

FROM POVERTY TO POVERTY: HOW SOCIAL MEDIA HAS IMPACTED THE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF UGANDAN YOUTHS



Unleashing Potential

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ABSTRACT

The study was set to investigate how social media affects the youths' economic well-being in Uganda. It was guided by two major objectives which included; analysing how youths use social media and discussing how the youths' usage of social media affects their economic well-being. Primary data was collected from a total of 5019 respondents using a closed-ended (structured) questionnaire in which questions were answered by Ugandans from different regions and countries. Data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). The study adopted the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) to measure the level of social media addiction among Uganda's youths. The findings indicated that most of the respondents were aged between 18-25 with 39.1% and 26-33 with 36.0% respectively. Majority of the respondents were unemployed constituting 52.5%, 47.5% of the respondents had joined social media between 2019-2022, 89.0% were accessing social media using mobile phones, 59.8% were using WhatsApp with only 10.8% using Facebook. Results indicated that 28.5% of the social media users mainly wanted to connect to their friends as their main purpose. 88.1% were spending between 2-5 hours per day on social media among others.

Using BSMAS, it was indicated that 50.4% of the youths agreed that they were always thinking of social media even when not using it. 41.4% used social media without any particular motive. 26.4% were found to have started arguments with others after using social media. 43.2% agreed that their personal work was interrupted by the time spent on social media. Majority (83.6%) revealed that they felt connected with others by spending time on social media. 70.3% agreed that they had failed to track the length of time they spent on social media. 63.3% acknowledged that they were afraid of not being on social media. 67.5% of the respondents were unable to reduce the time spent on social media. The study recommended that the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) in liaison with the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance should sensitize youths about the benefits of social media. Further, the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance should lift the ban on Facebook usage in Uganda. In addition, Social media should be embedded within the school curriculum. It further recommended a study on the impact of social media on the reputation and political capital of politicians in Uganda.

Keywords: Social media, Youth, Poverty, Internet

INTRODUCTION

This study entails an analysis of how social media affects the economic well-being of youths in Uganda. It was informed by the rising usage of social media in Uganda with many youths spending plenty of their time on social media which is likely to reduce their potential to concentrate on productive economic activities. A background to the study, general and specific objectives, methodology, findings, conclusions, and recommendations have been included.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Globally, a considerable number of children and young people are increasingly engaging with online platforms, facilitated by access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as mobile phones, tablets, laptops, and gaming consoles (Livingstone, 2019). This trend has been amplified in the post-COVID-19 era, marked by a shift towards remote work and heightened digital interactions in which there is increased usage of the internet (Kayemba, 2020).

The term 'social media' is commonly and generally used to refer to various online platforms enabling Twitter (predominantly favoured by elites and corporate entities), YouTube (ubiquitously accessed), TikTok (common globally), Baidu, Renren, Weibo, WeChat, and WhatsApp (utilized across different social classes), among others, some of which are less prominent in the Global South (Henry & Harte, 2012).

Fab-Ukozor & Ojiakor (2020) explains social media as a platform for marketing and socializing. The plethora of social media networks presents a wide range of social media usage but also increases challenges to youths especially those associated with computer misuse, cybercrimes, abuse of leisure, and worsening tendencies of laziness which may arise from social media addictions. Social network applications provide users with new forms of information sharing by bridging the gap created by physical barriers in reaching other target populations or audiences (Khan et al., 2021). Since social media has become a powerful tool for building remote connections, many ss have taken this advantage to share online information for business marketing, personal branding, and general content creation such as for entertainment purposes.

The advent of ICT, particularly through social media or social networking, has facilitated improved connectivity, information dissemination, government interactions with citizens, and interpersonal relationships across diverse demographics (Akanle et al., 2021; Rothe, 2020). Social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok have gained a larger following and usage among all classes of internet users especially youths since they are early adopters of digital technologies.

Notably, youths exhibit higher rates of internet usage and smartphone ownership compared to adults above the youth-hood age (Harpin et al., 2016). The contemporary landscape witnesses the widespread integration of social media into various socioeconomic and political activities across the World including among African youths. This is catalyzed by increased access to ICT tools like smart mobile phones in both developing and developed countries (Akanle & Omotayo, 2020; Kagoya & Mbamba, 2020). In an era characterized by pervasive digital technologies, young people (mainly between 18 and 35) are increasingly immersed in digitally networked environments, engaging in activities ranging from social media content creation to online leisure such as interactive gaming and collaborative endeavours as suggested by Lombana Bermudez et al., (2020).

Social media usage among youths yields multifaceted outcomes that end up impacting various aspects of their lives both positively and negatively. Oftentimes, time and financial constraints hinder effective engagement with social media, posing challenges for building and sustaining remote relationships using social media networks (Virtanen, 2015). The digital divide remains pronounced in Africa, with limited internet access hindering widespread adoption of internet-based technologies (Gupta & DSilva, 2020; Jinyevu et al., 2019). For example, in Uganda, in FY 2018/19, the government introduced Over the Top (OTT) Tax which was a daily charge of UGX 200 for anyone who could use social media.

This constrained many social media users, especially Facebook and WhatsApp (Kiberu Jonah & Kibira Vicent, 2021). Similarly, the country (Uganda) banned Facebook in January 2021 mainly following a case where Facebook management had put down 146 user accounts that were alleged to have been pro-government. Poor time management characterised by social media addiction as seen in the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) among youths exacerbates these challenges, since excessive social media use detracts from productive activities and worsens idle capacity for youths or any other social media users (Curtis et al., 2019). Moreover, online exposure increases vulnerability to cyber threats, brand misuse by bloggers, vloggers, political activists, entertainers, and other internet users, necessitating vigilance in social networking and internet usage (Nadaraja & Yazdanifard, 2013).

By June 2023, Uganda had an estimated 27.7 million internet subscribers (UCC, 2024). However, there have been several cases of social media misuse, misinformation, propaganda, character assassination, defamation, exposure of nudity, and other cases. These are highlighted and penalisable under Uganda's Computer Misuse Act 2022. This study addresses how social media usage, especially considering addiction, has exposed Uganda's youths (aged 18-35 as defined by the 1995 Uganda Constitution) to worsening levels of poverty.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The emergency of contemporary technologies has led to proliferation of social media platforms that have fundamentally transformed the social and economic landscape globally, Uganda inclusive. As of October 2023, over 4.3 billion (54% of the global population) own smartphones (GSMA, 2023). Majority of the people globally use mobile phones or smart phones to; socialize, do business, spend leisure, study, among other purposes (NIH, 2022). By June 2023, Uganda had 40 Million gadgets on the network, 27.7 Million internet subscribers, with an internet national penetration rate of 61 connections per 100 Ugandans, and 13.3 Million smart phone active subscriptions (UCC, 2023). However, the digital advancement has presented both opportunities and challenges to different demographics, youth being among the most affected.

Chapter 319 of Uganda National Youth Council Act defines a youth as a person between the age of 18 and 30 years. This demographic segment is particularly vulnerable to pervasive social media usage as platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok pose significant risks related to addiction, time mismanagement, moral decay, over expenditure of the little money they earn on buying data, and cyber threats. Consequently, these risks have the potential to adversely affect the economic well-being of Ugandan youths, a concern that warrants urgent and comprehensive analysis.

Uganda has a population of 45.9 Million people of which 22.7% are youth, reflecting the country's demographic dividend and the need for targeted youth-centric policies (UBOS, 2024). Despite the evident ubiquity of social media among the populace, there remains a paucity of empirical research that systematically examines the direct and indirect impacts of social media usage on the economic status of the youth. Excessive engagement with social media may detract the time that could otherwise be allocated to productive economic activities, such as education, skills development, and entrepreneurial ventures (Dodokh, 2022). This diversion of time and attention can exacerbate existing issues of unemployment and underemployment in Uganda, thereby contributing to the broader problem of poverty among the youth. Such detrimental consequences need urgent investigation, with a focus on the youth who are the most vulnerable. Thus, this study aims to bridge the existing research gap by systematically analyzing the patterns of social media usage among Ugandan youths and evaluating its effects on their economic well-being. Ultimately, provide actionable insights for policymakers, educators, activists, and other stakeholders to foster a balance between digital engagement and economic productivity of Uganda's youth.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was guided by the following objectives:

General Objective

This study aimed to examine how extensive social media usage contributes to the deterioration of economic well-being among economically disadvantaged youths in Uganda. Specifically, the analysis focused on how excessive time spent on unproductive social media activities rendered youths redundant and susceptible to poverty, particularly in the post-COVID-19 era.

Specific Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by two specific objectives:

- i) To analyse how youths use social media in Uganda
- ii) To discuss how the youths' usage of social media affects their economic well-being

Review of Related Literature

This section discusses the existing literature on the common digital platforms inclusive of social media and how youths use them.

Common Global Digital Platforms

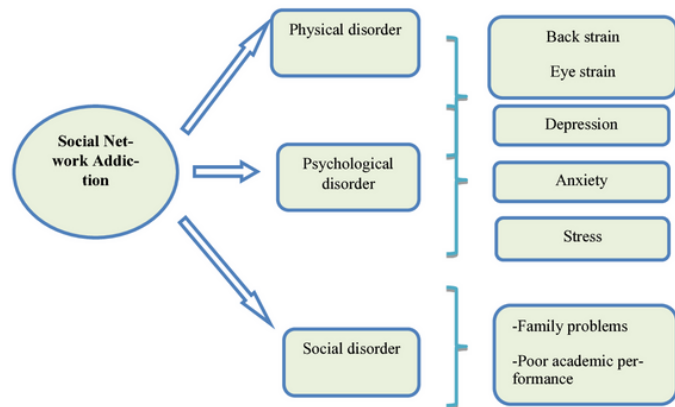
Wang (2016) summarized a list of the common global digital platforms and the years of their inventions as: MSN (1995), eBay (1997), Google (1999), Skype (2003), LinkedIn (2003), Facebook (2004), YouTube (2004), Twitter (2005), WhatsApp (2009), Instagram (2010), Google+ (2011), Snapchat (2011); QQ (1999), Tianya BBS (1999), Baidu (2000), Taobao (2003), Renren (2005), YouKu (2005), Tudou (2005), Douban (2005), Kaixin (2008), YY (2008), Sina Weibo (2009), WeChat (2011), MoMo (2011), and Meipai (2014).

Social Media Usage Among Youths

The advent of the internet and social media has turned the world into a global village while accessing information, across boundaries (Dar & Nagrath, 2022). All over the world, people use social media to share information and get connected with like-minded people. Generally, people develop social networks/relations with other like-minded people, who have similar personal or career interests.

Social media has also brought about disruptive changes in consumer-to-consumer, consumer-to-business and business-to-business communications which makes it easier, faster and cheaper compared to traditional methods (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Thus, the invention of social media changed and improved how we communicate with one another while providing many more benefits like a form of entertainment, knowledge sharing platform, co-op working space etc, (Baruah & Hazarika, 2020). Some education institutes use social media or blogs as a teaching tool and by doing so, the classes are more creative where students can freely express their ideas, opinions and academic skills (Chawinga, 2017). Because of the sudden boom in social media users, advertising companies have since switched their main marketing channels to social media as well (Amedie, 2015).

EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION



Source: Win et al., (2017) Social Network Addiction (SNA) related to Anxiety among Students at Kyaukse University, Mandalay Region, Myanmar

Social Media and Economic Empowerment

Social media is influencing employment both as an industry that creates jobs and as a tool that empowers workers (users) to access new forms of work, in new and more flexible ways (Mauroner, 2016). Thus, increased digitalization and automation are leading to new types of jobs and employment, these developments are changing the nature and conditions of work, altering skill requirements, affecting the functions of the labour markets and influencing the international division of labour.

Moreover, the ability of countries and enterprises to exploit new digital resources will become a key determinant of their competitiveness. Khajeheian (2012) mentioned that there are emerging ICT-enabled employment opportunities because countries around the world are looking to create more digital jobs, which have positive economic and social implications for workers and society.

Social Media and Job Search

With the introduction of online job portals and social media, recruitment has completely changed where today's younger generations search for a suitable job on the Internet (Karaoglu et al., 2022) due to the robust growth in ICT (Karácsony et al., 2020), and their usage in human resource management practices (Alexander et al., 2019). Applicants can even watch promotional videos on YouTube about the company and access websites where they can get information from other applicants and employees, as well as read blogs and opinions about the company that are relevant to them. Social media allows a company to search for candidates who are not necessarily looking for work, at times by perusing through their profiles on social media handles. This is a drastic change since in the past it has been very difficult for companies to reach those who are not actively looking for work (Davison et al., 2016). Most importantly, job seekers need to consciously manage their own social media profile by paying close attention to what they share online on social media platforms since approximately 70% of recruiters visit the applicant's social media profile, and what they see there influences their decision (Koch et al., 2018).

MATERIALS AND

METHODS

The study used both primary and secondary data on social media usage in Uganda. The study targeted 6,000 participants as the sample and reached 5,019 all of whom were obtained through simple random sampling to give chance to every social media user in Uganda to participate in the study. The sample included Ugandans living both within and outside Uganda to generate broader views on social media usage and how it affects the economic well-being of youths. There was also data collected through a review of related literature on social media usage globally and within Uganda. The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) was used to measure the level of social media addiction among Uganda's youths as illustrated in Table 11.

Questionnaires were distributed electronically through Google Forms comprising closed-ended (structured) questions. Data analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). The data analysed is shown in the results section below:

Results

Response Rate

The study targeted 6,000 respondents and reached 5,019. This implies a response rate of 83.7% which was reliable enough to provide meaningful and appropriate research conclusions.

A. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents.

Gender of the Respondents.

Table 1: Gender Composition of the Respondents

#	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
1	Male	2194	43.7
2	Female	2550	50.8
3	Other gender	021	0.4
4	Prefer not to Say	254	5.1

Source: Primary Data from the Field (2024)

Table 1 above shows that the majority of the respondents were female (50.8%) with only 43.7% males. Other gender were 0.4% and 5.1% of the respondents preferred not to disclose their gender. This implies females are more addicted to social media than any other gender.

Table 2: Age of the Respondents

#	Age Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Below 18 years	661	13.2
2	18-25 years	1961	39.1
3	26-33 years	1807	36.0
4	34-42 years	467	9.3
5	Above 42 years	123	2.4
	Total	5,019	100.0%

Source: Primary Data from the Field (2024)

From Table 2 above, the majority of the respondents were aged 18-25 years (39.1%). Closely followed by those aged 26-33 years (36.0%). Few young people below 18 years (13.2%) responded. The least of the respondents were aged above 42 years (2.4%). This signifies that the largest population that uses social media are youths in the age bracket of 18-33 years (75.1%).

Location of the Respondents

Table 3: Location of the Respondents

#	Location	Frequency	Percentage
1	Central Uganda	2678	53.5
2	Eastern Uganda	623	12.4
3	Northern Uganda	414	8.2
4	Western Uganda	416	8.3
5	United States of America	057	1.1
6	Canada	034	0.7
7	Sweden	023	0.5
8	Middle East	069	1.4
9	Other Parts of the World	705	13.9
	Total	5,019	100.0%

Source: Primary Data from the Field (2024)

Table 3 above portrays that the majority of the respondents hailed from Central Uganda (53.5%), while other regions of Uganda including Eastern, Western and Northern contributed 28.9% in totality. Notably, fewer respondents were from the international community, with the United States of America, Canada, Sweden, and the Middle East constituting 3.7% of the sample size. This implies a high digital divide between Central Uganda and all other parts of the country.

Employment Status of the Respondents

Table 4: Employment Status of the Respondents

#	Employment Status	Frequency	Percentage
1	Employed	1562	31.1
2	Unemployed	2634	52.5
3	Prefer not to Say	823	16.4
	Total	5,019	100.0%

Source: Primary Data from the Field (2024)

Table 4 above highlights that majority of the respondents are unemployed (52.5%) whereas 31.1% of the respondents are employed. However, 16.4% of the respondents preferred not to say their employment status. This implies the largest number of social media users are dependents who spend most of the money given to them on social media whereas few respondents who work to earn spend their money on social media.

Education Levels of the Respondents

Table 6: Education Levels of the Respondents

#	Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
1	Below 'O' level	1697	33.2
2	'O' level	1791	35.1
3	'A' Level	1393	27.4
4	Undergraduate Diploma	70	1.4
5	Bachelors	134	2.7
6	Post Graduate	024	0.5
	Total	5,019	100.0%

Source: Primary Data from the Field (2024)

From Table 6 above, the largest portion of the respondents had completed 'O' level (35.1%), slightly higher than those who had not completed 'O' level education (33.2%). A significant portion, 27.4% of the respondents had attained 'A' level education. Conversely, a smaller percentage of respondents held higher qualifications, with 2.7% having completed a bachelor's degree, 1.4% possessing an undergraduate diploma, and only 0.5% holding postgraduate qualifications. This indicates that majority of the social media users are average elites (95.7%) with technical proficiency, prompting them to adopt and interact with technology easily.

B. How Youths in Uganda Use Social Media

This objective focused on how youths in Uganda use social media with a critical look at the period between 2019-2024 effective the COVID-19 recess. The responses from youths were summarized in the subsections below:

Table 7: Mode of Access to Internet by Youths

#	Mode of Internet Access	Frequency	Percentage
1	Mobile Devices (Such as phones, tablets, etc)	4514	89.9
2	Laptops	304	6.1
3	Desktop Computers	201	4.0
	Total	5,019	100.0%

Source: Primary Data from the Field (2024)

From Table 7 above, majority of the youths (89.9%) access social media through mobile devices such as phones and tablets. Few youths (6.1%) access social media via laptops, and very few (4.0%) access it using desktop computers. This implies there is limited use of laptops and desktop computers among youth in Uganda with most of them using their mobile phones 'anytime anywhere' to access social media.

Social Media Platforms Used by Youths

Table 8: Social Media Platforms Used by Youths

#	Social Media Platforms Used	Frequency	Percentage
1	WhatsApp	3001	59.8
2	Facebook	543	10.8
3	TikTok	201	4.0
4	Instagram	201	4.0
5	Twitter	145	2.9
6	YouTube	742	14.8
7	Others	186	3.7
	Total	5,019	100.0%

Source: Primary Data from the Field (2024)

Table 8 above indicates that WhatsApp (59.8%) is the most used social media platform. This is loosely followed by YouTube (14.8%) and Facebook (10.8%). TikTok, Instagram and Twitter(X) are almost in the same usage range (4.0%, 4.0%, and 2.9% respectively) with a few other respondents (3.7%) using other social media platforms. The ban on Facebook by the Uganda government ahead of the 2021 general elections explains its limited usage as those few who illicitly access it use VPNs, which have their associated disadvantages such as high data consumption, slowed internet speed, and exposure to malware among other limitations. This led to platforms such as WhatsApp gaining dominance as they are cheap for audio calls and instant messaging.

Main Purpose of Being on Social Media

Table 9: Main Purpose of Being on Social Media

#	Main Purpose of Being on Social Media	Frequency	Percentage
1	Blogging or vlogging at a fee	084	1.6
2	To follow current affairs in the country	541	10.8
3	To connect with friends online	1432	28.5
4	For marketing and sales	253	5.1
5	For leisure	1342	26.7
6	For religious activities	207	4.2
7	No Major reason, just chatting	1021	20.3
8	Other reasons	139	2.8
	Total	5,019	100.0%

Source: Primary Data from the Field (2024)

Table 9 above reveals that majority of the respondents mainly use social media to interact with friends (28.5%) and have leisure (26.7%) while others have no specific reason but chatting (20.3%).

A significant portion of the respondents utilise social media to stay updated on current affairs (10.8%), and smaller segments engage in activities such as marketing and sales (5.1%), religious affairs (4.2%), blogging or vlogging for monetary gain (1.6%), and 2.8% for miscellaneous motivations. This indicates that the prevalence of casual interaction and entertainment underscores the intrinsic sociability and recreational potential inherent in social media platforms. Additionally, the utilization of social media for staying informed and conducting business reflects their evolving role as integral components of modern communication and commerce.

Length of Time Spent on Social Media Per Day

Table 10: Length of Time Spent on Social Media Per Day

#	Daily Time on Social Media	Frequency	Percentage
1	Below 2 hours	324	6.5
2	2-5 hours	4429	88.1
3	6-9 hours	156	3.2
4	Above 9 hours	110	2.2
	Total	5,019	100.0%

Source: Primary Data from the Field (2024)

From Table 10 above, majority of the respondents spend between 2 to 5 hours (88.1%) daily on social media. Conversely, 6.5% devote less than 2 hours per day. Few respondents (3.2%) spend 6-9 hours per day on social media. Only a minority (2.2%) dedicate over 9 hours daily to social media. It implies social media has a significant integration into daily routines for the majority of the respondents.

Social Media Addiction

The study used the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) to measure the level of social media addiction among Uganda's youths.

The results are summarized in Table 12 below:

Table 1: Social Media Addiction

#	Guiding Question	SD	%	D	%	SM	%	NA	%	SWA	%	A	%	SA	%	Total	%
1	I often think about social media when I am not using it	632	12.5	745	14.8	562	11.2	561	11.1	671	13.3	847	16.8	981	20.3	5019	100
2	I often use social media for no particular reason	456	9.0	857	17.0	647	12.8	972	19.8	592	11.7	741	14.7	754	15.0	5019	100
3	Arguments have arisen with others because of my social media use	1561	32.4	759	15.1	567	11.2	752	14.9	385	6.7	572	11.3	423	8.4	5019	100
4	I interrupt whatever else I am doing when I feel the need to access social media	656	12.3	598	11.9	763	15.2	878	17.4	764	15.2	564	12.2	796	15.8	5019	100
5	I feel connected to others when I use social media	121	2.4	148	2.9	237	4.7	221	4.4	530	10.5	1561	31.1	2111	42.0	5019	100
6	I lose track of how much I use social media	263	5.2	456	9.0	321	6.3	462	9.2	672	13.3	1563	31.1	1282	25.9	5019	100
7	The thought of not being able to access social media makes me feel distressed	410	8.1	434	8.6	284	5.6	724	14.4	693	13.8	1332	26.5	1143	23	5019	100
8	I have been unable to reduce my social media use	341	6.7	255	5.1	541	10.7	502	10	564	11.2	1434	28.5	1382	27.8	5019	100

Model Adopted from: Andreassen et al (2012) Development of a Facebook Addiction Scale. Psychological Reports, 110(2), 501-517: Modified by the Researchers

Where: SD-Strongly Disagree, Disagree, SM-Somewhat Disagree, NA-Neither Disagree nor Agree, SWA-Somewhat Agree, A-Agree, SA-Strongly Agree.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

50.4% of the youths agreed that they were always thinking of social media even when not using it. 41.4% used social media without any particular motive. 26.4% of the youths were found to have started arguments with others after using social media. 43.2% of the youth agreed that their personal work was interrupted by the time spent on social media. Majority of the youths (83.6%) revealed that they felt connected with others by spending time on social media. 70.3% of the youths agreed that they had failed to track the length of time they spent on social media. 63.3% of the youth acknowledged that they were afraid of not being on social media. 67.5% of the youths who were sampled, were unable to reduce the time spent on social media. The results are similar to the works of Curtis et al., (2019) who argued that the general consensus on social media and its addiction is that social media users tend to separate themselves from social interaction leading to increased loneliness. However, Christian et al., (2020) in a separate perspective concluded that social media could improve the well-being of lonely people since it improves emotional attachments and mood support.

·Majority of the respondents (50.8%) were females. This implies that females in Uganda are more addicted to social media compared to males.

·Most of the respondents (39.1%) were aged between 18-25 years followed by 26-33 years who were 36.0%. Hence, social media usage was rampant among users aged between 18-33 years.

·53.5% of the respondents sampled were from Central Uganda followed by 13.9% representing other parts of the world (Ugandans living abroad apart from the United States of America, Canada, Sweden, Middle East), and 13.9% from Eastern Uganda. Thus, youths in Central Uganda were fond of using social media compared to other parts of the country. This could ease their capacity to do online business whilst being exposed to the dangers of overusing social media platforms.

·It was found that 52.5% of the social media users sampled were unemployed. As a result, they spend most of their time on social media which promotes redundancy, and vulnerability to misusing social media.

·Majority of the social media users in Uganda (47.5%) joined social media between 2019 and 2022, and 40.2% joined after 2022. This would imply that the COVID-19 outbreak might have sparked off social media usage in the country. Besides, the period 2019-2022 included elections that attracted many youths. This could also be one of the factors why many youths joined social media to follow up the political trends and contribute as voters, supporters, and information handlers.

·68.3% of the social media users had attained a maximum level of education of 'O' level (ordinary level and did not reach high school). This explains why majority of these were unemployed.

·Most of the social media users (89.9%) were using mobile gadgets such as telephones and tablets to access internet. It was also noted that there were only 10.1% who used computers to access internet. This was partially due to the costly prices of both laptops and desktops which youths cannot afford especially given their unemployment status.

·There was a higher utilisation of WhatsApp (59.8%) compared to Facebook (10.8%) among other social media platforms. The low Facebook usage was largely a result of the government ban on Facebook that propels youths to use Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to access it. This is equally expensive and increases social media expenditure by youths, worsening their exposure to the risk of poverty and its related challenges.

· 75.5% of social media users used it to connect with friends online, leisure, and others with no major reason except just chatting. Surprisingly, 70.3% of the youths could not track the exact time they spend on social media apart from giving a range of time in terms of estimate. This implies very social media users use it for business purposes to improve their economic well-being. The internet data used becomes a waste of resources other than being used to make and multiply wealth such as through looking for customers online via social media.

Most of the social media users (88.1%) spent an average of 2-5 hours a day on social media. There are eight (8) normal working hours according to the labour laws of Uganda. Hence most of this time is wasted on social media. For youths who are already employed but spend a lot of time on social media, their productivity is low. Similarly, those engaged in self-employment lose their precious time on social media, leading to loss of their would-be income and worsening their vulnerability to poverty.

CONCLUSION

A high level of social media addiction by youths without using it for strategic networking and economic purposes will result in many of Uganda's youths remaining redundant, and financially weak. The would-be opportunities to connect to potential employers and customers are lost by social networking without a clear objective. Further, unguided youths who spend most of their time on social media without the initiative to seek any form of employment will become a threat to the country's moral, social, cultural, economic, and political capital. Creating a large pool of unemployed youths on social media culminates in misuse such as cyber crimes.

Recommendations

1

The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) and the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance should sensitize youths about the benefits of appropriate usage of social media and the disadvantages of its misuse. This will promote proper social media usage and maximise social and economic benefits from it.

2

The Ministry of ICT and National Guidance should lift the ban on Facebook usage in Uganda. This will increase the number of youths who use Facebook, in addition to reducing security threats since VPNs reflect foreign countries when connected and locations within the country where the social media user logs in from.

3

Social media should be embedded within the school curriculum for business and ICT subjects for students to embrace it as a tool of social and economic empowerment. This will improve the mindset change towards social media.

4

New studies should be conducted on the impact of social media on the reputation and political capital of politicians in Uganda with a hypothesis that social media is characterised by misinformation and propaganda that destroys politicians.

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