as labelling of the words or phrases that represent important themes in each response. These labels can be words, phrases, or numbers (Williams & Moser, 2019, p.45). In this case, the researcher coded the FGDs using numbers from 1 to 8.

A total of 8 FGDs were selected, and below is a summary presented in a table form of each group engaged in, with the number of respondents per faculty.

Name of the Faculty	Number of FGDs selected and coded using numbers 1, 2, 3 etc...	Number of respondents per FGD
Faculty of Business and Management Science	2 (Groups 1 and 2)	12 respondents per group
<u>Faculty of Sciences</u>	2 (Groups 3 and 4)	12 and 9 respondents respectively

Faculty of Medicine	2 (Groups 5 and 6)	10 and 12 respondents respectively
<u>Faculty of Applied Science and Technology</u>	1 (Group - 7)	13 respondents
<u>Faculty of Computing and informatics</u>	1 (Group - 8)	12 respondents

Table 1: Summary of the distribution of FGDs per faculty.

3.7 Data collection methods

The study aimed to assess the social media platforms university students use most and how they use them. For the validity and reliability of the research results, data were collected from different sources. This form of data collection is referred to as triangulation. Flick (2018, p. 527) defines Triangulation as the use of a variety of data sources, including time, space and persons and uses evidence from different sources to corroborate the findings in a study. collection instruments.

3.7.1 In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews are a one-on-one interview approach. Collecting data using interviews gives the most direct and straightforward approach to gathering detailed and rich data regarding a particular phenomenon, as stated by Jensen (1982, p. 240). Additionally, Boyce & Neale (2006) define in-depth interviewing as a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation. In this case, the instrument of data collection was used as an in-depth interview guide, which refers to a set of structured questions in which answers will be recorded by the interviewer (Boyce & Neale, 2006). The researcher designed and developed the structured interview guide tailored to the research questions, and the guide also included the content form for the respondents. The

researcher arranged for the appointments and collected the data from the participants at the agreed time.

The researcher also used a notebook and pen to capture all the feedback from the respondents (Key Informants). The interviews were conducted face-to-face.

The University student leaders from the faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Business and Management Science, Faculty of Sciences, Faculty of Applied Science and Technology, Faculty of Computing and Informatics, these were selected based on their knowledge of experiences they hold to provide their perspectives on social media platforms use most and how they use them, and the impact these platforms have on their user's academic performance. These experts provided insights into the broader trends and implications of social media usage among university students, as well as offering recommendations for best practices among others, as elaborated in detail in the next chapter.

3.7.2 Focus Group Discussion Guide

Plummer (2017, p.297) explains Focus Group Discussion as the focus group is a method of data collection where the researcher engages a group of 6 –10 participants to discuss issues related to the research question. The FGDs were used for this study to collect data as per the study research questions because this approach is an efficient method of gathering the views/opinions/responses from many participants at one time with the moderator. It further allows gathering data on attitudes, values and opinions (Richard & Powell, 1996, p.499). The instrument was comprised of broad areas of inquiry based on the research questions to solicit information on the social media platforms university students use most and how they use them. This enabled the researcher to generate and evaluate data from different subgroups of a population (Faculty of Business and Management Sciences, and other four Faculties that included Faculty of Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Applied Science and Technology, Faculty of Computing and Informatics) study area.

During the initiation of the study, the researcher had proposed conducting the focus group discussions, each consisting of ten respondents from the selected faculties. However, on executing the study research – social media platforms students use most and how they use them, the planned number per group went beyond as planned in each focus group discussion. The group discussions were coded using numbers ranging from 1, 2, 3 etc. Coding is referred to as the labelling of the words or phrases that represent important themes in each response. These labels can be words, phrases, or numbers (Williams & Moser, 2019, p.45). The researcher selected 8 FGDs and coded from focus group discussion 1 to group 8. The following summary table highlights each FGD engaged in, with the number of respondents per group in a faculty.

Name of the Faculty	Number of FGDs selected and coded using numbers 1, 2, 3 etc...	Number of respondents per FGD	Total number of the respondents per faculty
Faculty of Business and Management Science	2 (Groups 1 and 2)	12 respondents per group	24
Faculty of Sciences	2 (Groups 3 and 4)	12 and 9 respondents respectively	21
Faculty of Medicine	2 (Groups 5 and 6)	10 and 12 respondents respectively	22
Faculty of Applied Science and Technology	1 (Group - 7)	13 respondents	13

Faculty of Computing and informatics	1 (Group - 8)	12 respondents	12
--------------------------------------	---------------	----------------	----

Table 2: FGDs engaged with the number of respondents per group in a faculty.

3.8 Data analysis

To effectively analyze and present the findings, the researcher kept in mind the four specific objectives of the study to provide a comprehensive understanding of the social media platforms university students use most and how they use them, their experiences with these platforms, and recommendations for optimizing their usage for educational purposes. Qualitative data were gathered using an interview guide to conduct interviews with the key informants and focus group discussions were administered purposively to the selected participants from the selected faculties. Morrow (2005, p.250) advises that studies that employ qualitative interviews are guaranteed to achieve a detailed data collection. Thus, Key informant interviews were engaged because they offer an opportunity to the researcher to gather detailed information/opinions, knowledge and lived experiences in relation to the research questions/objectives.

Furthermore, qualitatively, the data were analyzed thematically. In thematic analysis, the researcher reads and familiarizes with the data, manually gives codes to the data, develops themes, reviews the themes, defines and names the themes, and finally produces the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.77). Data analysis was developed into a continuous process involving ongoing reflection on the data gathered, asking analytical questions, and creating notes during the course of the study. This approach of conducting the thematic data analysis was guided by A six-step process. It began with the data management phase and moved through the generative phase, interpretative phase, representational phase, and theorizing phase.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p.77-101), a six-step process is familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. This process was used to analyze this qualitative data through starting with organizing and getting the raw data ready for analysis. However, to clarify and triangulate the questionnaires that the researcher found unclear, he referred to field notes he took while conducting interviews and reviewing FGDs' documents. Transcription was done every evening for the interviews conducted each day and FGDs. To have a broad understanding of the data gathered during fieldwork and to consider its overall significance in relation to the study's main goal, the researcher examined all of the transcribed data. Thus, the researcher was able to analyze the opinions of the participants as well as the manner in which they expressed their thoughts. The results of the investigation were categorized into themes.

3.9 Reliability and Validity of Instruments

Reliability and validity are ways of demonstrating and communicating the rigor of research processes and the trustworthiness of research findings (Roberts, P., & Priest, H., 2006, p.41). To ensure reliability in qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness is crucial. Therefore, the researcher referred to previous research studies on the topic to ensure that the findings have context. For validity, the researcher endeavored to abide by the scientific rigor of data collection and analysis by recording the group discussions and interviews. To address the issue of trustworthiness, multiple methods of data collection (triangulation), focus group discussions, and intensive interviews were used to allow for an in-depth examination of the topic from various perspectives.

3.10 Ethical considerations

To fulfil ethical considerations desired in the School of Business, the researcher developed an introductory letter and consent forms entailing the aim of the study,

seeking consent from the respondents to voluntarily participate in the study. For the purpose of this research study, the introductory letter was presented to the class coordinators from the selected faculties from the university who assisted in gathering the respondents for the focus group discussions.

Additionally, the privacy of the respondents was maintained, as well as avoiding issues of plagiarism and falsification of data. All the work of other scholars used in this research was referenced as a measure of following ethical academic practices. Participants were also given the chance to participate voluntarily. Furthermore, participants' informed consent was ensured, explaining the nature and purpose of the study, as well as the risks and benefits of participation, and allowing participants to voluntarily choose whether to participate.

Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured to protect the identity of participants and ensure that their responses or personal information are not disclosed without their consent. This involved using codes to protect participant identity and keeping all data secure and confidential. Finally, the study avoided reinforcing any stereotypes or biases about particular groups in society or has any unintended negative consequences on the broader community.

3.11 Limitations of the study

Theofanidis & Fountouki (2018, p.155) assert that limitations in research are issues arising and are beyond measure for the researcher but can affect the methodology and analysis of data. One of the major limitations was the time and attention of research participants (respondents) owing to their busy schedules and limited attention span.

CHAPTER FOUR PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS.

4.0 Introduction

The analysis's findings are presented in this chapter in accordance with the study's objectives. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the most popular social media sites and the ways in which students utilize them. The analysis starts with a presentation of the respondents' personal traits before presenting the results in accordance with the objectives and research questions. The study's objectives were to:

- i. To determine which social media sites are most popular among university students.
- ii. To explore the unique ways in which university students utilize the social media platforms for.
- iii. To investigate how University students could use social media platforms for educational purposes.
- iv. To advise how university students might successfully use their most favoured social media sites for educational purposes.

4.1.1 Qualities of the Respondents

For this study, the sample's gender, age, faculty, course, and year were deemed significant characteristics.

Gender

In light of this, determining the respondents' gender distribution was of importance to the researcher. The analysis's findings revealed that, of the 80 respondents, 42 were men (52.5%) and 38 were women (47.5%).

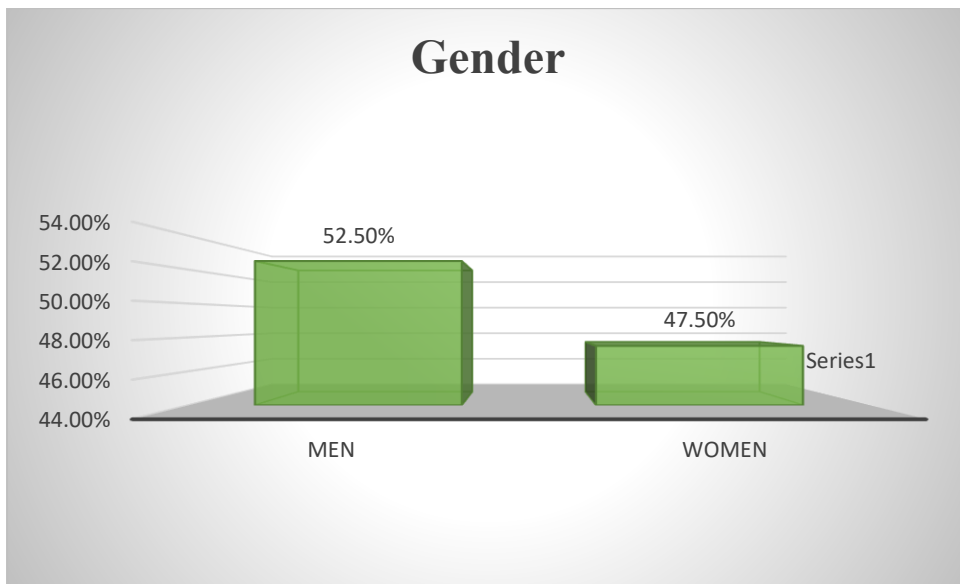


Figure 1: The respondents' gender distribution
Age

Additionally, as shown below, the study's results showed that 68 (85%) of the respondents were between the ages of 15 and 25, 10 (12.5%) were between the ages of 25 and 35, and 2 (2.5%) were between the ages of 35 and 40.

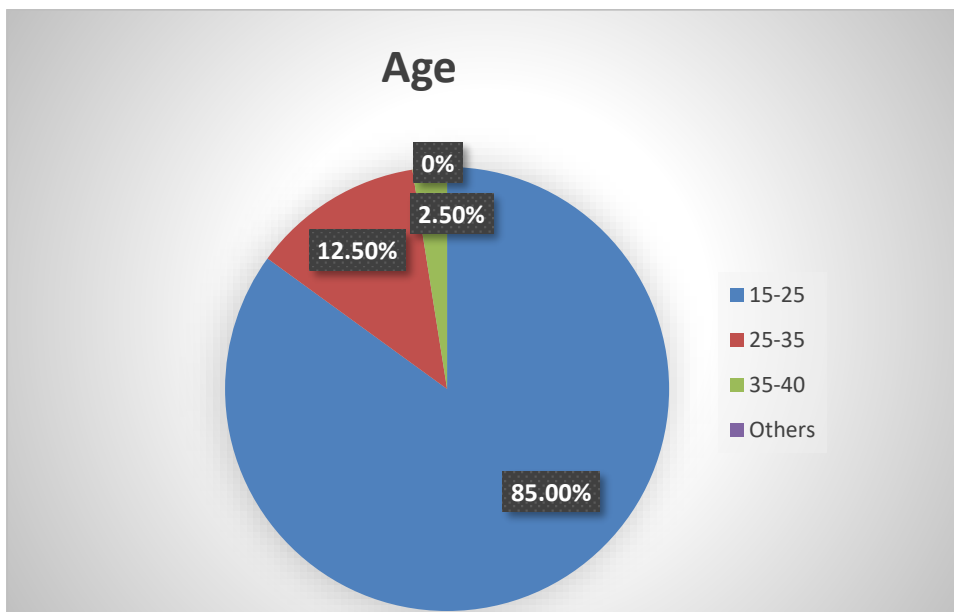


Figure 2: The respondents' age group
Faculty.

The study's results showed that 24 (27.5%) of the participants were from the Faculty of Business and Management Science, followed by 21 (23.75%) from the Faculty of Science, 22 (18.75%) from the Faculty of Medicine, 13 (15%) from the Faculty of Applied Science and Technology, and 12 (15%) from the Faculty of Computing and Informatic.

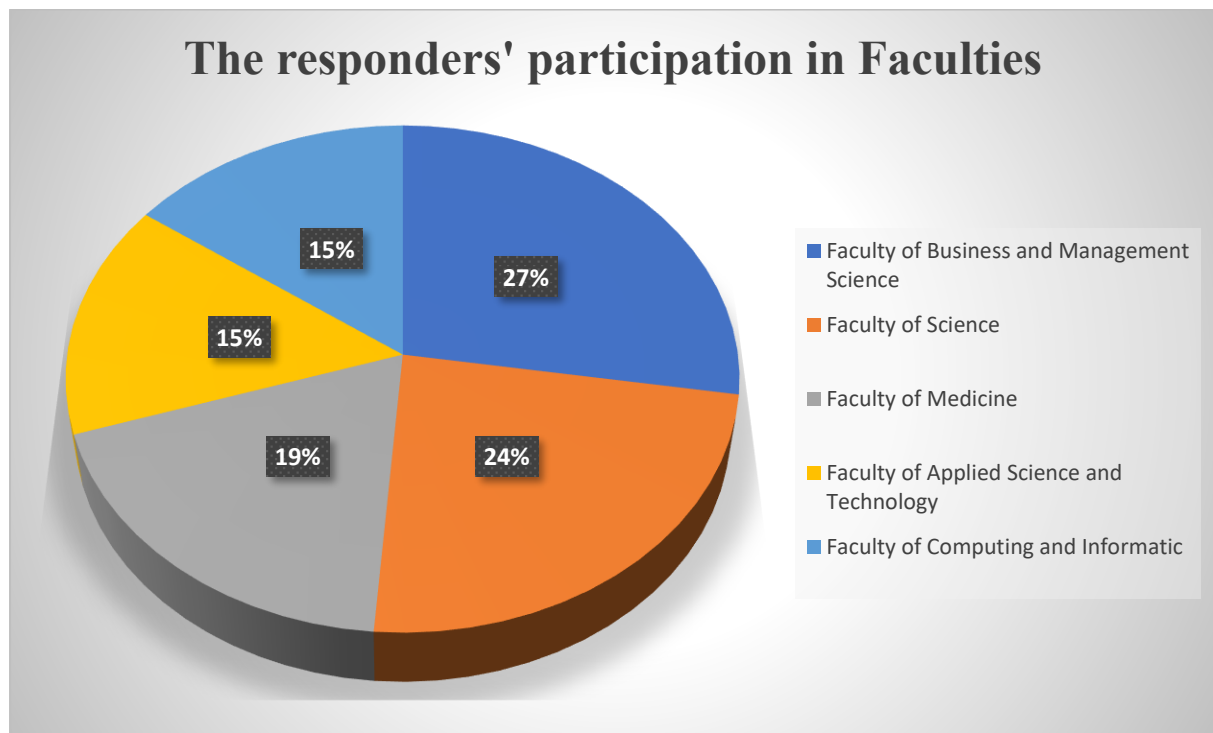


Figure 3: The respondents' faculty members' names
The various programs and the year that participants were enrolled.

Respondents were from a variety of departments and programs within the chosen faculties mentioned above, and they differed according to the year of research. Fifteen respondents were in their fourth year of study at the Faculty of Medicine, twelve were in their second year at the Faculty of Applied Science and Technology, twenty-two were from the Faculty of Business and Management, twelve were in their third year at the Faculty of Computing and Informatics, and nineteen were from the Faculty of Science.

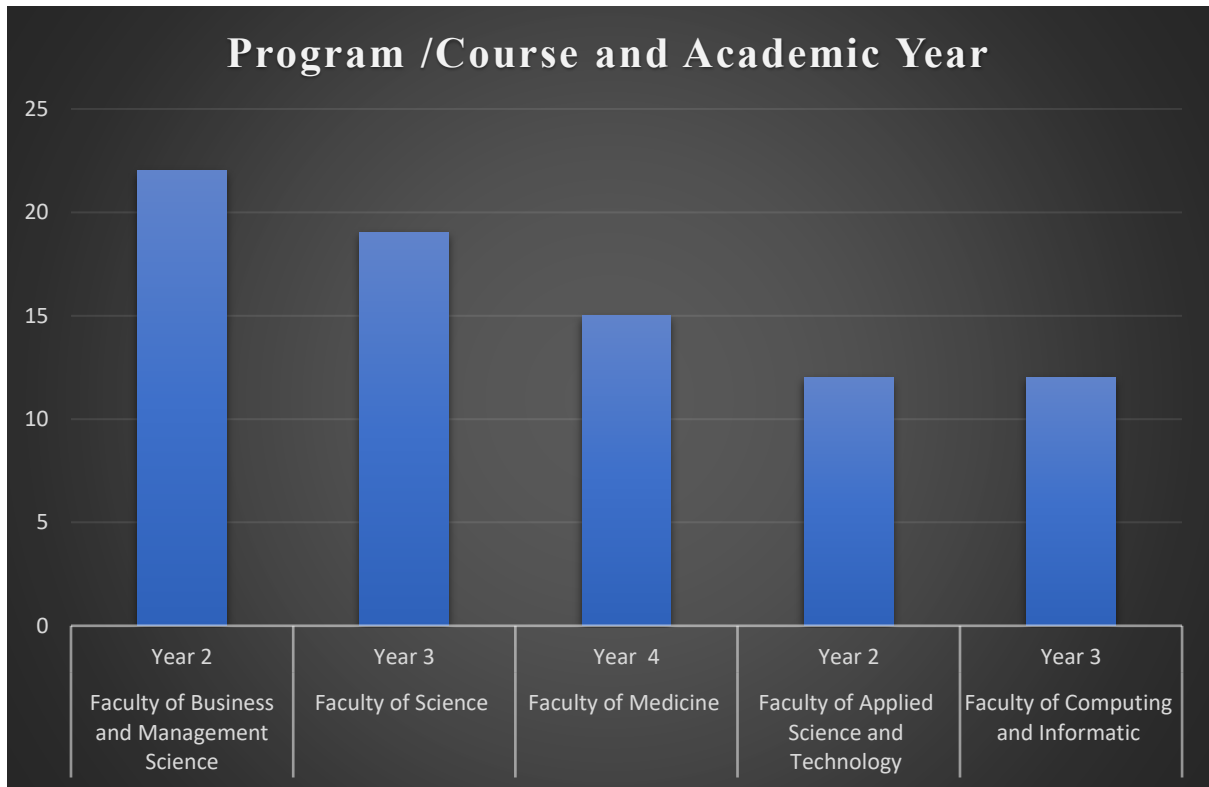


Figure 4: Year of enrolment and program category

4.1.2 RQ1: The most popular and favoured social networking sites among university students.

The study's primary goal was to determine and examine the social media sites that college students use most frequently. This required learning about students' preferences and identifying the platforms, they use most frequently. Through discussion groups and questionnaires, the study discovered that students utilize a wide range of social media platforms, such as YouTube, Wikipedia, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter.

Additionally, the results showed that students utilize their chosen platforms for a variety of purposes, including social connections, education/learning, communication, entertainment, and news events. During the conversations, the respondents emphasized that their peers mostly utilize Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp for social interactions and communication.

The respondents also mentioned that learning collaboration and group work are made easier by online libraries that provide a variety of academic resources. Students were able to collaborate remotely thanks to platforms like Zoom rooms. Furthermore, platforms such as WhatsApp, Google Meet, zoom rooms, news websites, and blogs were cited by the respondents as quick and easy ways for individuals to communicate and exchange information while also promoting conversations on a variety of subjects. They also talked about how websites like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok give children the chance to express themselves creatively and learn from tutorials.

Key informants were interviewed, and the study's conclusions shed light on the many social media sites that university students use and the factors that influence their choices. According to Interviewee A, "Students value easily accessible platforms for academic needs and communication. Students prefer platforms like WhatsApp because it is easily accessible for communicating with peers and lecturers." Additionally, students utilize their favourite social media sites, like Google Meets and Wikipedia, to obtain scholarly articles and e-books quickly (Key informant Interview, Respondent A, 22nd 03, 2024). Interviewee B came to a similar conclusion when she said, "Students' experiences and behaviours may vary according to their needs and purposes for using their preferred social media platforms." Social media sites like Google, YouTube, and WhatsApp are frequently used for research and communication. (Key informant Interview, Respondent B, 23rd 03, 2024).

The results of the mini-survey, which used questionnaires to gather respondent demographics, showed the different social networking sites that students frequently visit, as seen below.

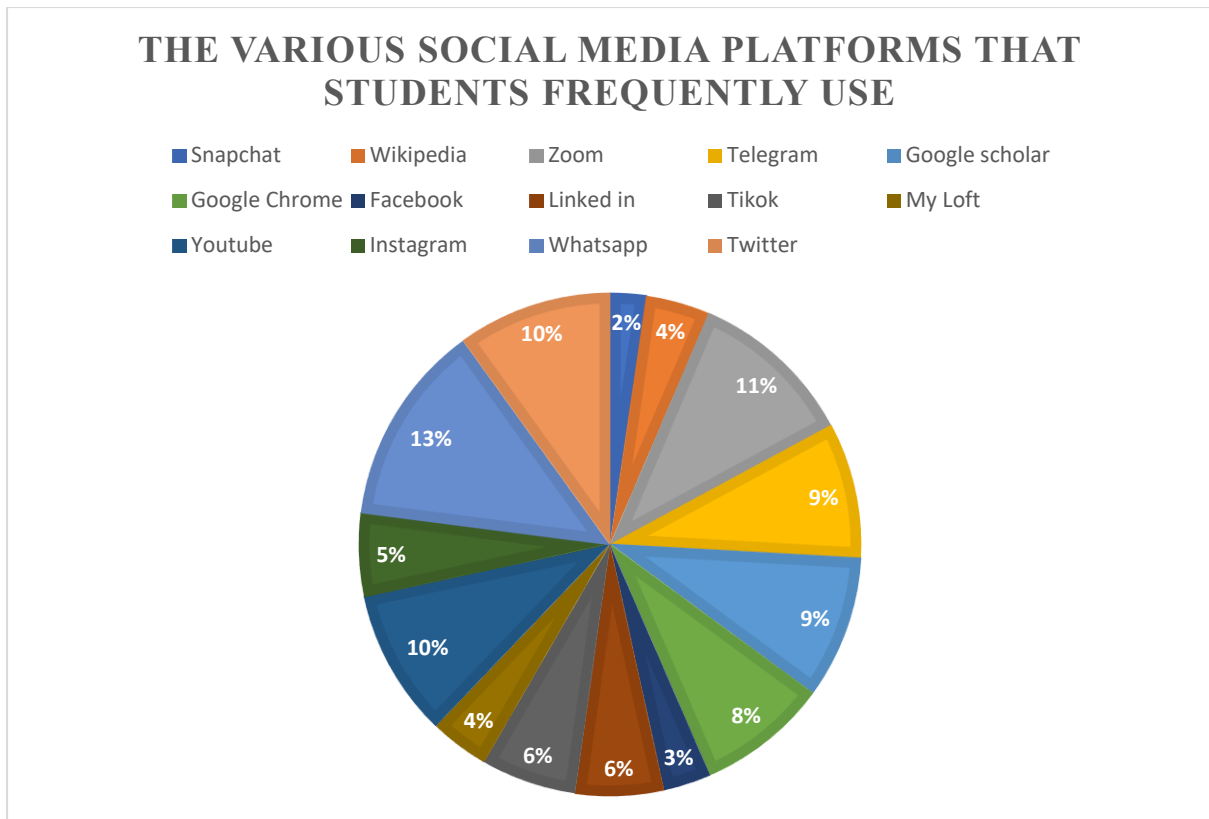


Figure 5: Frequent use of social media.

The results show that students' preferences for their social media platforms are influenced by their capacity to offer quick and easily accessible sources of learning information, improve communication between students and their lecturers, provide news and current affairs, and participate in class discussions. The decision for social media platforms is largely influenced by academic materials. Learning materials, research articles, and educational resources are easily accessible through online libraries and academic platforms. The respondents emphasized that students take the platform's features and purpose into consideration while choosing the best social media sites for their academic needs. Because they provide certain characteristics that are appropriate for academic needs, platforms like Google Meets and WhatsApp group call conversations are advantageous. Others took accessibility and availability into account. Respondent B from the fourth focus group from the faculty of sciences specifically explained that "some social media platforms are more feasible than others because they are always available and accessible at any time on

the phones, laptops, tablets, for example. "YouTube and WhatsApp. "I make sure to check the viability and accessibility of the platform across different devices, allowing me to work and access my academic resources from anywhere," respondent B continued (Focused Group Discussion, Respondent B).

Frequency of usage

Results under the same goal showed that students regularly use these sites on a daily basis. Social media platforms are used by 22 (28.5%) respondents three times a day, 7 (8.75%) respondents twice a day, 4 (6%) respondents once a day, and 47 (56.75%) respondents once a week.

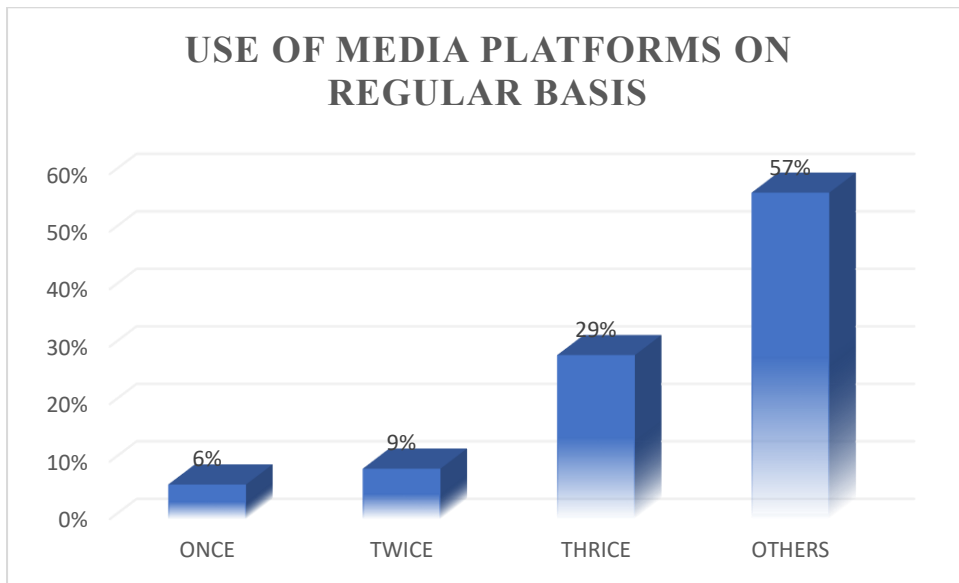


Figure 6: Respondents' frequency of media platform usage

Reasons why some platforms are preferred over others:

The following explanations for university students' preferences for social media sites over others were found based on the results of the focus group discussions:

Availability of scholarly resources Online libraries and other social media sites offer a range of educational resources. Platforms that provide simple access to intellectual information, instructional tools, and research publications are preferred by students.

Cooperation and group work: University students favour social media platforms that support cooperation and group work. Students can engage on group assignments, collaborate remotely, and successfully interact with their classmates thanks to platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet.

Information and news consumption: Students utilize social media sites to keep up with news, trends, and current affairs. Students may stay informed and participate in debates on a variety of topics thanks to platforms including news websites, blogs, social media (like Twitter), and messaging apps (like WhatsApp).

Personal expression and creativity: Students choose social media sites that allow them to express themselves and be creative. Students can showcase their skills and interests by creating and sharing material on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. These arguments emphasize the significance of academic resources, collaborative tools, information availability, and individual expression as critical elements impacting university students' social media platform selections.

Effects of university students' favourite social media platforms

Positive impacts:

Material access: Social media sites give students quick access to a wealth of material, enabling them to learn more and keep current on a range of interesting subjects.

Improved communication and collaboration: Students can work together and communicate efficiently regardless of where they are physically located thanks to platforms

like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet. This encourages teamwork and a sense of community by facilitating group projects, conversations, and knowledge exchange.

Availability of academic resources: Students can access a multitude of scholarly publications through platforms that allow access to academic resources, such as online libraries and research databases. This boosts their academic endeavours and improves their educational experience.

Possibilities for self-expression and creativity: Students can express themselves, show off their skills, and interact with people who have similar interests by using platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. This encourages the growth of individual skills, inventiveness, and self-assurance.

Negative impacts:

Distraction and information overload: Students may find it difficult to sort and prioritize pertinent content due to the volume of information on social media sites.

Distraction and decreased productivity may follow from this.

Cyberbullying and online harassment: Social media sites can serve as havens for these behaviours, which can have detrimental effects on the wellbeing and mental health of students. To provide a secure online environment, these problems must be addressed and mitigated.

Security and privacy issues: Using social media platforms brings up security and privacy issues. Students should be mindful of the privacy regulations and security measures put in place by these platforms and use caution when disclosing personal information.

Potential for addiction and time management problems: Overuse of social media can result in addiction and have a detrimental impact on students' time management abilities. Keeping a balance between their online activities and other facets of their lives is crucial for kids. These effects demonstrate the complexity of social media platforms, highlighting their beneficial contributions while simultaneously increasing awareness of the difficulties and possible drawbacks related to their use.

During the FGDs, the respondents reported several techniques the University could use to help students use social media platforms for learning.

Here are some tactics that colleges could use to successfully use social media platforms for instructional purposes based on the outcomes of the discussions:

Training and assistance: The university should give instructors and students thorough instruction and assistance on how to use social media sites for learning. Workshops, online tutorials, and other materials that showcase best practices and offer advice on making the most of these platforms' features and functionalities can fall under this category.

Curriculum integration of social and technological learning: To improve student engagement and learning results, incorporate social media platforms into the curriculum. Create tasks, projects, and exercises that call for students to use these platforms for research, collaboration, and presentation. The courses' learning objectives should be in line with this integration.

Clearly defined rules and regulations: Clearly define rules and regulations pertaining to the usage of social media platforms for instructional purposes. This can include standards for academic integrity, privacy concerns, and proper online conduct. Students should be informed of these rules, and they should get regular updates and reminders.

Personalization and customization: Motivate students to tailor their social media accounts to meet their unique learning objectives. This may entail using social media tools to maximize the learning experience, organizing content, and modifying settings. Students may feel more at ease and involved with the platforms if individualization is encouraged.

Collaboration and teamwork: Emphasize the importance of teamwork and group projects on social media platforms. Encourage students to form study groups, participate in online discussion boards and collaborate on projects using the available tools and characteristics. Use platforms that include features like shared document editing, video conferencing, and real-time messaging to promote collaboration and communication.

Evaluation and feedback: Make use of social media channels to give students timely evaluations and feedback. This can involve administering online tests or quizzes, giving feedback on student work and utilizing platforms for assignment submission. Enhancing student learning and encouraging ongoing development can be achieved by incorporating efficient feedback mechanisms into these platforms.

Conduct review and improvement: Use student feedback, surveys, and learning outcome assessments to routinely analyse the use of social media platforms for educational purposes. Utilize this input to pinpoint areas that want improvement and make the required changes to guarantee that the platforms are fulfilling students' needs and advancing their academic objectives. By putting these tactics into practice, academic institutions can fully utilize social media platforms for teaching, creating an atmosphere that encourages efficient learning, teamwork, and student participation.

4.1.3 RQ2: Effective use of social media platforms by students in the classroom.

The second goal was to find out how university students use these social media sites for academic purposes. This involved looking at how people use online learning tools,

participate in online forums and discussions, access course materials, and incorporate the platforms into their academic work. According to the findings, participants reported conducting research and gathering data for their studies using social media libraries, academic search engines (like Google Scholar), and internet databases. Additionally, they emphasized how team members may collaborate and work on projects using file-sharing platforms and collaboration tools like Google Docs and Google Sheets.

In order to share ideas and get clarification, participants also stated participating in online forums and conversations utilizing tools like Zoom, Google Meet, Facebook discussion groups, and What's-app group. Additionally, they stressed the value of using YouTube, TitTok, and other learning management systems, such as the Mbarara University of Science and Technology E-Learning Environment (MUSTELE), to obtain lecture materials and recordings in order to improve their educational experience.

Using favourite social media sites for research and information gathering is part of integrating them into academic work. "Social media platforms have increased access to information," stated a participant in the first focus group from the Faculty of Applied Science and Technology. Students may easily access a multitude of academic tools and educational content through social media sites. This accessibility can improve students' educational experiences by giving them access to a variety of viewpoints, current knowledge, as well as a deeper comprehension of their topics. When utilized properly, these platforms can enhance research, expand knowledge, and boost students' academic achievement. (Respondent A, Focused Group Discussion,) Scholarly papers, research projects, and eBooks are frequently located through online databases, academic search engines, and social libraries.

Additionally, students use social media sites to organize and take notes. They can write and manage social notes, classify material, and maintain organization with the help of tools like Google Drive. Additionally, students ask the university to assist them in utilizing

the platforms of their choice. Respondent from the Faculty of Business and Management Science's Focus Group 1 provided evidence for this. "Universities can create online learning communities or discussion forums within the digital media platforms where students can interact, collaborate, and seek help from peers and instructions in order to foster a supportive online learning environment.

Participants went on to explain why they use their favourite social media platforms in the classroom: they are more adaptable and convenient, dependable and provide first-hand information, available, faster, and accessible, equipped with modified journalistic knowledge and skills, used as a source of reference, provide simplified information, allow interactions, provide feedback, favourable for attending online classes, and are user-friendly, as demonstrated below.

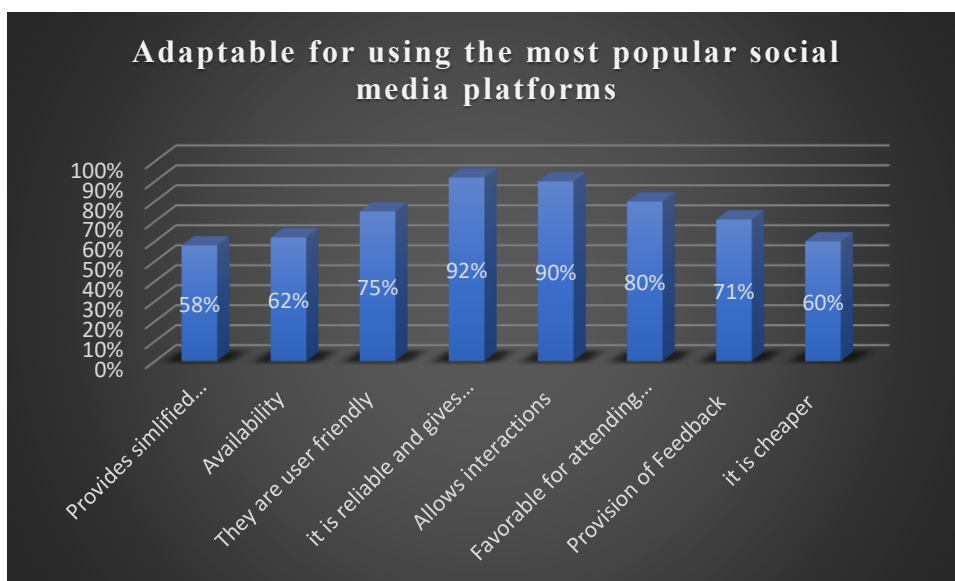


Figure 7: Adaptable for using the most popular social media platforms

The interviews provided insight into how university students use their favourite social media sites. "Students use these platforms for research, studying, and communication among peers," according to interviewee A from the Faculty of Computing and Informatics (Key informant interview, Respondent A). Respondent B also gave a

response that "provided perspectives on students using social media platforms for communication, research, and accessing information that improves their academic performance" (Key informant interview, Respondent B). By revealing how university students use their chosen social media sites for academic purposes, all of these insights were in line with Objective 2.

4.1.4 RQ3: Students' methods for utilizing their favourite social networking sites effectively in the classroom.

The participants discussed methods and techniques for making the most of their favourite social media platforms' educational advantages. They stressed the need of students striking a balance between online and offline learning, setting aside time for in-person conversations and offline reading. In order to stay focused and maximize available resources, respondents also emphasized the significance of establishing specific objectives and objectives and coordinating social media use with academic objectives. "I set objectives and deadlines by dividing tasks among my team members to emphasize their importance of active engagement, timely feedback, and open communication to ensure successful collaboration," said respondent D from the Faculty of Sciences during the seventh focus group discussion (Focus Group Discussion, respondent D).

The results also highlighted how important it is for students to improve their social literacy, which includes using sophisticated features of their preferred platforms and critically analysing online content. The importance of careful and focused usage, avoiding distractions from irrelevant content on social media was another topic covered by the attendees. They recommended participating in online academic forums and working together with peers in study groups to share ideas and expertise. Effective use of social media platforms can be promoted by sharing strategies and advice with peers. In order to assist others in identifying platforms that best fit their requirements and academic objectives, students can investigate

several platforms, test out their capabilities, and share their experiences in order to maximize academic work, participants also mentioned the importance of keeping up with platform upgrades and new features.

The findings from the interviews also provided advice and ideas on how university students might use their favourite social media sites for learning. While Interviewee B advised students to set objectives, maintain focus on academic work, and choose platforms that offer instructional content, Interviewee A from the Faculty of Computing and Informatics suggested that students prioritize the academic purpose of using these platforms and choose relevant and reliable platforms. From the standpoint of the main informatics, these suggestions from the interviews immediately address Objective 3 by offering university students tactics and direction to maximize the usage of their favourite social media platforms for their academic endeavours.

The results of the study "assessing the social media platforms used most of the university students and how they use them" were finally given in this chapter. The four study objectives that the researcher used to conduct the study were as follows: i) Identifying the various social media platforms that university students use most frequently; ii) Examining the specific purposes for which university students use the social media platforms; iii) Examining the experiences of university students using the social media platforms; and iv) Offering recommendations for how university students can use their most preferred social media platforms for educational purposes. The following is a summary of the main conclusions:

Table 3: Students' methods for utilizing their favourite social networking sites effectively in the classroom.

<p>The most popular social media sites among faculty students</p>	<p>How university students utilize the social media sites of their choice for</p>
<p>Wikipedia, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Google, TikTok, Snapchat, etc.</p>	<p>They communicate with their peers, look for information engages in social interactions, conduct academic research and conversations, find amusement, stay up to date on current events, and more using their preferred social media platforms.</p>

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.

5.1 Introduction.

Drawing from the qualitative study and using the Uses and Gratification theory as the main theory, the chapter discusses the significant findings on evaluating the social media sites that students use most frequently and how they use them.

5.2 .1 Platforms for social media Students at universities use most.

Finding and evaluating the many social media sites that university students most frequently use was one of the study's research objectives. Any type of material that is distributed via electronic devices is considered social media. Social media platforms, which provide a variety of learning opportunities, communication, cooperation, and information sharing, have become an essential part of our everyday lives and the lives of university students. According to the study's findings, respondents' preferences for the most popular platforms differed depending on their desires for satisfaction, accessibility, and experiences. WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Google, TikTok, Snapchat, and Wikipedia were the sites that the respondents indicated they used most frequently to satisfy their media needs.

The study used the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory, a well-established paradigm for explaining audiences' media consumption demands, to address this need (Katz et al., 1973, p. 509). Uses and gratifications theory, according to Katz et al. (1973), is a method for comprehending why and how people actively seek out particular media to meet particular media demands. Additionally, a fundamental tenet of the Uses and Gratification theory is that the wants and desires that drive media consumption and engagement differ based on the platform (Katz et al., 1973). As a result, the results of this study showed that students satisfy their media demands based on the social media platforms that they like, and the respondents are conscious of the reasons behind their use of social media. This result is consistent with Ellefsen's (2015, p. 160) explanation in his study that students view social media sites like

Facebook as their primary choice and hence devote a significant portion of their daily lives to using them. Facebook is nearly universally utilized by students in higher education, according to a study by Ellefsen (2015, p. 160) on Facebook use in Malaysia's major public universities.

5.2.2 Students' Use of the Social Media Sites They Prefer.

The study looked at the particular purposes for which university students use their favorite social media sites. In order to satisfy their social media demands, particularly academic ones, this involved looking into how these students incorporate their favorite social media sites, which include WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Wikipedia, Google Apps, TikTok, and Snapchat, among others. According to the analysis of the study's findings, the respondents combine their most popular social media platforms for a variety of purposes, including communication, education, entertainment, expanding social networks and interaction, finding and sharing information, and looking for news and current affairs updates. From this angle, the researcher's conclusions were in line with earlier studies that discovered several factors affect university students' use of social media.

The results showed that the respondents' preferred use of social media platforms was primarily driven by the requirement or necessity of communication. In terms of communication, the respondents stated that they primarily like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp since these platforms are rapid, accessible, and efficient at facilitating communication between students and instructors. This finding thus partially contradicts the findings of Alhazmi and Rahman (2013, p. 32), who found that Facebook has become one of the most popular social media platforms for communication between students and their peers and instructors in their study on Facebook usage in higher education institutions.

Additionally, this study found that 21% (16) and 74.4% (60) of respondents, respectively, preferred using Facebook and What's-App to meet their communication needs. Because of its widespread use, it has become a legitimate

communication tool, particularly among their teachers and other students. WhatsApp is a software that provides instant messaging on a variety of platforms, including desktops, tablets, and smartphones (Allagui, 2019, p.1-24). Launched in 2009, the app quickly became popular and widely used. WhatsApp is currently regarded as the most widely used media messaging service, particularly among younger people. Similarly, Menkhoff et al. (2015, p. 16) found that Facebook and WhatsApp encourage group interactions that give students a voice to interact more freely with their peers and instructors through knowledge sharing and academic discussions. This was discovered through an investigation on undergraduate students at some Singaporean universities.

Another noteworthy aspect that university students incorporate into their most popular social media sites are educational and learning support. According to the results, university students use their favorite social media platforms, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Wikipedia, Google Apps, TikTok, and Snapchat to research topics, obtain information, and keep up with news, trends, and current events. Because of manageability, the constraints of in-person classes, and the availability of conditions, they might follow educational pages, news sources, and experts to acquire pertinent class information for education and learning assistance needs. Similarly, students may develop values of self-promotion, image management, and online validation-seeking if they are repeatedly exposed to different social media platforms that emphasize self-presentation, personal branding, and quick satisfaction (V. Dijck, 2013, p.507). This result was found to be consistent with earlier studies that indicate long-term exposure to media content might affect people's attitudes, beliefs, and values toward the world around them as well as how they perceive reality. Cultivation theory was used in this instance because it suggests that excessive exposure to specific media messages might result in the development of a shared social reality, which may have an impact on people's behaviour and worldview (Gerbner &

Gross, 1976, p. 1). Respondents in the research reported integrating their most popular platforms for academic support in addition to learning support. This is accomplished by using internet platforms and educational websites that provide access to study materials, tutorials, learning tools, and online courses. In this instance, YouTube was identified as the site that students use the most for recorded video tutorial classes. Because of the ongoing improvements in internet technology, YouTube is becoming one of the potential social media platforms. By following their favourite trends, viewers can choose the video's material that interests them. With more than 2 billion subscribers worldwide, YouTube is one of the social media sites that has grown in popularity recently due to its use for educational reasons (YouTube Statistics, 2020).

According to the research currently in publication, a number of studies indicate that YouTube is the first multimedia platform that students use for their specific learning requirements (Mercer, 2011, p. 42). YouTube has become a popular platform for informal learning because it allows users to establish a social community of learners with others who share their interests or areas of expertise (Lee & Lehto, 2013, p.193). YouTube is the most widely utilized social media site in classrooms, according to Moran et al. (2012, p. 1). In contrast to this literature, respondents stated that, aside from amusement, they primarily use YouTube to find educational and expertly produced explanatory video to enhance their learning outcomes. YouTube recorded instructional films explore the topic and break down the answers to queries. As a result, students typically use YouTube videos to fulfil their specific learning objectives, including exam preparation, learning new material, reviewing previously learned material, and learning course material that they were unable to attend.

Another favoured social media site that respondents most frequently use for learning assistance and instruction is Google. According to the respondents, people utilize Google to access online libraries that aid in their education. The respondents also emphasized

how Google allows them to collaborate on projects and connect with team members using file-sharing and collaboration tools like Google Docs and Google Sheets. Lee and Faulkner (2011, p. 193) discovered that the inquiry model of e-learning has emphasized material richness as an extrinsic component in addition to learning assistance. In contrast to this study, participants use their favourite social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, to participate in online forums and debates, share ideas, and ask peers and instructors for clarification. In order to improve their educational experience from the established WhatsApp class groups, the respondents also stressed the significance of having access to lecture materials and recordings. These results are in accordance with earlier studies that shown the deliberate use of case scenario video clips, online photos, and graphics to boost student motivation and improve learner outcomes. Consequently, social media provides a wealth of information in many formats and perspectives to aid students in better understanding topics (Lee and Faulkner, 2011, p. 193). The Uses and satisfaction approach hold that media content and sources may be determined by consumers' pre-existing appeals (Blumler, 1979, p. 9). Customers in this survey look for information on YouTube because they think the platform has the capacity to satisfy their needs for learning help. According to the uses and gratification hypothesis, viewers actively choose the media content they want in order to satisfy their interpersonal, social, and psychological requirements (Blumler, 1979, p. 9). Furthermore, participants in the survey use their favourite social networking sites for amusement. According to the research, this was the third important aspect for which students use or integrate their favourite platforms.

Masciantonio et al. (2021, p.16 (3)) discovered that amusement was one of the most important demands for the majority of TikTok users, particularly the younger ones, and the literature currently in publication supports the conclusions of the prominence of this element. For instance, (10) 12.65% of respondents said they would rather use TikTok for

amusement and boredom relief. This revealed that university students' propensity for utilizing TikTok was mostly driven by their need for enjoyment. TikTok has outperformed other social media sites for amusement because it is a new platform with fewer age limitations (Durgungoz,2022a, 2022b, p. 1). Additionally, the results indicated that the respondents most frequently used socialization, networking, and creative expression as gratifications. They use these social media sites to expand their peer networks and improve their social lives. Social media sites including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and TikTok are utilized for socializing and maintaining relationships with friends, family, and peers, according to survey participants. Through texting, comments, and content sharing, these platforms make communication easier. Contrary to this analysis, Baguma et al. (2019, p. 99) observed that students express their creativity on websites like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, showcase their skills and be acknowledged for their work, whether it be in writing, photography, art, or video material.

Additionally, respondents noted that students now have more opportunities than in past generations to network, communicate, and connect with their peers thanks to these platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat), which are among their most popular platforms. Menkhoff et al. (2015, p. 16) found through an analysis on undergraduate students at different Singaporean universities that Facebook, and WhatsApp allow students a voice to network and connect more freely with their friends, supporting this factor in the literature. As a result, students can develop a social culture and form friendships based on shared interests. Furthermore, Ellefsen (2015, p. 160) carried out a study on Facebook use among higher education students in one of Malaysia's major public universities. The results showed that students view Facebook as their primary social interaction medium and, as a result, spend a significant portion of their daily lives using it. Therefore, the results of this investigation are consistent with the previous findings. Furthermore, the examination of the

study's results revealed that participants in student debates select the social media sites they use the most. According to Tiene (2000, p. 373), the use of Twitter, which was shown to be one of the most popular social media platforms in this study has raised the number and calibre of student debates. Through discussion and connections on Twitter, these debates thoroughly engage students in pertinent learning and foster critical thinking skills. Social media platforms have been linked to online communication and collaboration in a number of studies. For students, instructors, and peers to collaborate and communicate, platforms like YouTube, WhatsApp, and email are essential (Boateng & Amankwaa, 2016), respondents emphasized that with the recent advancements in technology, this literature supports the conclusions. Through the formation of WhatsApp chat groups, they continue to use Google Meet, WhatsApp, and other platforms to cooperate on their academic work, interact with their instructors, debate homework, and ask lecturers for clarifications from a distance.

5.2.3 Students' efficient usage of the social media sites they prefer for academic purposes.

Students' learning experiences and productivity can be greatly improved by using social media platforms for academic purposes. Finding the ideal balance between leisure and learning-focused activities is necessary for the effective use of social media platforms for academic purposes. Intentional and disciplined social media use can result in improved academic performance and a better comprehension of their studies.

According to the study's findings, respondents explained that in order to stay focused and make the most of the resources available, it's critical to set clear objectives and match them with the use of their preferred social media platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Wikipedia, Google Apps, TikTok, and Snapchat) for academic objectives.

According to the Uses and Gratifications hypothesis of the research study, the audience actively seeks out media content in order to achieve objectives and satisfy their

media requirements (Bryant & Miron, 2004). Students must therefore be deliberate and disciplined in the rapidly evolving field of technology in order to satisfy their social media needs through their favourite channels.

Additionally, some respondents to the study's findings talked about how students should use their favourite social media platforms to set objectives and deadlines for their studies. They should also divide tasks among team members to highlight the significance of timely feedback, open communication, and active participation in order to ensure successful collaboration. This is due to the numerous distractions found on social media sites, which could cause students to lose focus. Students can improve their academic experiences, gain access to useful learning resources work together with classmates and lecturers, and expedite their learning results by utilizing the power of the respondents' chosen social media platforms, according to the study's findings. Therefore, it is crucial that students find a balance between making good use of their favourite social media sites and stay away from distractions to make sure kids get the most out of these tools.

Additionally, they advised their friends to be well-organized and share all of their study materials utilizing cloud storage services like Google Drive in order to keep all academic files, notes, and study materials organized for efficient usage of the respondent's social media platforms. For group assignments and study sessions, these tools make it simple to share and collaborate with classmates. In both teaching and learning, communication is essential. Teachers connect with students through communication, and vice versa. Students should embrace their Learning Management Systems (LMS), such as the Mbarara University of Science and Technology E-Learning Environment (MUSTELE) or WhatsApp, so that instructors and lecturers can communicate with each other and with their peers. This communication process can be synchronous or asynchronous, according to the research findings presented here.

CHAPTER SIX

6.0 CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND FURTHER AREAS OF RESEARCH

6.0 Introduction

The study on assessing the social media Platforms university students use most often and how they use them is summarized, discussed, concluded, and recommended in this chapter. The study's findings, discussions, conclusions, suggestions, and opportunities for additional research is all summarized in this chapter.

6.1 An overview of the study's results

This study used a case study of Mbarara University of Science and Technology to evaluate the most popular social media sites and how students utilize them. The Faculty of Business and Management Science, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Applied Science and Technology, and Faculty of Computing and Informatics comprised the study population. To gather information, the study conducted in-depth interviews and FGDs. There were 80 responders in all, with more men than women participating in the study. The study was guided by the following objectives: i) Identifying the various social media platforms that university students use most frequently; ii) Examining the specific purposes for which university students use the platforms; iii) Examining university students' experiences using the platforms; and iv) Offering recommendations for how university students can use their preferred social media platforms for educational purposes. and v) To make recommendations on how university students can use their favourite social media sites for learning.

To improve upon the results based on the study's objectives, they are as follows:

According to the report, the majority of students utilize WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Google, TikTok, Snapchat, Wikipedia, LinkedIn, and other social media platforms to satisfy their urgent media demands. The results also showed that university students' experiences using their favourite social media sites varied and were influenced by a number of variables, such as personal preferences, academic objectives, and social contacts. The results also showed that students incorporate their preferred social media sites into their everyday life in a variety of ways. When these platforms become vital resources for communication, education, entertainment, expanding social networks and interaction, information collecting, socialization, and academic support, integration takes place. The results of the study did, however, also show how difficult it is for respondents to integrate their chosen social media platforms in order to meet their media needs.

Students' preferred social media platforms provide a number of difficulties that affect their time management, wellbeing, and academic achievement. These include; Distractions and Time Management, Information Overload - The vast amount of information available on social media platforms can lead to information overload, making it challenging for students to filter relevant and accurate content for their academic needs, Privacy and Security Concerns. Students need to be cautious about revealing personal information and be aware of security measures while using social media platforms may expose students to privacy issues and potential data breaches etc.

Lastly, the results demonstrated the methods that respondents recommended for using their favourite social networking sites for academic purposes. Finding the ideal balance between learning-focused and recreational activities, as well as being deliberate and disciplined with social media usage could result in improved academic performance and a

deeper comprehension of their studies, which would greatly improve their learning experiences and productivity.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS.

This study, which was a case study of Mbarara University of Science and Technology, concentrated on evaluating the social media sites that students use most frequently and how they do so. According to the research's findings, future research is anticipated to shed light on the social media sites that university students use most frequently and how they use them, particularly for academic purposes. By exploring the following research areas, scholars can acquire a deeper understanding of how students interact with social media platforms, opening the door to the creation of successful instructional strategies and regulations that optimize these platforms' potential for student learning and personal growth; According to the study's results, university students use WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Google, TikTok, Snapchat, and Wikipedia the most. These platforms are successfully used by students for academic purposes. The recommendations compiled here were divided into the following categories: Scholars, Faculty Leaders, Students, and Policy Makers in Higher Education.

Policy makers

By putting these suggestions into practice, policymakers in higher education institutions can establish a setting that optimizes the advantages of social media use while resolving possible issues and encouraging responsible, fruitful, and significant technology engagement for both students and teachers.

Standards for Responsible Use: I suggest that officials in higher education establish thorough and unambiguous standards for students, faculty, and students regarding ethical and responsible use of social media. These rules ought to cover online conduct, data security, privacy, and academic integrity.

Faculty Leaders

Faculty leaders play a critical role in ensuring that students receive the necessary support to use social media and digital tools effectively for academic purposes. One actionable recommendation is the creation of institutional social media hubs or digital support centres where students can access technical assistance, academic guidance, and digital literacy support. These platforms can serve as centralized spaces where students can ask questions, share resources, and receive support related to online learning.

Faculty leaders should also organize regular online workshops and training programs to guide students on appropriate and productive use of social media platforms in academic environments. These trainings can focus on topics such as digital professionalism, responsible online communication, and the use of social media for collaborative learning. Such initiatives will help students transition from using social media purely for entertainment to using it as a valuable educational tool.

In addition, institutions should develop monitoring and support systems that help ensure responsible social media usage within academic contexts. This can include structured online class observation, feedback systems, and clear communication channels between lecturers and students. Establishing these systems will help maintain academic integrity and ensure that digital platforms are used productively for learning activities.

Finally, faculty members and students should collaboratively develop and disseminate an ethical code for social media use in academic communication. Clear ethical guidelines will help define acceptable online behaviour, protect institutional reputation, and promote respectful and professional digital interactions among members of the academic community.

Students

Students should create a productive study environment by designating distraction-free spaces specifically for academic tasks. Social media platforms often compete for students' attention, which can reduce concentration and productivity during study sessions. Establishing structured study routines and minimizing digital distractions will help students improve focus, enhance time management, and achieve better academic outcomes.

Students are also encouraged to protect their online privacy when using social media platforms. Because social media platforms frequently collect and share user data, students must exercise caution when sharing personal information online. Reviewing and adjusting privacy settings, limiting access to personal content, and practicing safe online behaviour will help safeguard their digital identity and personal security.

Additionally, students should prioritize social wellness by maintaining a healthy balance between online and offline activities. Excessive social media use has been linked to stress, reduced productivity, and mental fatigue. Taking regular breaks from digital platforms, engaging in physical activities, and interacting with peers offline can improve students' mental well-being and support healthier academic lifestyles.

Scholars

As technology continues to evolve, new social media features and communication patterns are constantly emerging. Scholars are therefore encouraged to conduct further research on how social media platforms can be effectively utilized for communication, education, entertainment, and social interaction among university students. Such research is important because understanding evolving digital behaviours will help educators design learning strategies that align with students' real-world media usage patterns.

Furthermore, scholars should investigate innovative ways to integrate social media tools into teaching and learning processes. Research in this area can provide evidence-based strategies for transforming social media from a distraction into a meaningful academic resource that enhances collaboration, knowledge sharing, and student engagement.

6.3 Further Areas of Research

After investigating the most popular social networking sites among students and their usage patterns, the researcher recommends further research in the following areas:

Critical Thinking and Social Media Literacy

Future studies should examine how social media literacy interventions influence students' critical thinking abilities. This research is necessary because students frequently encounter misinformation and unverified content online. Understanding how educational interventions improve students' analytical skills can help institutions design programs that promote responsible digital engagement.

Privacy Awareness and Data Security

Future research should also explore students' understanding of privacy risks and data security issues related to social media usage, particularly within educational contexts. This includes examining their awareness of data collection practices by digital platforms and their willingness to adopt strategies that protect their personal information.

Social Media and Academic Performance

Further studies should investigate the relationship between different types of social media activities and students' academic performance. Understanding whether social media supports or hinders academic outcomes will help educators and policymakers design strategies that encourage productive usage while minimizing distractions.

REFERENCES.

- Aghazamani, A. (2010). How do University Students Spend Their Time on Facebook? An Exploratory Study. *Journal of American Science*, 6, 730–735.
- Ali, A., Iqbal, A., & Iqbal, K. (2016). Effects of social media on youth: A case study in University of Sargodha. *International Journal of Advanced Research*, 4(11), 369–372.
- Allagui, B. (2019). Writing a Descriptive Paragraph Using an Augmented Reality Application: An Evaluation of Students' Performance and Attitudes. *Technology, Knowledge and Learning*, 1–24.
- Almogheerah, A. (2020). Exploring the effect of using WhatsApp on Saudi Female EFL students' idiom learning. *Arab World English Journal*, 11(4), 328–350.
- Al-Rahmi, W., & Othman, M. (2013). The impact of social media use on academic performance among university students: A pilot study. *Journal of Information Systems Research and Innovation*, 4, 1–10.
- Alhazmi, A. K., & Rahman, A. A. (2013). Facebook in Higher Education: Students' Use and Perceptions. *Advances in Information Sciences and Service Sciences*, 5(15), 32.
- Apeanti, W. O., & Danso, E. D. (2014). Students' Use of Social Media in Higher Education in Ghana. *Innovative Journal*, 3(1), 3–9.
- Asibong, U., et al. (2020). Psychological distress and social media usage: A survey among undergraduates of a university in Calabar, Nigeria. *Niger Postgrad Med J*, 27(2), 115–121.
- Athique, A. (2013). *Digital Media and Society: An Introduction*. Polity.

- Baguma, R., Bagarukayo, E., Namubiru, P., Brown, C., & Mayisela, T. (2019). Using WhatsApp in teaching to develop higher order thinking skills. *International Journal of Education and Development Using ICT*, 15(2), 98–116.
- Baltar, F., & Brunet, I. (2012). Social research, virtual snowball sampling method using Facebook. *Internet Research*, 22(1), 57–74.
- Benedek, M., Jurisch, J., Koschutnig, K., Fink, A., & Beaty, R. E. (2021). Elements of creative thought. *NeuroImage*, 210, 116586.
- Blumler, J. G. (1979). The role of theory in uses and gratifications studies. *Communication Research*, 6(1), 9–36.
- Boateng, R. O., & Amankwaa, A. (2016). The impact of social media on student academic life in higher education. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science*, 16(4), 1–8.
- Boyce, C., & Neale, P. (2006). *Conducting in-depth interviews*. Pathfinder International.
- Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), 210–230.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Bryant, J., & Miron, D. (2004). Theory and research in media. *Journal of media*, 54(4), 662–704.
- Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 210-230

Calli, L., et al. (2013). Identifying factors that contribute to student satisfaction in e-learning. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 14(1), 85–101.

Castells, M. (2000). *The Rise of the Network Society*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Chen, A., Lu, Y., & Wang, B. (2017). Customers' purchase decision-making in social commerce. *International Journal of Information Management*, 37(6), 627–638.

Chen, B., & Bryer, T. (2012). Instructional strategies for using social media. *IRRODL*, 13(1), 87–100.

Chugh, R., Grose, R., & Macht, S. A. (2021). Social media usage by higher education academics. *Education and Information Technologies*, 26, 983–999.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Sage.

Davis, C. H. F., et al. (2012). *Social Media in Higher Education*. University of Arizona.

De Wever, B., et al. (2015). A wiki task for first-year university students. *Internet and Higher Education*, 25, 37–44.

Deng, L., & Tavares, N. J. (2013). From Moodle to Facebook. *Computers & Education*, 68, 167–176.

Domizi, D. P. (2013). Microblogging to foster connections. *TechTrends*, 57(1), 43–51.

Dzvapatsva, G. P., et al. (2014). Use of social media platforms for improving academic performance. *South African Journal of Information Management*, 16(1).

Ellefsen, L. (2015). Perceptions of Facebook use in Higher Education. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 5(1), 160.

Gerbner, G., & Gross, L. (1976). Living with television. *Journal of Communication*, 26(2), 182–190.

Grieserror (2014. P.0), Gerlich, R. N., et al. (2015). App consumption. *Academy of Marketing Studies Journal*, 19(1), 69–79.

Greenhow, C., & Lewin, C. (2016). Social media and education. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 41(1), 6–30.

Gunter, B. (2000). *Media Research Methods*.

Jensen, K.B. (1982). The qualitative research process. In Jensen, K.B. (eds). *The handbook of media* London: Routledge.

Junco, R., Heiberger, G., & Loken, E. (2013). The effect of Twitter on college student engagement and grades. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 29(2), 119–132.

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! *Business Horizons*, 53, 59–68.

Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509–523.

Kumar, A., & Sharma, V. (2018). Social media as a tool for self-expression. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 78, 147–157.

Lee, D. Y., & Lehto, M. R. (2013). User acceptance of YouTube for procedural learning. *Computers & Education*, 61, 193–208.

Lelissa, T.B. (2018). *Research Methodology*; University of South Africa, PHD Thesis
Method.

Masciantonio, A., et al. (2021). Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and well-being during COVID-19. *PLOS ONE*, 16(3).

Menkhoff, T., et al. (2014). Incorporating microblogging in higher education. *Computers in Human Behavior*.

Mirembe, D. P., Lubega, J. T., & Kibukamusoke, M. (2019). Leveraging Social Media in Higher Education. *European Journal of Open, Distance and E-Learning*, 22(1), 70–84.

Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 250.

Mugenda, O. M., & Mugenda, A. G. (2003). *Research Methods: Quantitative & Qualitative Approaches*. Acts Press.

Paul, J., Baker, H., & Cochran, J. (2012). Effect of online social networking on student academic performance.

Price C., & Rambe, P. (2018). A critical review of mobile instant messaging. *IRRODL*, 19(5), 218–237.

Roberts, P., & Priest, H. (2006). Reliability and validity in research. *Nursing Standard*, 20(44), 41–46.

Sudha, S., & Kavitha, E. (2016). The effect of social networking on students' academic performance.

Tongco, M. D. C. (2007). Purposive sampling as a tool for informant selection.

Van Deursen, A. J., & Van Dijk, J. A. (2014). The digital divide shifts to differences in usage. *New Media & Society*, 16(3), 507–526.

Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science*, 359(6380), 1146–1151.

Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (2014). *Media Research*. Cengage.

Williams, J., & Brown, K. (2020). Motivations for social media use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 102, 57–66.

Yeboah, D., Nyagorme, P., & Barfi, K. (2020). Mobile learning support in distance education. *Texila International Journal of Academic Research*, 7(2), 61–71.

Yunus, M., et al. (2013). *The Use of ICT in Teaching ESL Writing Skills*.

Appendix I: Consent Form for Field Data Collection

UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION DURING THE STUDY DATA COLLECTION.

Researcher's Name: Ronald Atuzarirwe

Institution: UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY, pursuing a master's degree of Arts in Organisational Leadership and Management.

Contact Information: atuzarirweronald@gmail.com

0701762675

Dear Respondent,

Greetings, I am Ronald Atuzarirwe, a student of Uganda Christian University pursuing a master's degree of Arts in Organisational Leadership and Management. I am conducting a study on Evaluation of the most popular social media platforms used by students: a case study of Mbarara University of Science and Technology. The information given will be used only for academic purposes and will be treated with the highest level of confidentiality.

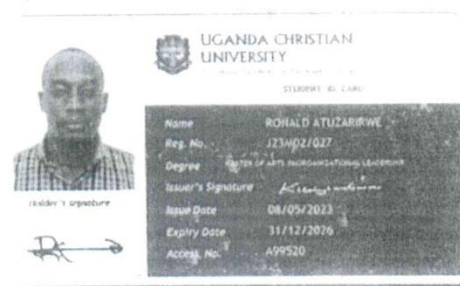
Your responses will be kept strictly confidential. All data collected will be anonymised, and any identifying information will be removed before analysis. Your participation will not be linked to your personal identity.

I request to ask a series of questions, and all your answers are correct. I only want to learn what you think. if you find the discussion topic uncomfortable, you are welcome to withdraw from the discussion at any time. I will be recording this discussion so that I have your opinions.

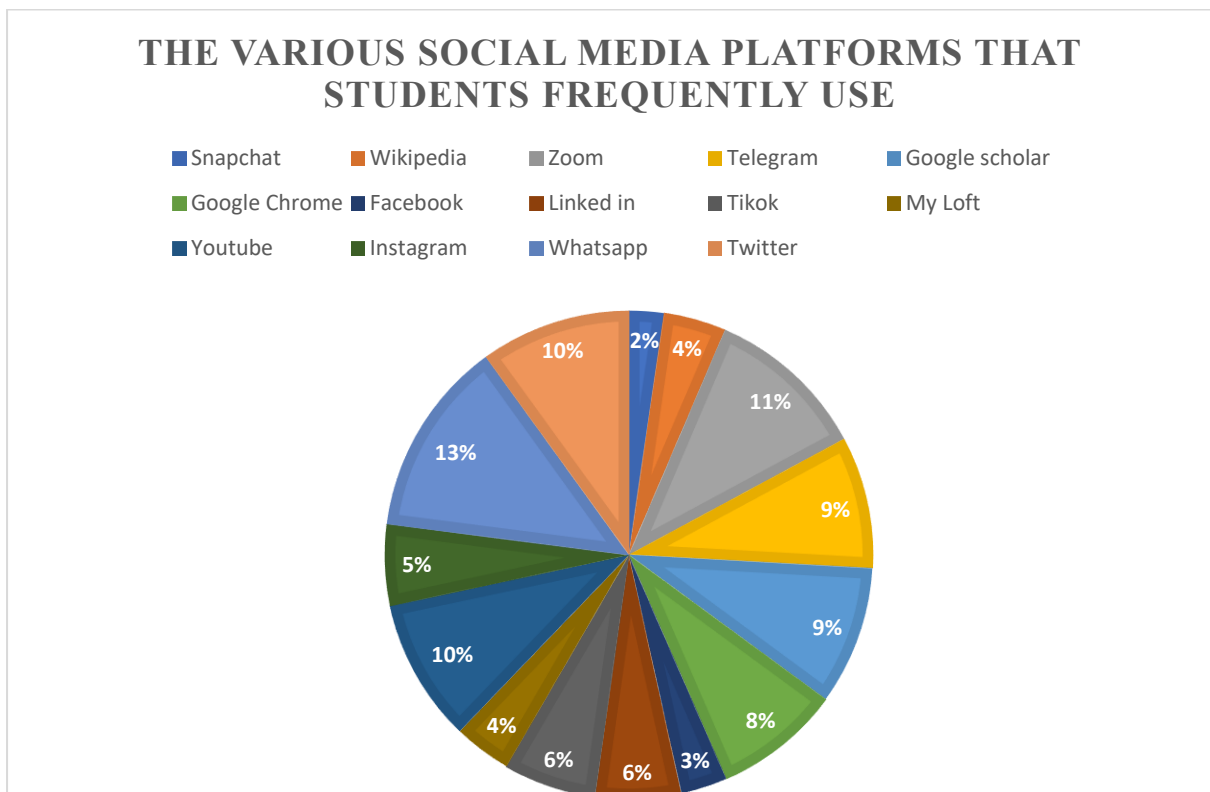
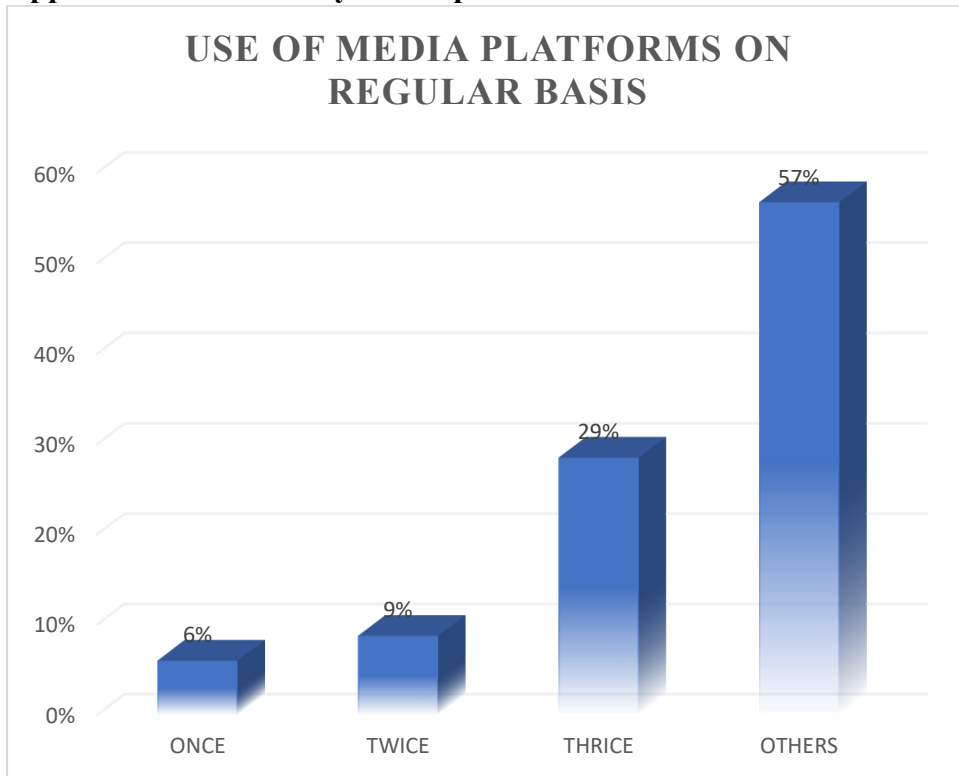
Participant's Signature.....

Registration Number.....J23M02/027

Attached below is my University Student card to confirm that I am a Student of Uganda Christian University. Thank you for your cooperation.



Appendix 1I: Data Analysis Sample sheet in excel form



1. What is your gender?

A) Female

B) Male

Appendix III: Sample of the filled Questionnaire Guide

C) Others

2. Age of the respondent (circle the most appropriate)

A) 20 -25 Years **B) 25 -30 Years** C) 35 -40 Years D) others

3. What is the name of your Faculty?

..... Faculty of Applied Science and Technology

4. What Course / Programme and Year are you in?

..... Applied Science and Technology - (Year 2)

5. What social media platforms do you use on a regular basis?

..... Whatsapp, Twitter

6. What is the reason for your answer?

..... To acquire information in regards to the global changes through twitter, and
Whatsapp for discussions through voice calls

7. How frequently do you use the social media platforms in a day? Tick below.

A) Once B) Twice C) Thrice D) Others

8. Do you use these social media platforms for academic purpose or personal and others purposes? Tick the best below that represents your view.

a) Yes b) No

9. What reason (s) do you give for your answer above?

..... The social media platforms are conclusive for self learning and aren't limited
The social media platforms are swift in sending and receiving of ^{to distances} messages

..... Whatsapp, Twitter

6. What is the reason for your answer?

..... To acquire information in regards to the global changes through twitter, and
Whatsapp for discussions through voice calls

7. How frequently do you use the social media platforms in a day? Tick below.

A) Once B) Twice C) Thrice D) Others

8. Do you use these social media platforms for academic purpose or personal and others purposes? Tick the best below that represents your view.

a) Yes b) No

9. What reason (s) do you give for your answer above?

..... The social media platforms are conclusive for self learning and aren't limited
The social media platforms are swift in sending and receiving of ^{to distances} messages

Appendix IV: Guide for Focus Group Discussions.

<p>Objective One:</p> <p>The different Social media platforms mostly used by university students</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) What do you think are some of the reasons for the preferences of the university student's usage of certain social media platforms over others?2) What impact do these social media platforms have on the academic performance and the learning outcomes of the students in the university?3) Suggest some of the strategies you think the university could employ to effective utilization of the social media platforms for educational purposes of the students?
<p>Objective Two:</p> <p>How university students use their most preferred social media platforms for</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) How do you determine which social media platforms are suitable for your needs especially academically?2) How do the university students integrate their preferred social media platforms into their academic work and study routines?3) Describe any challenges that university students encounter when using their preferred social media platforms for academia.

<p>Objective Three:</p> <p>How university students can effectively use their most preferred social media platforms</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What are some of the techniques/strategies that university students can employ to maximize the educational benefits of their preferred social media platforms? 2) What are some of the practices/tips that students could share with their peers on effectively leveraging their preferred social media platforms for academic achievement?
<p>Conclusion</p>	<p>Thank you for your cooperation</p>

Appendix V: KEY INFORMANTS GUIDE (in-depth interview).

Bio data	<p>1. Date of the interview.....</p> <p>2. Tell me a little about yourself</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gender (don't ask, just observe) ○ Age..... ○ Highest level of education..... ○ Duration in position.....
Interview Questions	<p>3. What do you know about social media platforms?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>4. What social media platforms do you use on a regular basis?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>5. What perspectives do you provide on how students are using social media platforms?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>6. What impact does it have on their academic performance?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>7. How effectively would advise students to use their preferred social</p> <p>8. media platforms for academia?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Thank you for your cooperation</p>

END