

ABSTRACT

Social media usage is today a major engagement among university students around the world. The question of whether social interactions on social media are useful in enhancing students' psychosocial wellbeing has therefore become a matter of interest. The use of social media contributes to psychosocial wellbeing because it expands social space therefore increasing social support among students with a positive impact on their academic performance. This study intended to add to the existing knowledge in this field. Its purpose was to study the effect of social media usage on students' psychosocial wellbeing in Laikipia University, Kenya. The objectives of the study focused on four major aspects of social media usage which were choice of social media platform, gender of user, frequency of use and level of online self-disclosure. The study used descriptive research survey design to find out the real situation on social media usage among a sample of students and then generalized the results to the whole target population. It based its arguments on the Online Social Support Theory as well as the Theory of Planned Behavior which explain the motivations and gratifications of social media usage. All the 5,206 students of Laikipia University's main campus were targeted for this study. The sample for this study was 371 students who were selected using a combination of stratified and simple random sampling methods. All the four university counsellors were sampled for the study. The researcher used questionnaires with structured questions to collect data. Expert opinion on the instruments was sought from supervisors and experts in the department of Psychology, Counselling and Education Foundations in Laikipia University and used to improve the validity of the instruments. Piloting of the instruments was done in Dedan Kimathi University in Nyeri County. Reliability of the instrument was determined using the internal consistency method. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.76 was obtained against a threshold of 0.70 showing that the instrument was suitable for this study. The researcher visited the institution and administered questionnaires to the students and counsellors who filled them and handed them back. Information from the questionnaires was then compiled, coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 24.0. Mean, frequencies and percentages were used to analyse the data. The data was then presented using frequency distribution tables, bar graphs and pie charts from which conclusions were drawn. The study found that 97.78% of students in Laikipia University were using social media for various purposes. It also found that female students engaged more on social media (82.6%) than male students (17.4%). On the choice of social media platforms, the study found that WhatsApp was the most popular social media platform with 93.7% of its users indicating that they logged in on a daily basis. The study concluded that social media engagement played a vital role in uplifting the psychosocial wellbeing of university students by enabling them to remain in close contact with family and friends and affording them the social capital that they needed to foster a sense of belonging and social safety. It is hoped that the outcome of this research will motivate the administrators of Laikipia University and other institutions of higher learning to proactively enhance the use of social media in campus as an avenue for social support among students in order to enhance their wellbeing.