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Original Article

## Social Media Influence on Personal Security among the Youth in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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Technology*

This study examined positive uses of social media that include warning and preventing individuals from violence resulting from negative uses of social media and user victimisation. The study was guided by Space transition theory which states that criminals are more likely to commit crimes in cyberspace more than in physical space due to anonymity and identity flexibility. The objective of the study was to determine the forms of social media use among the youths in Nairobi County. The target population were members of the Professional Criminologists Association of Kenya (PCKA). Purposive sampling was used to select 155 youth respondents from a population of 15000 youths and 145 law enforcement informant interviewees drawn from 2,000 law enforcement officers in PCKA in Nairobi County. Piloting of the questionnaire was disseminated among 30 PCKA youths Nakuru chapter. The research instruments were verified by the supervisor for content validity. Statistical Packages for Social Sciences, SPSS and Microsoft Excel software were used in data entry and descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. Qualitative data were analysed using content analysis, coding, classification, and text inferencing. This study was significant to academic research, criminal justice practitioners and the private sector to assist in goal formulation and achievement of cyber security. The results of this research showed that the form of social media that youth mostly prefer +are WhatsApp over other social media platforms. The most preferred social media platforms by both genders were found to be WhatsApp and Twitter. It was recommended that future research could focus on the modern methods of social media as technology is dynamic. This will give direction on the contemporary forms of social media and their relationship to personal security; this, in turn, improves the security settings suitable for the users.

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## INTRODUCTION

Social media can be defined as digital platforms that involve interaction among several users by sending messages or calling in a simpler and faster way that only requires an internet connection and a smartphone or a computer (Jeesmitha & Com, 2019). In the past, communication was slower as it was done through letters, telephone calls, or newsletters. Improvement in technology has led to improved communication globally. Social media involves interaction through the creation of accounts where users exchange ideas, goals and keep track of each other (Akakandelwa & Walubita, 2017).

The early form of social media dates back to 1997 and is referred to as Six Degrees founded by Andrew Weinreich based in New York; it had millions of users who were able to create online profiles and interact with others; however, it was limited by internet connectivity which was not common among people at that time (Jeesmitha & Com, 2019). In the early 2000s, other social networking sites such as LinkedIn and Myspace gained popularity. Facebook and Twitter which are the most popular platforms had already spread to most countries by 2006. Today, there are many social media sites depending on individual preferences (Jeesmitha & Com, 2019).

In North and South America, the main forms of social media commonly used include YouTube and Facebook with 68% of adults using Facebook; however, young adults (18-24 years) frequently use Instagram and Snapchat (Richins, 2015). In South American countries, the trend varies among countries depending on technology. Research has found that social media is an increasingly prevalent fixture for youth in the USA with more than 90% of teenagers using it daily (Byrne et al., 2018) (Byrne, Vessey, & Pfeifer, 2018). Though social media has provided many positive opportunities for youths, it has also become a major platform for cybercrime and violent extremism (Alava, Frau-Meigs, & Hassan, 2017; Byrne, Vessey, & Pfeifer, 2018) (Alava et al., 2017; Byrne et al., 2018).

In Africa, young people use social media for entertainment, social interaction, and research. In South Africa, most youths spend time chatting, uploading content, downloading video games, getting news updates, and sharing knowledge. Facebook tops the list, then YouTube and Twitter are among social media users in South Africa (Shava & Chinyamurindi, 2018). In Nigeria, social media has been used by terror groups such as Boko Haram to perpetrate insecurity (Omede & Alebiosu, 2020). Nigerian security agencies monitor social media to be able to sieve out and react to all anti-

government, anti-military, and anti-security communications on social media (Ogunlana, 2019; Omede & Alebiosu, 2020). It has also been established in the literature that social media has been used to target victims of ritualism and sacrifices in West African countries as well as parts of East Africa (Olofinbiyi, 2021).

Kenya according to the Communications Authority of Kenya (CAK) there are about 40.4 million mobile phone subscribers in Kenya, the trend keeps on increasing and commonly downloaded applications are Facebook, branch, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Tala, True caller, and Opera mini. The majority of the users are on WhatsApp at 12 million and the least is Snapchat at 0.25 million (Bake, 2018). In Kenya, Al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda Muslim jihadists use Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to spread their ideologies to their sympathisers and cause fear in the entire population by posting images of successful attacks. This in turn fuels hatred. Social media provides direct communication between terrorists and interested parties (Project et al., 2018). During the post-election violence in Kenya, social media was used to spread propaganda, regrouping of people and provide updates about the crisis while fuelling ethnic hatred (Kižina, 2015)

### **Social Media and Personal Security**

Social media has been known to influence personal security. Criminals use social media platforms to perpetrate crimes and violence against their target victims based on their online activities. Cybercriminals target social media sites with the use of malware programs aimed at a computer or a network. Common methods used to deliver malicious programs are pop-up advertisements and attachments connecting to various links (Kumar & Somani, 2018). Sophos antivirus developer states that malware victims on social media are 40% of its user's modern techniques target legitimate websites to spread malicious programs through holes (Kumar & Somani, 2018). Spammed emails contain

malicious links that a potential victim clicks on the link, which will be redirected (Soomro & Hussain, 2019).

Computer programs rapidly change and so do malicious programs making them even more difficult to detect among dormant computers. Cyberbullying perpetrators may enjoy anonymity due to the fact that they can change the user profiles and personal information of different individuals (Nilan et al., 2015). The victim may be aware of the offender, but a challenge is posed when the proof is required to show the offender is indeed someone well known to the victims. Online romance scams occur when a user sends a friend request to someone pretending to show interest; they end up exchanging personal information that is used to manipulate their victims for monetary gains (Whitty & Buchanan, 2016). Studies carried out shown that social media users or someone they know have experienced online romance scams, with the users forging new relationships online (De Jong, 2019). Loneliness has been attributed to victims who get involved in online romance scams. A study carried out shows that most victims are females (Shaari et al., 2019).

### **Social media and Personal Security**

Each form of social media has specific privacy and account settings to suit the target market. WhatsApp contains end-to-end encryption that prevents information access to third parties (Tamori et al., 2018). Facebook security concerns include hacking of user accounts, impersonation, cyberbullying, and cyberstalking. Several years after Facebook's inception, user names and passwords were sent with encryption making them available to third parties hence a security risk (Calbalhin, 2018).

Security concerns on WhatsApp include sharing links to different users that are malware attacks and when followed, could lead to the users' details being leaked. Also, most computers, tablets, and smartphones do not encrypt data such as iPhones, hence, posing a security risk. Identity theft occurs

when a person conceals their original identity, for instance, by stealing someone's phone and sending messages to the contacts to obtain money (Irshad & Soomro, 2018). Research on the use of social media suggests that social use tops the list, such as exchanging emails and chatting; the highest percentage of people have email accounts (Nishad, 2018). Cybercriminals send emails with the motive of defrauding their victims or inviting them for a false interview that the mainstream organisation knows nothing about. Some go as far as collecting application fees from unsuspecting job seekers in order to be recruited (Hufnagel et al., 2019).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Jaishankar proposed a new theory of cybercrime in 2008. Space transition theory explains criminal behaviour both in actual space and cyberspace (Jaishankar 2008). Criminals are likely to commit a crime in virtual space due to flexible identity, impersonation and lack of deterrence factors. Criminal behaviour in digital space may be likely to be transferred to actual space. This theory states that criminals are likely to meet in the virtual space due to their similarities in goals and then agree to participate in crimes as a group; the platform provides an easy way to escape due to the temporal nature of cyberspace. Cybercrimes may result from the conflict of norms from physical space and cyberspace. This theory gives an explanation of what leads to cybercrime and the nature of the behaviour of offenders in cyberspace.

In this study, social media sites provide avenues for criminals to commit crimes identity is flexible due to the fact that they can create profiles using a fake name and even put fake photographs, which can be easily accessed online. When a crime is committed, the victim may not have the details of the offender. Cybercrime laws in Kenya have not been fully implemented, and this poses a challenge to the

victims who have to endure the wrath of the perpetrators for fear of being exposed to the whole world. Blackmail is a common characteristic of online criminals; they demand monetary gains or damage the victim's reputation.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was geographically located in Nairobi City County. The site was chosen as it is a cosmopolitan area with the majority of the population from diverse backgrounds. The Professional Criminologists Association of Kenya is located in Nairobi City County with members spread across different counties. The members who participated in filling out questionnaires were between the ages of 18-35 years.

This study employed descriptive survey research. The design was chosen as the population was to be described with respect to study variables. Kerlinger and Lee (2000) assert that descriptive design is appropriate to comprehensively gather information about a specific group at an appropriate time and location. It also adopted a mixed-method approach, which aims to obtain quantitative and qualitative data required in the study according to the objectives (Silva, 2017). Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using survey questionnaires distributed among the respondents and then later on analysed.

A target population is a group of people with common characteristics that meet the criteria for a specific research topic (Mohsin, 2016). This study had, as its target population, all youths who are members of PCAK, with a target population of 15,000 youths ranging between the ages of 18-35 years. The study also targeted law enforcement officers in PCAK, who were 2,000 in Nairobi. *Tables 1* and *2* illustrate the respective target population.

**Table 1: Target population of youth members of PCAK**

Youth Respondents by Age	Target Population		
	Female	Male	Total
19-25	2,710	8,032	10,742
26-30	677	2,226	2,903
31-35	387	968	1,355
Total	3,774	11,226	15,000

Source: (PCAK, 2021)

**Table 2: Target population of law enforcement members of PCAK**

Law enforcement Department	Target Population		
	Female	Male	Total
Administration Police Service	273	230	503
Kenya Police Service	480	343	823
Directorate of Criminal Investigations	178	233	411
Private Security Services	94	80	174
Others	42	57	99
Total	1,067	933	2000

Source: (PCAK, 2021)

## RESULTS

### Response Rate

The general response rate for all the participants in the current study was 43.00%, where 129 out of 300 targeted respondents participated, as shown in *Table 3*. The response rate for youth respondents drawn from PCAK was 43.23%, with 67 out of 155 target respondents participating. The response rate of the law enforcement informants drawn from PCAK was 42.76%, with 62 out of 145 targeted respondents participating.

The response rate found in the current research was well above the average response rate for surveys

that were found at 33%, as shown in Lindemann (2021). The response rate in the current was also above the acceptable limit for online surveys, which was found as 29% (Lindemann, 2021). It was found that the response rate for youth participants was slightly higher than that for law enforcement informants, possibly due to previous findings that young people frequently use the internet more than older people (Kelfve et al., 2020). The finding confirms findings in previous research that youth more efficiently use online questionnaires than older people, who often find being online challenging (Dillman & Smyth, 2007; Kaplowitz et al., 2004).

**Table 3: Response rate**

PCAK Members	Sample			Participants			Rate (%)
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Youth	116	39	155	50	17	67	43.23%
Law enforcement	77	68	145	51	11	62	42.76%
Total	193	107	300	101	28	129	43.00%

Source: (Researcher)

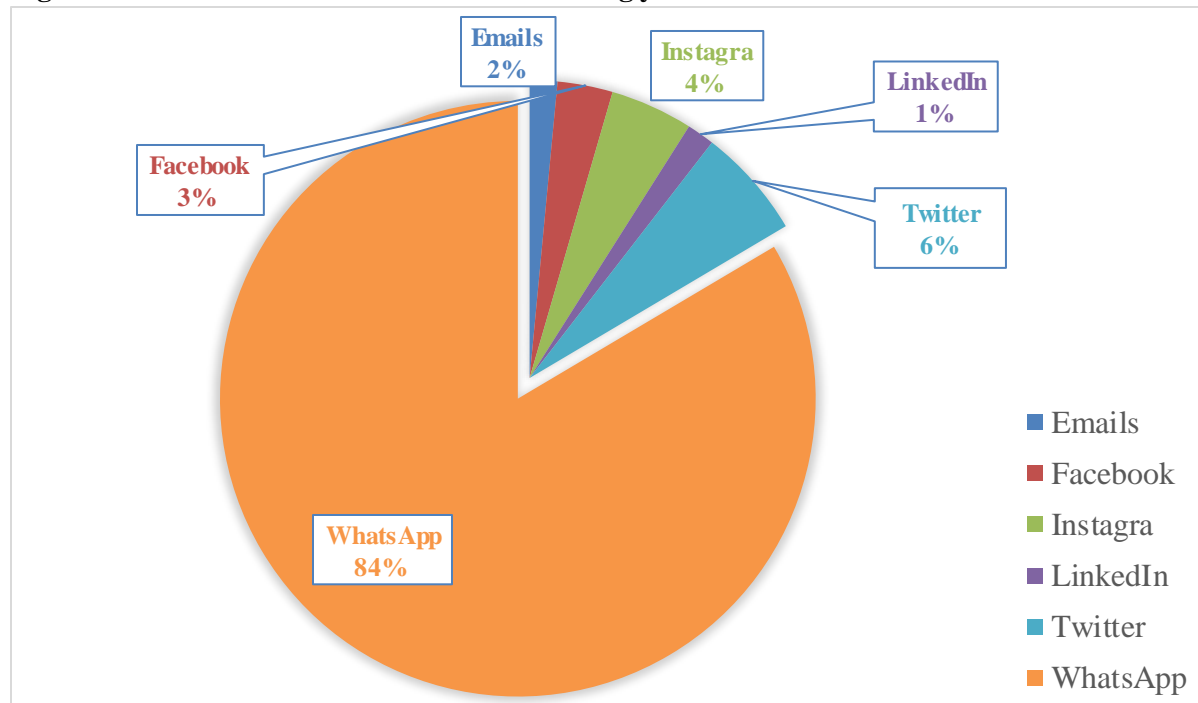
**Descriptive Findings**

***Forms of Social Media among the Youth in Nairobi City County***

The pie chart in *Figure 1* illustrates that 84% of the youth respondents indicated that they mostly used

WhatsApp, about 6% of commonly used Twitter, 4% used Instagram, 3% used Facebook, and the rest mainly used emails. From these results, about 97% of the youth respondents used WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, and only 3% commonly used other social media platforms such as email and LinkedIn.

**Figure 1: Most used forms of social media among youth**



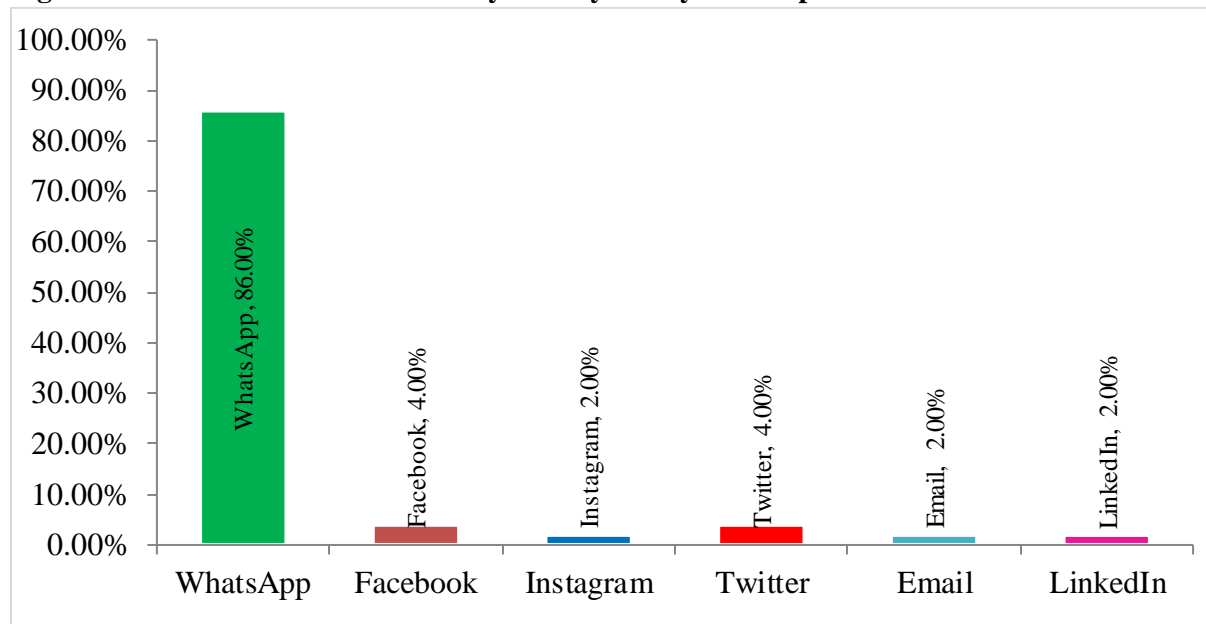
**Source:** (Researcher)

The results that the youth prefer WhatsApp over other social media platforms corroborate findings in previous research that it provides simple, personal, and real-time messaging without any cost other than their internet data already in their smartphones (Jisha & Jebakumar, 2014; Udenze, 2017). The percentage usage of WhatsApp was closer to that found in a study in Kenya that found its use at 89% compared to 84% found in the current research. (SIMElab Africa, 2019). Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp are all owned by Facebook Inc and were most commonly used by 91% of the youth respondents. The largest preference for WhatsApp by the youth in the current research was also most likely due to its privacy features enabled by end-to-

end encryption as confirmed by Endeley (2018) as a means of preventing privacy infringements and reducing security threats due to hacking and other crimes.

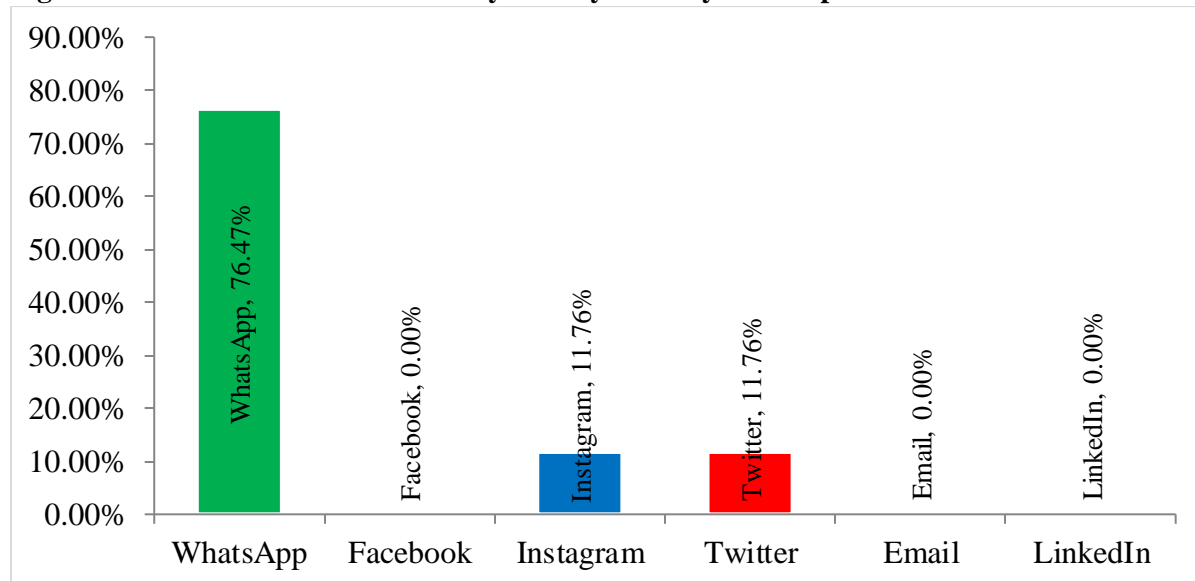
Further analysis of forms of social media users with respect to gender is shown in *Figures 2* and *3*. About 86% of male and 76% of female youth respondents were found to mostly use WhatsApp. About 4% of male and 12% of female youth respondents were found to mostly use Twitter. Similar results were found with regard to Instagram, where more female youth respondents (12%) used Instagram compared to males, who were only 2%.

**Figure 2: Forms of social media mostly used by male youth respondents**



Source: (Researcher)

**Figure 3: Forms of social media mostly used by female youth respondents**



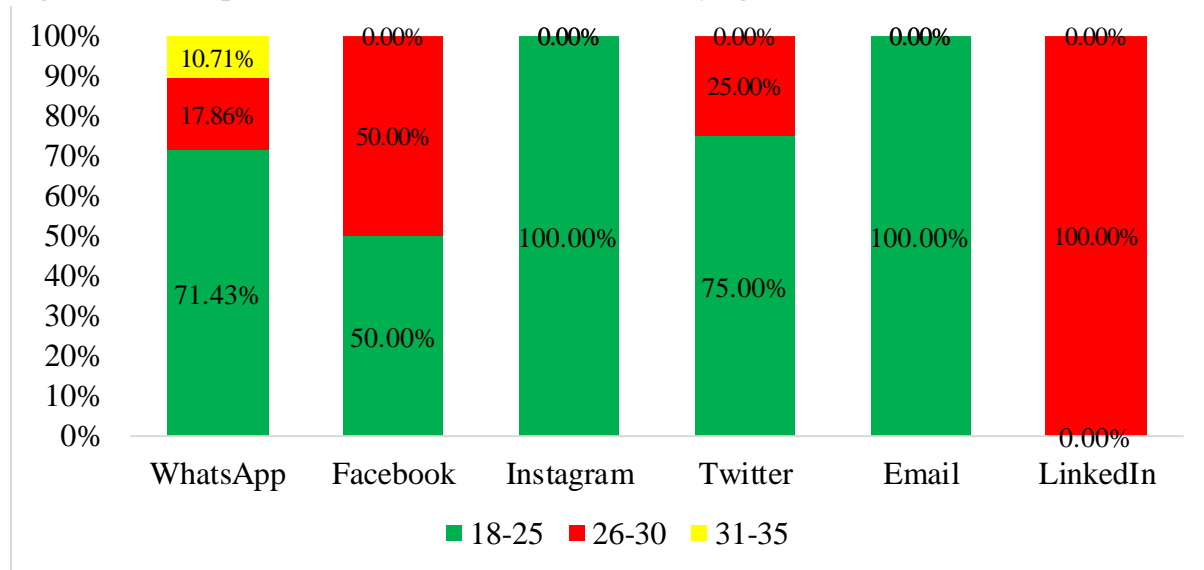
Source: (Researcher)

From the results, it was clear generally that the most preferred social media platforms by both genders were WhatsApp and Twitter. This finding on youth preference for WhatsApp and Twitter corroborates findings in previous research (Aissani & Dheyab Abdullah, 2018; George, Sabu, & Jamir, 2020). Additionally, male youth respondents mostly preferred Facebook, while female youth

respondents mostly preferred to use Instagram. This finding confirms previous findings of Waechter (2021) in his study of social media individuality and collectively that female youth prefer Instagram more than their male counterparts. The results that female youth mostly preferred Instagram to Facebook compared to the male also confirmed

findings by Herrero-Diz and Ramos-Serrano (2018).

**Figure 4: Youth preference for forms of social media by age**

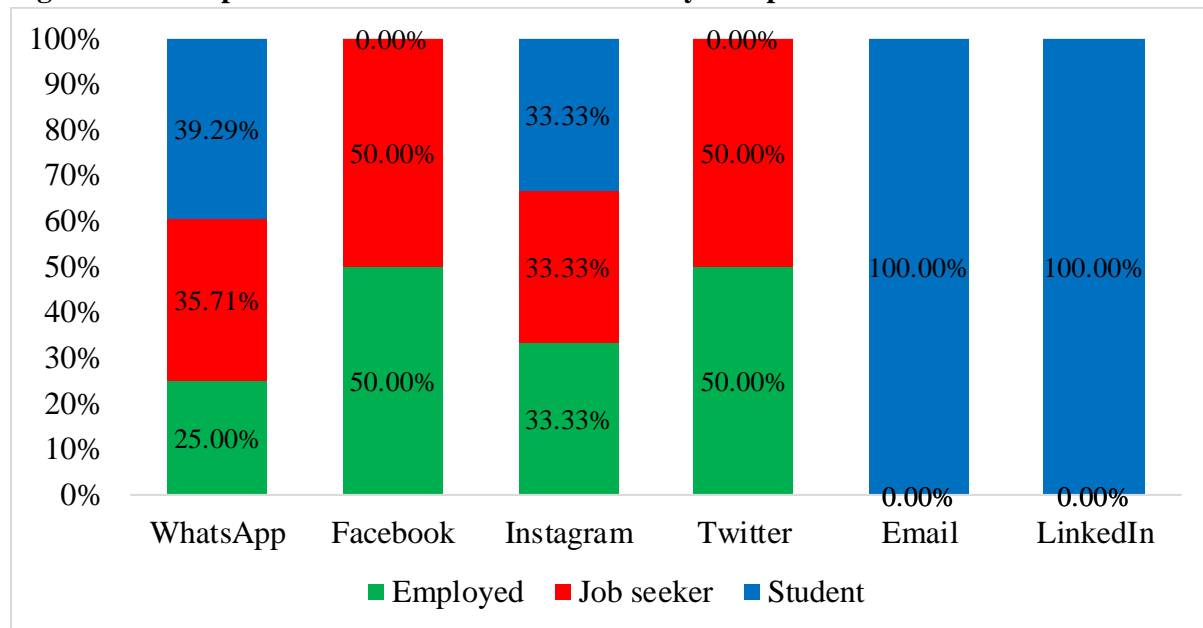


**Source:** (Researcher)

Analysis of social media preference across age groups of the youth respondents presented in *Figure 4* illustrated that Instagram and Email were preferred by youth in the age bracket of 18-25 years, while LinkedIn was most preferred by youth in the age bracket of 26-30 years. From the results, about 75% of youth that preferred Twitter were in the age group of 18-25 years, while the rest who preferred the platform were 26-30 years old. Facebook was preferred in equal measure by youth respondents aged 18-25 and 26-30 years. About 71.48% of youth who preferred WhatsApp were in the age bracket of 18-25 years, 17.86% were in the bracket of 26-30 years, and the rest were in the bracket of 31-35 years.

The findings show that older youth in the age group of 31-35 years did not prefer Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Email, and LinkedIn but preferred WhatsApp. This could possibly be due to the privacy of WhatsApp and its convenience in communicating with friends and group members, as indicated by Udenze (2017). WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Emails were most preferred by younger youth in the age bracket of 18-25 years, possibly corroborating the findings of Uls, Ellison and Sunrahmanyam (2017) in their study of benefits and costs of social media in adolescence. They indicated that youth needed the platforms for frequent communication, relationships, job-search, sharing study materials for those who are students, and sending important documents (Uhls, Ellison, & Subrahmanyam, 2017).



**Figure 5: Youth preference of forms of social media by occupation**

**Source:** (Researcher)

Analysis of social media preference across occupation status of the youth respondents presented in *Figure 5* illustrated that all the youth across occupations preferred WhatsApp and Instagram. In addition to the two platforms, employed youth respondents preferred Facebook and Twitter, while job seekers preferred Facebook and Twitter, and students mostly preferred Email and LinkedIn.

Focusing on each platform, Email and LinkedIn were preferred by students. Facebook and Twitter were preferred equally among job seekers and employed youth respondents. Instagram was also mostly used in equal measures of 33.33% among each of the groups. About 39.29% of youth who mostly used WhatsApp were students, 35.71% were job seekers, and 25% were employed.

The findings that job seekers preferred WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to Emails and LinkedIn show that they possibly used these social media to cultivate their social support networks as suggested by literature (Feuls et al., 2014). However, the finding that LinkedIn and Emails were not preferred among job seekers but are

entirely preferred to other platforms by students was surprising and suggests that job seekers are mainly focused on maintaining support networks and not in active formal pursuit of jobs by use of emails and LinkedIn which, according to Chytiri (2015) and Bichir (2011), are preferred by employers.

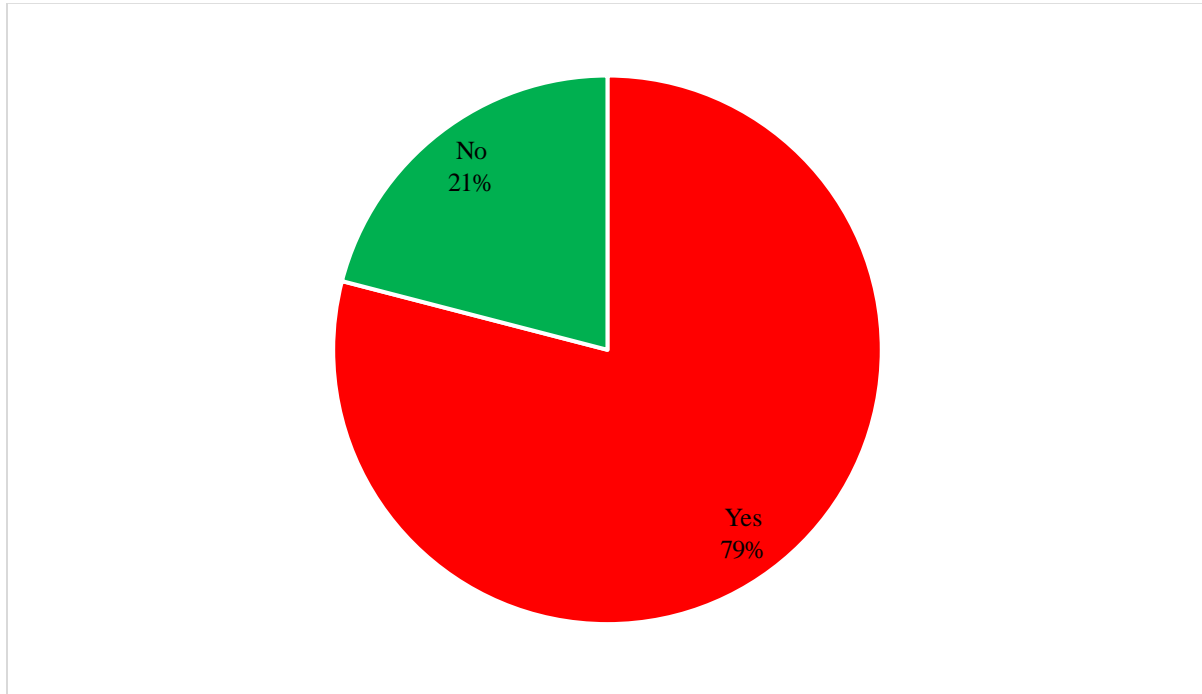
Results in *Figure 6* illustrate that about 79% of the law enforcement informants agreed that time spent on social media has a relationship with a predisposition to social media crimes. This corroborates findings in the literature that time spent online increases the possibility of exposure to risks and pathological tendencies such as cyberbullying (Hay & Ray, 2020; Throuvala, Griffiths, Rennoldson, & Kuss, 2021). The rest of the law enforcement informants did not agree.

The respondents who did not agree cited various reasons, including the nature of activities one is involved in within social media, socioeconomic and political factors at a specific stage of life, the type of audience one entertains, and the type of social media one is engaged in. Other informants argued that so many people are active on social media and not victims. They noted that spending more time on

social media gives one exposure and knowledge to know the modus operandi of the perpetrators, and this one becomes aware of the vulnerabilities of

social media. It was also noted that one could become a victim of cybercrime without spending more time on social media.

**Figure 6: Time Spent on Social Media and Predisposition**



**Summary of Findings**

The results of the current research show that youth mostly prefer WhatsApp over other social media platforms, possibly because it provides simple, personal, and real-time messaging without any cost other than their internet data already in their smartphones (Jisha & Jebakumar, 2014; Udenze, 2017). The percentage usage of WhatsApp was 84% in the current research compared to 89% in the literature (SIMElab Africa, 2019). From the results, the most preferred social media platforms by each gender were WhatsApp and Twitter. It was also found in the current research that older youth in the age group of 31-35 years did not prefer Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Email, and LinkedIn but preferred WhatsApp. This was possibly due to the privacy of WhatsApp and its convenience for communicating with friends and group members. WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Emails were most preferred by younger youth in the

age bracket of 18-25 years. Email and LinkedIn were preferred by students. Facebook and Twitter were preferred equally among job seekers and employed youth respondents. Instagram was also mostly used in equal measures of 33.33% among each of the groups. About 39.29% of youth who mostly used WhatsApp were students, 35.71% were job seekers, and 25% were employed.

**CONCLUSION**

Forms of social media that youth mostly prefer is WhatsApp over other social media platforms. The most preferred social media platforms by both genders were WhatsApp and Twitter. Youth in the age group of 31-35 years did not prefer Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Email and LinkedIn but preferred WhatsApp. WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Emails were most preferred by younger youth in the age bracket of 18-25 years. Email and LinkedIn were preferred by students.

Facebook and Twitter were preferred equally among job seekers and employed youth respondents.

### Recommendations

Technology keeps changing, future studies should look at upcoming forms of social media like TikTok and the security challenges it poses to users. It is recommended that for tracking of social media criminals and victims to be improved, there should be the creation of awareness to the youth to come out and identify possible accounts, interactions, and persons likely to be suspects. Victims should not fear reporting to law enforcement agencies. Public and private sector partnerships and cooperation in the tracking of suspects of social media crimes should be improved.

There should be clear policies on social media. Currently, Kenya has ICT policies and there is no specific policy addressing social media. Specific policies on social media and social media crimes should be put in place. Better policies on the investigation and prosecution of social media crimes should be put in place to support the implementation of laws addressing social media crimes. Regional and international policies on addressing cross-border social media crimes should also be put in place. There should be a law enforcement unit dedicated to social media and with clear policy guidelines on its operations and powers.

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