SOCIAL NETWORKING: IMPLICATIONS ON SOCIAL- EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OF GENERATION Z STUDENTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN KISII COUNTY, KENYA

BY

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DECLARATION

Declaration by the Candidate

I declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been presented for degree in any other University. No part of this thesis should be reproduced in any manner without prior permission of the author, or Moi University.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research thesis to my beloved father the late Marko Mong'are (Rest in Peace), who was a true educationist, who valued education, who was the visionary source of my inspiration, who taught me to be unique, determined and hardworking and for giving me support, guidance and encouragement to pursue this PhD.

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ABSTRACT

Despite the rapid expansion of digital communication, limited scholarly attention has been directed toward how online social networking shapes the socio-emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students in tertiary learning environments an area where research remains fragmented and inconclusive. This study addressed this gap by examining the implications of social networking on the social and emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya. The purpose of the research was to investigate how and why Gen Z students engage in social networking and to determine the resultant socio-emotional outcomes within the educational context. Specifically, the study sought to: analyse the underlying motivations driving Gen Z students' engagement in social networking: evaluate the extent to which social networking influences the social Well-Being of Gen Z students: assess the impact of social networking on the emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students: explore strategies that can promote healthy use of social media by Gen Z students and compare gender differences in patterns of social networking and their effects on the socio-emotional Well-Being of this cohort. Guided by a Pragmatic research paradigm, the study adopted a convergent parallel mixed methods approach, enabling simultaneous collection and integration of quantitative and qualitative data. The work was anchored on Uses and Gratifications Theory, which assumes that individuals actively select media platforms to satisfy specific psychological and social needs, and Social Network Theory**,** which posits that social behaviour and outcomes are shaped by patterns of connections and interactions within online and offline networks. The target population comprised 36,820 students enrolled in tertiary institutions within Kisii County, alongside deans of students from these institutions. Using Yamane's formula, a sample of 396 Gen Z students was derived. Probability sampling techniques of stratified multistage sampling followed by simple random sampling were used to select the students, while purposive sampling identified five deans of students from five institutions. Data were collected using questionnaires for students and interview guides for deans of students. A pilot study was conducted to ensure instrument reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.743 across 39 items, indicating strong internal consistency. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and percentages, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed and integrated during interpretation. The study found that Gen Z students demonstrated high levels of social networking engagement driven by motivations such as communication, entertainment, identity expression, and academic support. While social networking enhanced social connection and facilitated emotional expression, it also contributed to negative outcomes such as excessive screen time, reduced quality of life, weakened soft skills, and tendencies towards addictive behaviours. Gender differences were observed in platform preferences and types of online activities undertaken. The study concludes that although social networking provides meaningful opportunities for connection and self-expression, its' unmoderated use poses significant risks to the socio-emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students. It recommends active involvement of parents, caregivers, and institutional administrators in guiding students toward healthier digital practices. Further recommendations include integrating emotional wellness and digital counselling into student support frameworks, establishing peer mentorship programmes to strengthen offline social relations, and developing gender-responsive social media awareness campaigns to promote responsible and balanced online engagement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION ii
DEDICATION iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv
ABSTRACT v
TABLE OF CONTENTS vi
LIST OF TABLES x
LIST OF FIGURES xi
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS xii
CHAPTER ONE 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY 1
1.1 Overview 1
1.2 Background of the Study 1
1.3 Statement of the Problem 10
1.4 Purpose of Study 12
1.5 Objectives of the Study 12
1.6 Research Questions 12
1.7 Justification of the Study 13
1.8 Significance of the Study 14
1.9 Scope of the Study 15
1.10 Limitations of the Study 17
1.11 Assumptions of the Study 19
1.12 Theoretical Framework 19
1.12.1 The Social Network Theory (SNT) 20
1.12.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&GT) 22
1.13 Conceptual Framework 27
1.14 Operational Definition of Terms 29
CHAPTER TWO 37
LITERATURE REVIEW 37
2.1 Overview 37
2.2 Concept of Socio- Emotional Well-Being 37
2.2.1 Social Well-Being (SWB) 39
2.2.2 Emotional Well-Being (EWB) 43

2.3 Motivations Driving Gen Z Students' Engagement in Social Networking.....44
2.3.1 Generational Cohorts through Digitalization and Social Networks 52
2.3.2 Generation Z Cohort.....55
2.3.3 Evolution of Social Media.....59
2.4 Influence of Social Networking on Social Well-Being of Gen Z Students 69
2.5 Impact of Social Networking on the Emotional Well-Being of Gen Z Students 91
2.6 Strategies that can Promote Healthy Use of Social Media by Gen Z Students 106
2.7 Gender and Social Networking 118
2.8 Research Gap.....124
2.9 Chapter Summary.....126
CHAPTER THREE.....129
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY 129
3.1 Introduction 129
3.2 Research Paradigm.....129
3.3 Research Design.....130
3.4 Research Area 131
3.5 Target Population 133
3.6 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size 133
3.6.1 Sample Size 134
3.6.2 Sampling Procedures 135
3.7 Data Collection Instruments.....136
3.7.1 Questionnaire for Students 137
3.7.2 Interview Schedule for Deans of Students 138
3.7.3 Focus Group Discussions for Students.....138
3.8 Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments 138
3.8.1 Validity 139
3.8.2 Content Validity 139
3.8.3 Construct Validity.....140
3.8.4 Face Validity.....140
3.9 Reliability of Instruments.....140
3.9.1 Trustworthiness 143
3.9.2 Transferability 143

3.9.3 Dependability....143
3.9.4 Confirmability....144
3.9.5 Reflexivity of the Researcher....144
3.9.6 Scoring of the Instruments....144
3.10 Piloting of Research Instruments....145
3.11 Data Collection Procedures....146
3.12 Data Analysis....148
3.13 Ethical Considerations....149
CHAPTER FOUR....151
DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION 151
4.1 Overview....151
4.2 Response Rate....151
4.3 Demographic Characteristics....152
4.3.1 Age of students....152
4.3.2 Gender of the students....152
4.3.3 Year of Study....153
4.4 Motivations driving Gen Z students to engage in Social Networking....153
4.4.1 Method of Accessing the Internet....154
4.4.2 Content Accessed Online....155
4.4.3 Students' Behavior with Social Media....157
4.4.4 Descriptive Statistics for Gen Z students' motivations for engaging in social networking....160
4.5 Influence of Social Networking on the Social Well-Being of Gen Z Students 165
4.6 Impact of Social Networking on the Emotional Well-Being of Gen Z Students 170
4.7 Gender perception on Social Networking and Socio-Emotional Well-Being of Gen Z Students....173
4.8 Strategies that can Promote Healthy Use of Social Media by Gen Z Students 176
CHAPTER FIVE 180
SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS....180
5.1 Overview....180

5.2 Summary of the Findings 180
5.2.1 The Motivation for Social Networking by Gen Z Students 180
5.2.2 Influence of Social Networking on the Social Well-Being of Gen Z Students 181
5.2.3 Impact of Social Networking on the Emotional Well-Being of Gen Z Students 182
5.2.4 Gender perception on Social Networking and Socio-Emotional Well-Being of Gen Z Students 182
5.2.5 Strategies that can Promote Healthy Use of Social Media by Gen Z Students 183
5.3 Conclusion 183
5.4 Recommendations of the Study 185
5.5 Areas for Further Studies 186
REFERENCES 188
APPENDICES 203
Appendix A: Introductory Letter 203
Appendix B: Institutional Consent 204
Appendix C: Informed Consent for Participants 205
Appendix D: Questionnaire for Students 206
Appendix E: Focus Group Discussion Guide 212
Appendix F: Interview Schedule for Deans of Students 214
Appendix G: Approval from the School Of Education 215
Appendix H: Nacosti Permit 216
Appendix I: Authorization by the County Director of Education 217
Appendix J: Permission from the Institution 218
Appendix K: Map of Kenya Showing Kisii County 219
Appendix L: Map Showing the Location of the Study 220
Appendix M: Plagiarism Awareness Certificate 221

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Sample Size 134
Table 3.2 : Reliability Acceptable Table 141
Table 3.3: Reliability Statistics 142
Table 3.4: Data Analysis Process 149
Table 4.1: Response Rate Questionnaire 151
Table 4.2: Age of the Students 152
Table 4.3: Gender of students 152
Table 4.4: Year of Study 153
Table 4.5: Gen Z Students' motivations for engaging in social networking 153
Table 4.6: Method of accessing the internet by Gen Z students 154
Table 4.7: Content Accessed Online 155
Table 4.8: Students' Behavior with Social Media 158
Table 4.9: Gen Z Student's Motivation for engagement in Social Networking 160
Table 4.10: Gen Zs' Perceptions on the Influence of Social Network on their Social Well-Being 166
Table 4.11: Emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students 170
Table 4.12: Gen Z Students' Perception on Gender 174
Table 4.13: Students' Perceptions on Strategies that can Promote Healthy Use of Social Media 176

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Social Networks & uses and Gratifications Theories Triangulation Model 26

Figure 1.2: Conceptual Framework on Implications of Social networking on the social-emotional well-being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya. 28

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CAK	Communications Authority of Kenya
CIDP	County Integrated Development Plan
DV	Dependent Variable
EWB	Emotional wellbeing
FOMO	Fear of Missing out
IREC	Institutional Research Ethics Committee
IV	Independent Variable
LREB	Lake Region Economic Bloc
NACOSTI	National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
OCD	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
OMG	Slang used to express 'O My God'
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEWB	Socio- Emotional Well-Being
SNS	Social Networking Sites
SNT	Social Network Theory
SPSS	Statistical Package For Social Sciences
SWB	Social Well-Being
U&GT	Uses & Gratifications Theory
UN	United Nations
USIU-A	United States International University-Africa
YOLO	Slang meaning 'You Only Live Once'

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Overview

This chapter introduces the study on Implications of Social Networking on Social-Emotional Well-being of Generation Z (Gen Z) Students in Tertiary Institutions in Kisii County, Kenya. It focuses on the background, statement of the problem, purpose of study, research objectives, research questions, as well as the justification. The chapter also discusses significance, scope, limitations and assumptions of the study. Additionally, the theories applied, conceptual framework and the operational definition of terms are discussed and chapter summary done.

1.2 Background of the Study

Social networking is the use of dedicated internet based social media through applications and websites to interact with other users, to connect with others, communicate, share information and form relationships. It entails having connections in both real and digital worlds. It can be used widely for many purposes through sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, whatsapp and many others. In this study, reference will be for the online networking. Social Networking is the independent variable of the study whereas socio emotional wellbeing which is the ability to build and maintain healthy relationships, having meaningful interactions with people around one, and being able to understand one's own emotions and handle them in different situations is the dependent variable.

In terms of socio-emotional well-being, there are several sub- variables categorized into high and low. High socio -emotional well-being is characterized by happiness, satisfaction, self-esteem, feeling liked, feeling loved, feeling secure and enthusiastic. Low Socio-emotional well-being is characterized by feelings of dejection, despair,

hopelessness, apathy, loneliness, embarrassment, anxiety and uncertainty. These can or cannot be enhanced by other variables like age, gender, year of study, faculty or school or department, type of institution, course of study, and cell phone ownership.

In this study, this new mode of communication is referred to by various names such as online social networking, social networks, social networking and social media interchangeably because of its broad scope and widespread usage. Generation Z (Gen Z) is one of the current six generational cohorts comprising of individuals born between 1997 and 2012.

Ariffin et al, (2024), assert that in recent years, the pervasive influence of social networking platforms has significantly impacted the lives of individuals across generations, particularly among the Generation Z cohort. With the advent of digital technology and the internet, this cohort has grown up in a world where social networking sites serve as integral components of their daily lives. The implications of this phenomenon extend beyond mere communication and networking; they delve into the intricate fabric of socio-emotional wellbeing, especially in the context of tertiary education institutions.

Additionally, having grown up surrounded by digital technology, this generation has become naturally fluent in navigating both online and offline environments. Their ease with tech tools makes them quick to adapt to new innovations. Many place a high value on education, often aiming for advanced learning opportunities, and show a strong interest in entrepreneurial ventures. Despite these strengths, their deep dependence on digital platforms can lead to difficulties in face-to-face communication, emotional well-being struggles, and gaps in evaluating and understanding information critically (Ariffin et al., 2024).

Social networking by use of various media is the most popular mode of communication that has become part of everyday lives. According to Elkatmis&Talbot (2024), social media has enabled people to communicate freely with anyone around the world. People can share their ideas, emotions, feelings and moments through the perceived secure platform. It has revolutionized the way young people including Generation Z communicate, interact and socialize, becoming an integral part of their social and cultural fabric as they are considered the largest users of technology. The techno- savvy students get so engrossed in social media activities that they spend a considerable amount of their time online.

Elkatmış & Talbot, (2024), in their study on Examination of Social Media usage among Gen Z students in Turkey opine that in recent years, social media platforms have emerged as the dominant space for interaction, especially among the younger generation (Elkatmış & Talbot, 2024). In today's digitally driven world, the way people interact and connect has been fundamentally reshaped. Among all aspects of social life, communication has seen the most dramatic shift. Historically, human expression relied on spoken language, writing, and print media. Now, however, it is increasingly mediated through digital tools such as the internet, computers, and various communication technologies. This study explores how the use of online social networking affects the social and emotional well-being of Generation Z students in higher learning institutions.

In a research conducted in China, it was found the diverse content and abundant information on social networking sites cater to college students' curiosity and thirst for knowledge. By perusing and assimilating such information, college students can enrich their knowledge base and elevate their cognitive proficiency, thereby enhancing their emotional management capabilities (Han & Xu, 2024). It further alluded despite that,

the utilization of social networking sites inevitably brings about some adverse consequences. Further, they averred that comments and visual posts shared on social networking platforms can trigger strong emotional reactions among college students and that overdependence on these sites may weaken real-life connections and diminish their ability to communicate effectively in person. Further still, exposure to negative content such as baseless criticism or online attacks can be common, and continuous interaction with such environments may create psychological strain, ultimately affecting students' emotional regulation and well-being.

A study conducted in Pakistan on the impact of Social media on learning behavior for sustainable education concluded that social media generally impacts youths' daily lives and college students in particular (Abbas et al, 2019). Gen Z are otherwise youth that are generally motivated by the 'desire to bond and bridge social capital, entertainment, and escape through the consumption of social media' (Can & Gökçe, 2019). This study focused on the students born between 1997 and 2012 and are in the tertiary institutions in Kisii County. They are the Generation Z, sometimes also referred to as digital natives or Centennials and their shaping habits include smart phones and social media. This influence can be attributed in part to the role that higher education institutions play in shaping students' academic paths, social relationships, personal identities, and even their behaviors and choices (Smith et al., 2022). Moreover, the ways in which this generation raised alongside the rise of computers and the internet uses social media have become a defining characteristic of the digital era (Elkatmış & Talbot, 2024).

In a systematic literature review of two young generations namely the millennials and post-millennials, that took into account research that had been conducted from 2010 to 2020 concentrating in developed countries, it was found out that, the Gen Z are technically savvy and connected (Karuna & Tiwari, 2021). A Pew research center

survey conducted in USA among youth aged 18-24 also confirm that they are a demographic cohort that has integrated social media into their daily activities forming a large proportion of users of online networking with 88% of all undergraduate students using any form of social media (Smith & Anderson, 2018).

Gen Z is the first generation to grow up entirely with the internet, social media, and smartphones. Generation Z college students are known for being digital natives, having grown up with the internet, social media, and advanced technology thereby having their own unique characteristics. Their approach to online networking is unique in several ways. Having been born and brought up in the digital era, they are technology savvy, and have a wider opportunity for accessing information and communicating through social media. Generation Z is extremely comfortable with technology and digital communication tools. They grew up with smartphones, social media, and apps like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat, so they are adept at using online platforms for networking. According to Zaim et al (2020), computer and internet have become an important part for Gen Z and they are even able to shop on the internet or chat with friends by using online application (Zaim et al., 2020).

Gen Z has distinct characteristics and behaviors that set them apart from older generations, making them an intriguing subject of study in terms of how they interact with online platforms, build relationships, and navigate the digital world an aspect that has implications on their socio-emotional well-being. Most of the Gen Z students are so familiar with social media and the types of communications, to the extent that self-expression, friendship building, and other forms of online engagement are now almost the only reality they know and live. Students are drawn to social media for a variety of reasons. One major appeal is the sense of freedom it provides and they can express themselves freely, share content of their choice, and engage in conversations with

anyone they wish. These platforms also offer opportunities to expand their social circles, interact with others through comments, and show agreement or appreciation through features like likes. It has actually given students a place where they can create virtual communities giving them the liberty to fascinate themselves with more freedom (Shilpi & Arun, 2019).

Social media plays a significant role in shaping how students understand themselves and relate to others within a wider social framework. As they encounter a constant stream of content which includes photos, messages, and peer interactions, their sense of identity, personal values, and understanding of societal norms can be deeply affected. These platforms often create an underlying pressure to showcase an idealized version of oneself, which can influence self-perception and encourage frequent social comparisons (Purnama, 2023).

Moreover, many young people today are so immersed in the often unrealistic digital world that they risk missing out on essential social skills, such as effective verbal communication and meaningful face-to-face interaction (Agrawal & Singh, 2019). According to Agrawal & Singh, (2019), face to face communication is important for healthy living therefore by not so doing and constantly engaging in offline world might lead to isolation, depression, anxiety, irritation and above all emotional distress among the students.

Sumadevi (2023), asserts that media has brought about notable benefits for young people, particularly in how it enhances communication and strengthens their sense of connection and belonging. These platforms serve as hubs for accessing information, learning materials, and a wide range of viewpoints, making them valuable tools for education and personal growth. In addition, social media plays an increasingly

important role in driving social awareness, inspiring youth-led activism, and supporting meaningful causes, giving young people a voice and the power to influence change in their communities. Despite these advantages, the negative effects of social media cannot be ignored. Excessive use especially spending more than three hours a day online has been linked to mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, often intensified by constant comparisons and exposure to unrealistic lifestyles portrayed online. Issues like cyberbullying and threats to personal privacy also pose serious concerns, potentially harming the emotional wellbeing and safety of young users (Sumadevi, 2023).

Reports from Statista (2023) indicate that globally, there are over 5.52 billion unique mobile users in the world today making 67% of active mobile users. There are 4.3 billion (57%) active internet users with 3.48 billion (45%) users of online social networks with 96 billion (54%) people using social media on mobile phones. This means that more than half of the world's population uses social media, with more young people involved. Growth trends indicate that an average of more than one million people start using social media every single day (Statista, 2023) This shows that social media is popular and attracts more people among them the Generation Z students in tertiary institutions.

Euajarusphan, (2021) in a study on "Online Social Media Usage Behavior, Attitude, Satisfaction, and Online Social Media Literacy of Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z" in Thailand found that Gen Z were the highest ranked in media usage though it was mainly for purposes of academics and mass communication. The study further found that the Gen Z were motivated to use social networking because of personal characteristics and motivation as well as the ability to exchange knowledge. Further still, it argued that Gen Zs were born in the era of technological convenience

and do not know a world without internet and communication devices (Euajarusphan, 2021). Additionally, the Gen Z dare to reveal themselves, are highly confident and highly emotional and do not know a life without the internet which they use daily.

In the United States, about 78% of the public are reported to have used social media (Pew Research Center, 2021). This was found out through a survey on Social media use that also revealed that 74% of college students use Facebook, 43% use Instagram, and 51% LinkedIn. In Africa, more than 15% of people are online with youth population being featuring as the highest in the global space. As a consequence, social media consumption continues to raise concern among key stakeholders as to the user needs and gratifications sought and the students in tertiary institutions fall in this category (USIU-Africa, 2020). In terms of reach, South Africa has the highest connectivity which stands at 51%, followed by North Africa at 50%, West Africa 41%, Middle East 12% and East Africa at 32%. (Report 2023)

According to Subair, Solomon, and Adebola (2019), college students engage with multiple media platforms and typically spend over three hours per day on social media. Their primary motivations for using these platforms include social interaction (83%), accessing information (74%), academic purposes (73%), business-related activities (68%), and entertainment (61%). The study that was conducted in Nigeria to examine social media usage among undergraduates vis-à-vis its influence on their studies also identified several negative impacts of social media use on undergraduate education, such as internet addiction (45%), increased distraction (32%), diminished writing and spelling abilities (24%), anti-social tendencies (6%), and experiences of cyberbullying (4%) (Subair, Solomon, & Adebola, 2019)

The Communications Authority of Kenya (CA 2019), has reported that Kenya has 46.94 million mobile subscriptions which is at 91%. Further there are 43.33million internet/data subscriptions which translate to 84%. They further note that 99.2% of the total data/internet subscriptions in Kenya are on mobile phones. (CA, 2019). According to the Communications Authority, most Kenyans aged between 21-35 years spend more than three hours on social media daily with 19% of undergraduate students spending more than three hours on social media, mostly at night.

According to Wamuyu (2020), patterns of social media usage in Kenya vary notably by age group. Individuals aged 21 to 25 tend to prefer platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Telegram, while those in the 26 to 35 age bracket are more engaged on professional networks like LinkedIn, Skype, and Twitter. Among undergraduate students, LinkedIn emerges as the most commonly used platform (41.4%), closely followed by Pinterest at 40.7%. For users holding masters or doctoral degrees, Skype leads in popularity (14.9%), with LinkedIn (12.6%) and Twitter (9.5%) also showing significant use. Overall, the findings highlight a strong presence of social media activity among individuals with higher education, particularly at the college level.

In May 2015, the Daily Nation (local Kenyan media) reported that a 19-year-old female university student committed suicide because she was tormented by a lover that she met online through face book page called love beyond skin color as reported by Angira, 2015. Similarly, a sixteen-year-old high school student committed suicide in Nairobi following participation in an online game known as Blue Whale Challenge which encourages participants to inflict harm upon themselves and on the 50th day of playing the game, they are asked to kill themselves. The game is reported to have been associated with several deaths overseas with about 130 in Russia alone (Ombati & Masibo, 2017).

There are few Kenyan researches based on online social networking and socio-emotional well-being of students in tertiary institutions. An ethnographic study conducted at Moi and Kisii universities explored how internet usage becomes socially meaningful for learning beyond the confines of the classroom. The findings highlighted the widespread use of both mobile phones and internet services among university students (Egesah, 2019). Notably, 59.0% of the students reported using smartphones to access educational content and expand their knowledge beyond what is taught during lectures. The study also revealed that, apart from academic purposes, students frequently rely on mobile internet for leisure activities, entertainment, and maintaining social connections within their peer networks. In this study, students affirmed that despite the benefits, there is indication that internet use can be disruptive.

Although there have been studies on students in tertiary institutions, most have focused on influence of the social media on either academic performance, mental health, gender and media use. The researcher found no study specifically examining the implications of online social networking on the social- emotional well-being of Generation Z students in tertiary institutions highlighting a significant research gap which this study fills and further contributes to the existing knowledge on this technological phenomenon.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Online networking platforms have become central to the daily lives of Gen Z students, including those in tertiary institutions in Kisii County. As digital natives, they rely heavily on platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and X for communication, entertainment, and academic interaction. While this deep engagement can foster connection and creativity, it also carries potential risks, influencing their overall well-being in both positive and negative ways (Tomar & Jayswal, 2024).

Additionally, while these platforms facilitate connection and information access, emerging evidence shows that frequent or prolonged use may expose students to risks such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, addiction, poor sleep, and reduced face-to-face interaction and limited interpersonal development. Studies conducted in Kenya and beyond reveal that youth spend extended periods online often more than 4.5 hours daily making them vulnerable to socio-emotional disturbances linked to excessive engagement with online content.

A systematic review on “Social Media and Psychological Distress among youth” that was carried on through published literature, journals and databases between 2000-2017 found that frequent use of social networking sites like face book, twitter and Instagram often makes users especially youth vulnerable to depression and anxiety (Agrawal & Singh, 2019), thereby affecting their socio-emotional well-being. Despite the growing use of social networking among Gen Z students, especially in tertiary institutions across Kisii County, existing research in Kenya has tended to focus mainly on academic performance, patterns of usage, and access to different platforms. Very few studies have examined how the nature, frequency, and content of online interactions directly influence socio-emotional well-being, particularly for young adults in this region who are at a sensitive stage of emotional and social development. With the rapid emergence of new platforms and increased dependence on digital communication, there is a need to understand how online engagement shapes students' emotional health, self-esteem, motivation, and social relationships.

Although social networking platforms offer numerous benefits, their impact on the socio-emotional well-being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions within Kisii County remains unclear and under-researched. Existing studies have not adequately explored how factors such as excessive use, online social pressures, digital interactions,

and the type of content consumed affect students' emotional stability and social functioning. This lack of empirical evidence creates a significant gap in understanding the socio-emotional implications of online networking for this population, making it necessary to investigate how these platforms influence their well-being during their academic journey.

1.4 Purpose of Study

The study purposed to establish the connection between Social Networking and Social-Emotional Well-being of Gen Z Students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

1.) Analyze the underlying motivations driving Gen Z students' engagement in social networking in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya.

2.) Evaluate the extent to which social networking influences the social well-being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya.

3.) To assess the impact of social networking on the emotional well-being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya.

4.) To determine the gender perception on social networking and socio-emotional well-being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya

5.) To explore strategies that can promote healthy use of social media by Gen Z students in Tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya

1.6 Research Questions

The study was informed by the following specific questions:

1) What are the underlying motivations driving Gen Z students' engagement in social networking in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya?

2) To what extent does social networking influence the social well-being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya?
3) What is the impact of social networking on the emotional well-being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya?
4) What is the gender perception on social networking and socio-emotional well-being among Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya?
5) What strategies can be put in place to promote healthy use of social media by Gen Z students in tertiary institutions?

1.7 Justification of the Study

Generation Z is the first cohort to grow up with uninterrupted access to social media, making these platforms a central aspect of their daily. They rely heavily on social media for staying connected, seeking entertainment, and expressing their identities. Uses &Gratifications Theory posits that individuals actively use media to satisfy specific needs such as social interaction, entertainment, and information seeking, self-expression, and identity formation. Gen Z students, being digital natives, are highly motivated to engage with social networking sites to gratify these needs. Tomar & Jayswal (2024), assert that while this deep engagement with social networking can foster connection and creativity among this population, it also carries potential risks, influencing their overall well-being in both positive and negative ways. UGT therefore justifies examining implications of online social networking use and socio-emotional well-being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County.

Social Network Theory posits that individuals are embedded in social structures made up of relationships, interactions, and shared resources. For Gen Z students, social networking platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp act as digital extensions of their social networks. Gen Z is uniquely networked, with social identities,

friendships, and daily interactions heavily mediated by digital platforms. As much as they use the online resources for connecting with people, socializing as well as for academic purposes, problematic use of the online social networks is associated with impaired psychological wellbeing among university students. (Satici, 2018). Increased reliance on social media platforms has raised concerns about time-wasting, reduced academic focus, cyberbullying, misinformation exposure, and emotional distress. Understanding these implications is necessary for stakeholders in Kisii County's tertiary institutions as would come up with interventions like digital counseling and peer mentorship that would help the Gen Z students.

Excessive engagement with social networking platforms among Gen Z students in colleges has been linked to various psychosocial challenges which may include difficulties in inter-personal relationships, and while Generation Z is widely regarded as digital natives, the full extent to which social media may disrupt their psychosocial well-being remains uncertain (Pescadero & Cabahug, 2023). In view of this, a practical justification for the study is that the findings guide tertiary institutions to consider developing policies that will guide responsible and healthy use of social media in tertiary institutions alongside designing digital literacy campaigns.

1.8 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in bridging the knowledge gap of online social networking as a factor influencing the socio-emotional well-being of Gen Z students. It was hoped that it would also help Gen Z students to know how to balance between online social communication and face to face communication and develop important social skills. It also attests to the urgent need for the development of new strategies that will help educate the students on how to be active and creative and therefore share and consume content responsibly. It was envisaged that this study would give new insights

to understanding the potential value of online social networking on college students and how they can use social media in a healthy and responsible way. This will culminate in Gen Z students in tertiary institutions to benefit socially and emotionally hence achieve positive socio-emotional well-being. Once that happens, it will also contribute to not only to academic success but also overall wellbeing of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions.

The issue of mental health has featured a lot in the recent past and so the findings provide more insight to the counseling psychologists so that they will be able to guide young people appropriately on how social media can affect them. The Government of Kenya may also benefit and review the regulations guiding media use and especially among young people. The universities and institutions of higher learning will also acknowledge the influence of online networking activities of their students on their socio-emotional well-being and can be able to guide them accordingly in order to enhance socio-emotional wellness.

Most important is that the findings of this research provide insights for educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals in developing strategies, interventions and support systems that foster healthy social media usage and promote the socio-emotional well-being of Gen Z students. In as much as it contributes to the existing literature, the study on implications of online social networking on the socio-emotional wellbeing of Gen Z students also contributes to knowledge and also gives practical implications and recommendations for future research.

1.9 Scope of the Study

The study focused on the implications of social networking on socio-emotional well-being and was conducted among Gen Z students in selected tertiary institutions in Kisii

County. The County that is located in the western part of Kenya, is home to several tertiary institutions that serve a large population of Gen Z students. These students, who are typically between the ages of 18 to 24, represent a critical demographic in terms of understanding the intersection of digital behavior and socio emotional well-being. Like many regions globally and Countrywide, Kisii County has experienced a significant increase in internet access and smartphone use, particularly among younger people. With increased online activity, the region is seeing a rise in the use of social media platforms for various reasons.

Further still, while there is a growing body of research on the impact of online networking on youth in general, most studies focused on urban centers, with little attention given to more rural or semi-urban areas like Kisii County. Conducting this study in Kisii County helped fill this gap in knowledge and allowed for a more holistic understanding of how geographical factors may influence the relationship between online networking and socio-emotional well-being.

Additionally, Kisii County is home to a diverse student population, with students from various cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. This diversity provided an opportunity to study a range of experiences and perspectives regarding the impact of online networking on the socio-emotional well-being of Gen Z students. A total of 396 Gen Z students drawn from the first and second year cohorts aged 18-24 years and the deans of students from the selected tertiary institutions participated in the study. The study was conducted during the month of May. The semesters were on and most students were in college.

1.10 Limitations of the Study

While conducting research on the Implications of social networking on the socio-emotional well-being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, it was important to acknowledge and address the potential limitations of the study. First and foremost, the study focused on Gen Z students within the tertiary institutions only. The study population did not include students from all years but rather first and second year students who fall within the age of 18-24 years. Focus was also on certain forms of social media that the students mostly use. There is a possibility that some respondents did not return the questionnaires. The researcher deliberately produced more questionnaires in order to give room for a higher return rate. Follow ups were done by the research assistants to make sure the filled questionnaires were all returned. Also, participants may have either over reported or under reported their online networking behavior. Nonetheless, the participants were encouraged to give honest information to the best of their ability.

Another possible limitation to the study was that assessing social-emotional well-being could be subjective and open to interpretation. Different individuals may have varying definitions and perceptions of their own well-being, which could introduce subjectivity and impact the reliability and validity of the study. This was taken care of by clearly defining socio-emotional well-being so that participants were able to respond from a common view of Socio-emotional well-being. Additionally, measuring different dimensions of socio-emotional well-being like self-esteem, interpersonal relationships and emotional regulations helped provide a more accurate picture of socio-emotional well-being. There was also possibility that the study may not fully account for external factors that could influence social-emotional well-being, such as personal life events,

academic pressures, or offline social interactions. These factors may confound the relationship between social networking and well-being.

Other issues affecting students such as security, trust and cultural aspects that were not being considered could also have been a limitation to the study. The study's findings might have been influenced by cultural and contextual factors specific to the participants' geographic location or institutional setting. In order to ensure that the study remains valid and reliable, several considerations were made. They include but not limited to the selection of participants that involved random selection which helped to ensure that some of the confounding variables were distributed hence minimizing their effects on the results.

Also, the researcher took care of the possible effects by using the mixed methods approach. In the approach, the focus group discussions with Gen Z students and key informant interviews was done in with consideration of the cultural sensitivity. This was by making sure that the questions both in questionnaires and FGD were structured in a way that reflects the widely perceived cultural norms. This was cognizant of the fact that experiences and emotional expression and perceived security differs across cultures. The quantitative and qualitative approach helped the researcher to triangulate findings.

It is likely that some students may not have given honest information as they may have felt that there was invasion into their privacy. In this regard, ethical considerations regarding privacy, informed consent, and participant confidentiality were assured and ensured while conducting the study. These considerations may have had an effect on the recruitment process and data collection methods, potentially impacting the study's

outcomes so the participants were assured of confidentiality and assurance was given that information obtained is purely for purposes of research.

1.11 Assumptions of the Study

The researcher had the following assumptions that;

1) The characteristics of the participants in the selected tertiary institutions were representative of the Kenyan College Gen Z students
2) Respondents would provide honest and accurate information in the questionnaires regarding their social networking and socio emotional well being
3) All the respondents clearly comprehended the items in the data collection instruments and responded as it was intended by the researcher
4) The social networking platforms namely Whatsapp, Instagram, Tiktok, X and Facebook among the Gen Z students
5) Social wellbeing can be reliably self-reported
6) External factors like family issues, have minimal influence on responses
7) Respondents have digital devices and regular access to internet

1.12 Theoretical Framework

The overarching conceptualization of this research was informed by both The Social Network Theory (SNT) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). The utilization of an eclectic theoretical approach provided for integration and interjection that guided the study and provided insight into the connections between the independent variable which is Social Networking and the dependent variable which is Socio-emotional well-being. The triangulation of the social networks theory and the uses and gratifications theories offered very rich framework for understanding the implications of online networking on socio-emotional well-being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions. The social

networks theory (SNT) suggests that in order to have access to information, individuals must bridge structural holes in networks. This will enable them to access diverse information. The Gen Z students have access to various online platforms which enable them access a wide range of information, resources and perspectives even beyond their immediate circles which can enhance not only their learning experiences but also their socio-emotional wellbeing.

1.12.1 The Social Network Theory (SNT)

The social network theory has existed from the late 1890s. The idea of Social Networks was foreshadowed by both Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Torries in their theories and research of social groups. In the 1930s, several groups analyzed social interaction in small groups especially in the classrooms and work groups. In 1954, J.A. Barnes started using the term social networks, with its own theoretical statements, methods, and social network analyses software. The theory views social relationships in terms of nodes and ties. Nodes are the individual actors within the network and ties are the relationships between the actors. This is actually the premise behind social network platforms (places) that is Facebook, X, Instagram, whatsapp and YouTube among others.

The theory further asserts that an individual's social networks comprise strong and weak ties. Strong ties are more intimate and involve more self-disclosure and various forms of resource exchange (Marsden & Campbell, 1984). They further assert that people who are strongly tied tend to show similarities in attitudes, background and experience. This is very practical in the online social networking sites for example WhatsApp where an individual starts a group as a single node and connects all his/her close friends. That is very popular among youth in colleges who also have connections with members of their class or course mates or former school mates and the list goes on and on.

Social Network Theory contributes greatly to this research since it provides a lens through which to examine the structure, dynamics, and implications of social connections within online platforms. It posits that individuals exist within intricate webs of social relationships, where the nature of connections and interactions influences various aspects of their lives. In the context of this study, Social Network Theory helps elucidate how the patterns of online interactions within social networking sites shape the socio-emotional experiences of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions. Firstly, it provides insight into how individuals connect, communicate and form relationships within digital spaces. The Gen Z cohort has grown up in the era dominated by social media and online networks which fundamentally influence how they interact socially, emotionally and also academically.

Secondly, since the theory focuses on networks between individuals, groups and institutions, it helps to identify the nodes which denote the individuals and in this case the Gen Z students. The nodes are followed by the edges which denote the connections and in this case the for the Gen Z students it includes the friendships, follows, likes, and comments between them which in one way or another effects their socio-emotional wellbeing either positively or negatively. Thirdly, the theory focuses on communities that is the groups or individuals who are highly connected within a larger social structure such as peer groups or online communities. It emphasizes the tendency of individuals to associate with other who share similar characteristics. Gen Z students often join groups of common interest like belonging to same academic year, studying same subjects, belonging to common associations and more other groups that may be of interest to them.

The Social Networks Theory helped the researcher identify the various preferred online applications the Gen Z use to form relationships such as Tik Tok, Instagram, X or

Facebook. It further helped in identification of the types of the connections the Gen Z students have in terms of weak or strong ties in relation to family and friends and how those relationships influence their socio-emotional well-being. Generally, social network users form some online identities so this social aspect is evaluated by application of the Social Networks theory. This is because Gen Z students present themselves online through posts, selfies or participate in viral trends in order to gain social acceptance and approval, an aspect that greatly contributes to socio-emotional well-being. Therefore, application of this theory played a key role as it provided a lens through which the researcher looked at the interconnectedness and relationships that contribute to shaping the Gen Z students online experience leading to finding out how online networking implicates their socio-emotional well -being.

1.12.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&GT)

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&GT) is one of the key frameworks in communication studies that explores the relationship between individuals and mass media. It offers a lens through which to understand why people engage with various media platforms, particularly social media. As highlighted by Katz et al. (1973), the theory emphasizes that individuals use media to fulfill specific social and psychological needs, which in turn shape their motivations and communication behaviors. A central premise of U&GT is that audiences are active participants in the media consumption process, intentionally seeking content that brings them the greatest satisfaction (Jafar & Mehrad, 2016). This perspective shifts focus from the media itself to the user, underlining the gratifications derived from usage rather than viewing media use as a goal in itself.

Abbas et al. (2019) further explain that U&GT helps to uncover the reasoning behind why individuals turn to particular social networking platforms to meet personal needs

and goals. The roots of the theory trace back to the early 1940s when scholars began examining why people consistently listened to radio broadcasts or read newspapers. However, it was American sociologist Elihu Katz in the 1970s who formally developed the approach, proposing that individuals use media actively and intentionally to serve their personal interests. At its core, the theory is anchored in two fundamental questions: why people are drawn to specific media and what kind of satisfaction they derive from it. With advances in research, Blumler and Katz (1973), changed the direction of research in communication and media to "what media does to individuals and "what do individuals do to media". According to Katz and Blumler, the individuals' media content and choices depend on the psychological needs that they wish to satisfy and these needs in turn stem from social and psychological states and conditions (Ruggiero, 2000) .

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&GT), originally developed by Katz et al. (1973), was designed to explore the motivations behind individuals' engagement with specific forms of media and the satisfaction they derive from that engagement. The theory is grounded in four core assumptions: first, that media users are active participants with purposeful, goal-directed behavior; second, that individuals turn to media to fulfill particular needs and desires; third, that social and psychological factors influence how media is used; and fourth, that media consumption is intertwined with interpersonal communication (Rubin, 1993). A central concept in U&GT is the distinction between two types of gratifications: *gratifications sought* and *gratifications obtained*. The former refers to what individuals expect to gain from using a certain medium, while the latter reflects the actual benefits or satisfaction they experience as a result (Katz et al., 1973).

Within the context of social media, this theory is particularly useful for understanding how and why users engage with platforms based on their unique personal traits, needs,

and expectations—and how these interactions lead to varied outcomes in terms of gratification. In this regard, this study also found out what the Gen Z do while spending so much time online as well as the content they send or receive. Uses and Gratifications Theory identifies four fundamental needs that drive media use: the need for information, entertainment, personal identity, and social interaction. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, cater to these needs in various ways. With users able to follow specific pages and access content around the clock, they can receive timely updates and information from sources they trust and prefer (Parvez, 2019).

Katz et al, (1973) outlined 5 categories of media needs that vary across audiences with different personal characteristics. The first one is that people use the media in order to be informed or educated. This falls under the cognitive need whereby people have to gather information, surveillance, acquire knowledge and understanding. The media examples for acquiring information include television, videos and movies most of which are available online. Gen Z students in colleges mostly access this information through their mobile phones and laptops. Secondly, the affective needs where people have the emotional needs, have the need to experience pleasure and identify with characters of the situation in the media environment such as in movies and soap operas.

The content is often watched even through You Tube and the popular ‘Viu Sasa’ where youth can access whatever it is that they want to watch. Thirdly, people use the media for personal integrative needs whereby they want to build confidence and credibility. This is often shown through videos, status updates and sometimes people replace companionship with social media, fourth, to enhance social interaction whereby people want to connect with family, friends, workmates and many other social groups so as to integrate.

The need for integration is realized through instant messaging, chat rooms where people form groups and still the wider social media. Instant messaging can be relaxing,

entertaining, can enhance affection, social integration and enable one to escape from the stresses of life. The fifth component is to escape from the stresses of daily life. Here people want to engage by distracting themselves from the stresses that life brings and release tension. In most instances Gen Z students and other people as well escape or divert themselves by going online, to the internet and watch movies, play games and engage in chats.

At times, others use social media to escape from daily stress and to have a cover up of their frustrations and use it as a diversion or escape mechanism from life's problems and challenges. They heavily rely on social media in order to have peace of mind. This research applied the U&GT to help explain why the Generation Z are using social media as well as the gratifications they seek to achieve. Uses and Gratifications Theory shifts the focus from passive media consumption to active audience engagement, emphasizing that individuals select and use media to fulfill specific needs and gratifications. This theory suggests that users are not merely influenced by media content but actively seek out and utilize media to satisfy psychological, social, and cultural needs. In the context of social networking, Uses and Gratifications Theory enables an exploration of how Gen Z students employ these platforms to fulfill various socio-emotional needs, such as socialization, self-expression, and identity formation.

This theory is relevant to the study on 'Social Networking-Implications on the Social-Emotional Well-being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County' since it provides insights into the reasons for the use of media (which can include online social networking) by people and in this particular study the Generation Z students. Although this theory is relevant for this study, the researcher does not acknowledge that students do not only rely on social media for socio-emotional well-being. There are other factors that contribute the interaction of social media and socio-emotional

wellbeing which include but not limited to year of study, faculty or school or department, gender, course being undertaken

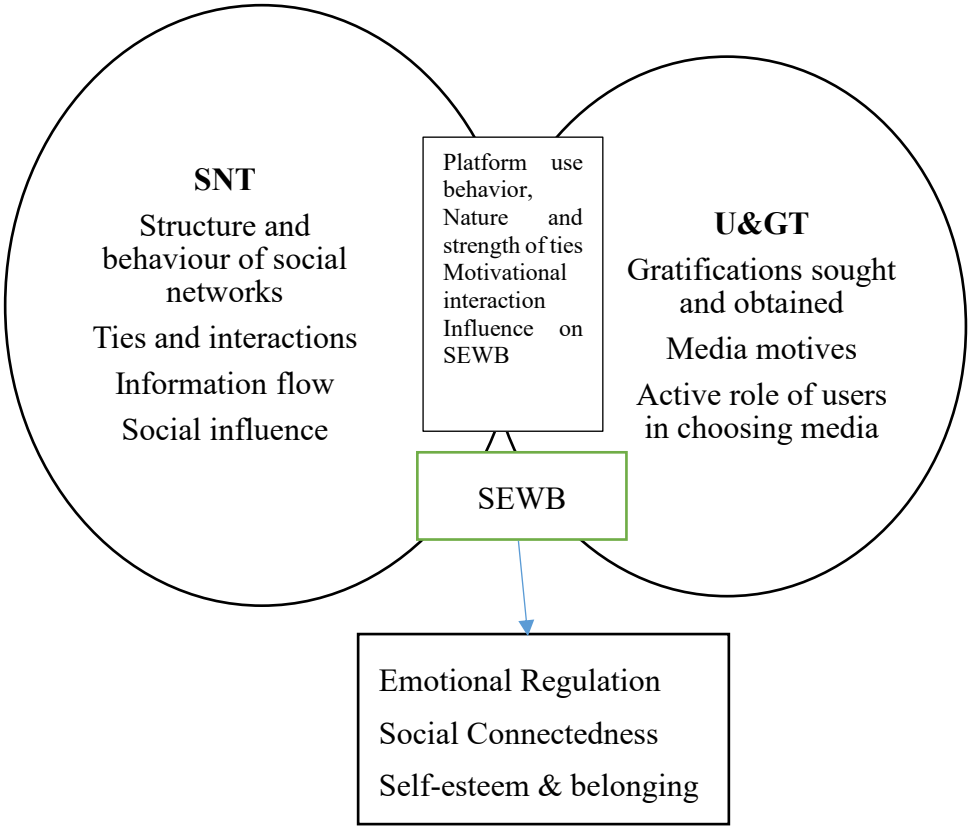

Figure 1.1: Social Networks & uses and Gratifications Theories Triangulation Model

***(*Researcher 2025)**

For the social Networks theory, the structure and behavior of social networks is that they are made up of connections as nodes and ties with weak and strong ties. It is the strength of the ties that influence the individuals' interactions and behavior since the connected people show similarities, attitudes, backgrounds and experiences. The use of SNT in this study helped bring insight on how Gen Z students in tertiary institutions form connections, communicate and share information within their networks. It also helped examine the network dynamics.

For the Uses and Gratifications theory, the concept is to explore why individuals use media and what gratifications they seek. It also emphasizes the active role of users in choosing media to satisfy their needs. As per the objectives of the study, the UGT helped in shedding light into the reasons why the Gen Z students in tertiary institutions engage with the various online social networking platforms like Facebook, Instagram, twitter and Tik tok. It also categorizes gratifications such as socialization, information seeking, entertainment, self-expression, and affective needs. By underpinning this study, the UGT theory helps elucidate how the gratifications contribute to the socio-emotional well-being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions

For the data collection, what was collected was linked to the variables of the study and focused on the students' social media usage patterns, nature of their online networks and the gratifications they derive from the networking. The uses were linked to but were not limited to emotional well-being, loneliness, self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, happiness, education and information.

1.13 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is constructed upon the interjection of two prominent theoretical perspectives: Social Network Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory. These frameworks offer valuable insights into understanding the dynamics of social networking and its implications on the socio-emotional wellbeing of Gen Z students within tertiary institutions. The independent variable in this study is social networking with the dependent variable being socio-emotional well-being as illustrated in the figure below.

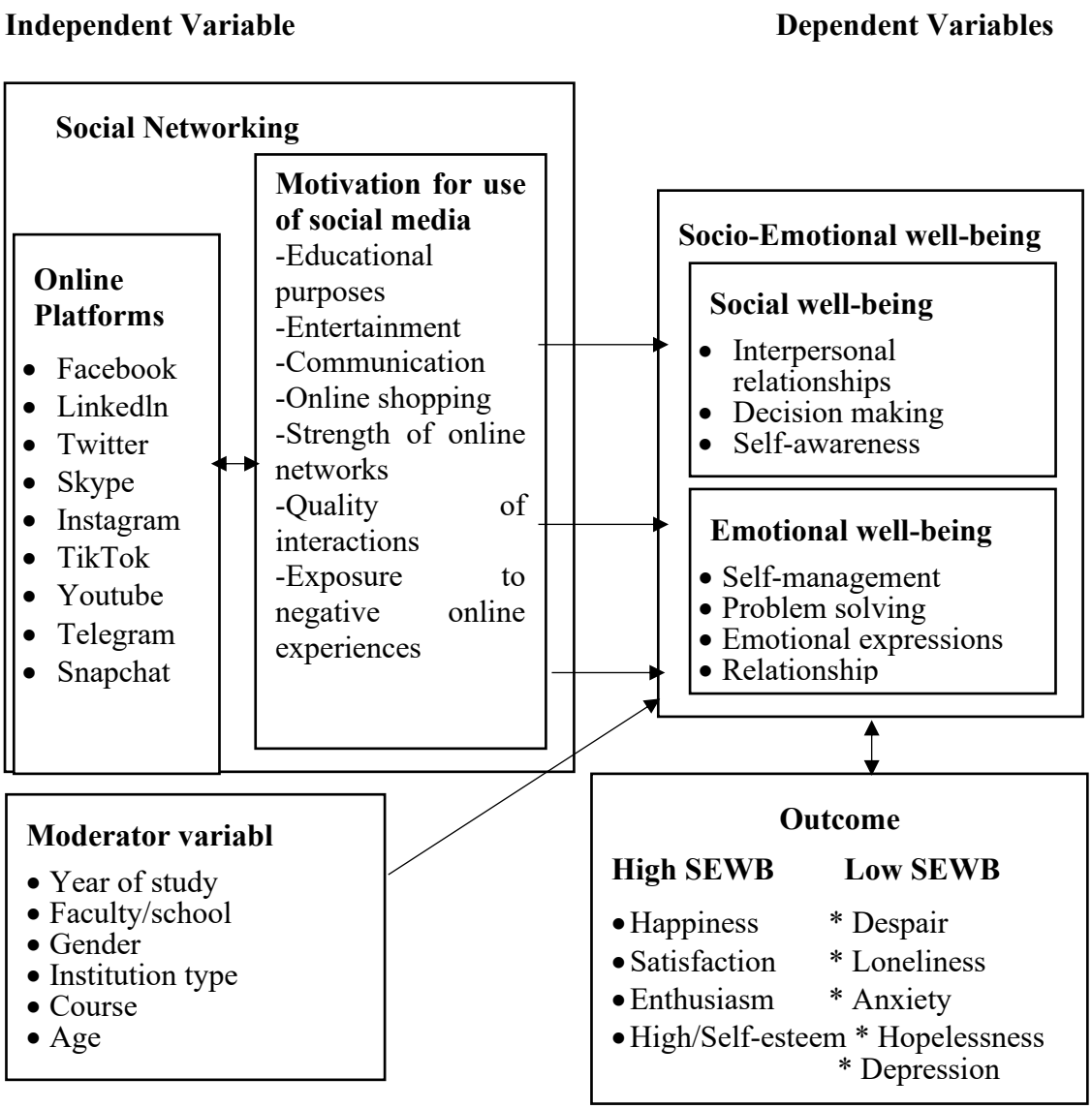

Figure 1.2: Conceptual Framework on Implications of Social networking on the social- emotional well-being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya.

The conceptual framework was formed on the basis of both U&GT and SNT. On the Independent variable which is social networking, the uses encompasses the motivations for social networking which include educational, entertainment, communication and shopping. The SNT Theory informed the strength of online networks, quality of online interactions and exposure to negative sonline experiences. For both theories, the interjection occurs through the platforms used. Some popular modes include Facebook, X, WhatsApp, Instagram, Tik Tok, Snapchat, telegram and YouTube. The dependent variable is Social-Emotional well-being which could be affected by the activities of

online social networking. Under Social well-being, it is assumed that several aspects including social skills, interpersonal relationships, negotiation and decision making among others are affected either positively or negatively as a result of participation in social networking.

For the emotional well-being, aspects such as knowledge about self, relationship management, problem solving and emotional expression are factors that were be discussed. The said factors may contribute to either high or low socio-emotional well-being of the Gen Z students in tertiary institutions. There are also moderator variables including the demographics, year of study, school or faculty or department, type of institution, course of study and ownership of smartphone respectively.

1.14 Operational Definition of Terms

For purposes of this study the following terms are defined as follows;

Anxiety: This is an emotion that is characterized by feelings of tension, worry, fears and general unease. In this study, anxiety refers to the feelings of unease, worry, or nervousness experienced by Gen Z students as a result of using online social networking platforms. It was measured through self-reported responses to items that assessed general anxiety symptoms, particularly in relation to social media use for example on fear of missing out.

Content: Content refers to any material (such as text, images, videos, posts, comments) created or shared by users on online social networking platforms. In the context of this study, it included the types of posts (for example status updates, photos) Gen Z students engage with or create on these platforms, and how such content impacts their socio-emotional well-being.

Centennials: A term often used interchangeably with Gen Z. Centennials are the younger subset of Gen Z, typically referring to individuals born from the late 1990s to the early 2010s. In the context of this study, Centennials would be students who are likely to be the most recent cohorts of Gen Z, possibly ranging from 18 to 24 years old during the study period, attending tertiary institutions

Digital Connectivity: Digital connectivity refers to the ability of individuals and devices to engage in communication and interaction through technological networks. Its primary goals include improving quality of life, promoting economic development, and bridging the gaps created by the digital divide (Imjai et al., 2024). In this study, it is the level of engagement and interaction that Gen Z students have with digital devices and the internet, particularly through online social networks. This includes the frequency, duration, and nature of their interactions with digital platforms that is on social media sites and messaging applications. It encompasses the infrastructure, technologies, and services that support the smooth and efficient flow of data and information across various digital platforms and networks.

Digital Era: This is the period characterized by widespread access to and use of digital technologies and the internet, shaping how people interact socially, access information, and manage their personal and social lives, particularly focusing on the digital experiences of Gen Z students. This era is heavily shaped by the widespread influence of digital technologies, including cloud computing, the internet, mobile devices, and virtual reality.

Digital Natives: Digital natives refer to Gen Z students who have grown up surrounded by and immersed in digital technology, particularly the internet and online social networking platforms. They have high familiarity and comfort with using digital

devices and communication technologies, and their socio-emotional experiences may be influenced by these technologies.

Digital immigrants: These are those people who learnt to use computers at some stage during their adult life. This is because they grew up before the internet and other digital computing devices and so have to learn and adapt the technologies. In this study, the Gen Zs were born and brought up in the digital area whereas there are generations that are now engaging in social networking (like X and Y) but have had to learn as opposed to Gen Z.

Emotional awareness: It refers to the capacity to recognize and comprehend both one's own internal states such as preferences, emotions, and intuitions and those of others, along with the impact these factors may have (Ariffin et al., 2024). In this study, emotional awareness is the ability of Gen Z students to recognize, understand, and reflect on their own emotions and the emotions of others as they participate online activities.

Emotional Expression: It refers to the ability to express and regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in response to shifting situations and changing circumstances (Ariffin et al., 2024). In this study, emotional expression refers to how Gen Z students convey their emotions through online social networking platforms. This includes verbal expressions (such as status updates or comments) and non-verbal expressions (such as emojis, reactions, or photos). The study explored how the ability to express emotions online impacts students' emotional well-being.

Emoji: These are small digital images or icons used on social media platforms to represent actual words. They can be in form of hands, fingers and different facial expressions among others. They represent emotions as well and are also used by Gen Z

students to express emotions, reactions, or ideas in online communications. They are important to the study because when Gen Z s are constantly using them, they miss out on critical social skills of verbal communication much as they emojis can be powerful in communicating emotions.

Facebook: A social networking platform enabling registered users to create personal profiles, share photos and videos, and communicate through messages to stay connected with family, friends, colleagues, and a broader audience. In the context of this study, Facebook refers to the social media platform used by Gen Z students to connect, communicate, share content, and engage in social networking. Facebook is relevant to this study as it is among the platforms preferred by Gen Z students.

Gen Z: Generation Z (also known as Gen Z, iGen, or centennials, post millennials) generally defined as those born between 1997 and 2012 (Pew Research). In this study, Gen Z refers specifically to students attending tertiary institutions in the relevant time frame who are members of this age group, typically aged 18-24 during the study period.

Instagram: Instagram refers to a popular social networking platform primarily used for sharing photos, videos, and stories. Users can like, comment, and interact with posts made by others. In this study, Instagram was explored as a key platform where Gen Z students engage in self-expression, peer interaction, and emotional sharing.

Interpersonal Relationships: Interpersonal relationships refer to the social connections or interactions between Gen Z students, both online through social media and offline that is in-person interactions. This study examined how online social networking affects the quality, frequency, and dynamics of relationships, including family bonds,

Likes: It is a form of engagement on social media showing that one literally likes the content posted by simply clicking a button. The buttons differ depending on the media platform in use for example on Facebook the like button is a thumbs-up whereas on Instagram and twitter, a like is indicated by a heart. This is relevant to the study because Gen Z students are very keen on the reactions they receive as a result of their posts. It may denote acceptance and that would impact on their socio-emotional well -being.

Online Social networking sites: These are the virtual communities where online social networking takes place. They allow users to share their thoughts, digital photos, and videos while informing the wider public about global events and current happenings through the use of an online network. In this study, the sites under focus will be Facebook, twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, TikTok and LinkedIn Online social networking sites (OSNs) are internet platforms where individuals, particularly Gen Z students, can create profiles, connect with others, share content, and interact socially. Examples include Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok.

Social media: This is a collective term that refers to websites and applications that are used for communication, interaction and content sharing. People use social media to stay in touch and as a means of interaction with families, friends and various communities. Ajijola (2022) defines it is a platform that attracts large numbers of internet users for the purpose of entertainment, information sharing, sending messages and other forms of expression through the media. In this study, it refers to online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and others, where Gen Z students create and share content, communicate with peers, and engage in social networking

Social Skills: Social skills in this study refer to the abilities of Gen Z students to interact and communicate effectively with others, both online and offline. This includes the ability to initiate and maintain conversations, resolve conflicts, express emotions, and

understand social cues in various contexts, particularly in digital environments. They are part of social wellbeing

Social Networking: This is the use of dedicated internet based social media through applications and websites to interact with other users, to connect with others, communicate, share information and form relationships. It entails having connections in both real and digital worlds .It can be used widely for many purposes through sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, whatsapp and many others. In this study, reference will be for the online networking. Social networking involves the creation and management of a digital social presence on platforms that allow individuals to connect, share content, and communicate with others. In this study, it specifically refers to Gen Z students' use of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to form virtual communities.

WhatsApp Messenger: WhatsApp Messenger refers to a widely used online messaging platform, where users can send text messages, voice notes, images, videos, and make voice or video calls. In this study, WhatsApp Messenger was considered as one of the social networking platforms that Gen Z students use to communicate with peers and engage in group chats, and its influence on their socio-emotional well-being was evaluated in terms of the frequency of interactions.

Platform: A platform is any online service or website where users can interact with each other, share content, and form communities. In this study, platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and Snapchat are included, and their effects on the socio-emotional well-being of Gen Z students were analyzed in form of preferences by Gen Z students.

Post: A post refers to any content which can be in form of text, images, videos uploaded or shared by Gen Z students on online social networking platforms.

Self-awareness: It is having a clear understanding of one's mental and emotional state and being able to focus on how his/her actions, thoughts and emotions do or do not align with internal standards In this study, self-awareness refers to the ability of Gen Z students to recognize and understand their own emotions, behaviors, and thoughts while interacting with online social networking platforms.

Self- management: Self-management refers to the ability of Gen Z students to regulate their emotions, behaviors, and actions in a healthy manner, especially when interacting in online spaces. This includes managing stress or anxiety triggered by online interactions, setting healthy boundaries with social media use, and making mindful decisions about online content sharing.

Self-esteem: Self-esteem refers to the overall sense of self-worth or personal value that Gen Z students hold about themselves. In this study, self-esteem was measured through self-report that assessed feelings of self-worth and how students perceive their value, particularly in relation to their online presence and interactions on social media.

Socio- emotional well-being: It is the ability to build and maintain healthy relationships, having meaningful interactions with people around one, and being able to understand one's own emotions and handle them in different situations. In this study social well-being focuses on interpersonal relationships, decision making and -self-awareness. On the part of emotional wellbeing, focus is on self-management, self-expressions, relationship management, and problem solving. Socio-emotional wellbeing is the overall emotional health, resilience, and the ability to form positive relationships and social connections. This includes students' emotional regulation, their

sense of belonging, and their capacity to handle social challenges, as influenced by their online social networking behaviors. In this study, socio-emotional well-being is operationalized as a combination of self-reported emotional distress like sadness and perceived social connectedness, happiness or satisfaction with social relationships.

Tertiary Institutions: -These are institutions that offer formal post – secondary education. They include vocational schools, technical training institutes, colleges and universities. In this study, the Gen Z students that participated in the study were selected from such institutions.

Tik Tok; An application that lets people watch, create and share videos often as a sound track right from one's phone. TikTok is a popular social media platform that allows users to create and share short videos. In this study, TikTok is one of the platforms that Gen Z participate which could influence their socio-emotional wellbeing.

User: The individual, group, or entity engaging on the platform. In this study, a user refers to any Gen Z student who actively engages with one or more online social networking platforms, such as WhatsApp Messenger or Instagram. A user will be defined by their participation in activities like posting content, liking or commenting on posts, or interacting with others through messages or reactions.

Vimeo: Vimeo is an online video-sharing platform where users can upload, share, and view videos. It is one of the media platforms that could influence their socio-emotional wellbeing through sharing and consumption of the video contents.

Viusasa: This is a Kenyan video-on-demand streaming service. Whatever content that the Gen Z consume through this channel could also have implications on their socio-emotional well-being

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

This chapter examines the prior literature regarding or related to Implications of online social networking on the socio-emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students in colleges. Many studies have been conducted worldwide to investigate how social networking may influence college students' academic influence, social capital, self-esteem and interpersonal relationships. In this regard, such studies and articles related to the theme of this research were reviewed in order to help identify the gaps which needed to be filled as well as indicate any areas of concern that might require further research. In order to facilitate a clear picture regarding the implications of social networking on Gen Z students in tertiary institutions Kisii County and by extension the Kenyan context, the review included studies done in various Countries in the world as well as in Kenya.

Reviewed literature on the growing presence of online networking in young people's lives, especially among students in tertiary institutions, helped establish the relevance of these platforms in shaping their socio-emotional experiences. This chapter is divided into various sections as guided by the objectives of the study and with the intention of helping readers understand the whole concept of social networking with regard to the socio-emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students. The sections include aspects of socio-emotional well -being, understanding of social networking, its evolution as well as its implications on Gen Z students.

2.2 Concept of Socio- Emotional Well-Being

Well-Being emerges from an individual person's thoughts, actions, and experiences. Growing one's Well-Being is a lifelong pursuit (Rehman, 2020). He identifies five dimensions of Well-Being, beginning with Emotional Well-Being, which involves the

capacity to manage stress effectively, build resilience, and cultivate positive emotions that contribute to overall happiness. Physical Well-Being refers to taking care of one's body through proper nutrition and regular physical activity to support optimal physical functioning. Social Well-Being emphasizes the ability to engage in healthy communication, form meaningful relationships, and sustain a reliable support system. Well-Being is physical and relational. It follows that Well-Being that crisscrosses over from work into the relationality of everyday life is not only organizational but is also resonant in personal life (Carr, 2023)

Workplace Well-Being refers to the ability to align one's professional life with personal interests, values, and a sense of purpose, ultimately contributing to meaning, fulfillment, and professional growth. Societal Well-Being, on the other hand, involves active engagement in a vibrant community, culture, and environment. The author emphasizes that achieving overall Well-Being requires a balance across all five dimensions namely emotional, physical, social, workplace, and societal. According to Sharma et al. (2023), communication and emotion are deeply interconnected, a relationship that becomes particularly evident in digital spaces. On social media platforms, individuals routinely express, interpret, and navigate a broad range of emotions through their online interactions. Socio-emotional well- being then generally refers to an individual's ability to understand, manage, and express emotions effectively, maintain healthy interpersonal relationships, and cope with life stressors. In the context of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions, consideration was also made with regard to their emotional resilience, self-esteem, sense of belonging, and capacity to form meaningful relationships. This concept refers to an individual's ability to manage their emotions, build and maintain positive relationships, cope with challenges, and feel a sense of belonging and self-worth. In the context of Gen Z students, socio-

emotional Well-Being is critical as they navigate academic stress, identity formation, social pressures, and personal growth in a highly digitalized world. The connectivity in terms of Social networking platforms allow students to connect with peers, form social networks, and receive emotional support. Social networking can also be a cause of frustration like in the cases of cyber bullying which could impact negatively on the socio-emotional well- being of students in tertiary institutions.

2.2.1 Social Well-Being (SWB)

Social Well-Being highlights the significance of interpersonal relationships and broader societal experiences in shaping individual and collective quality of life. By incorporating the "social" dimension into Well-Being, attention is drawn to how people engage with one another and interact with institutional structures and cultural norms. In this sense, evaluating social Well-Being involves examining both the quality of personal relationships and the overall health of the society in which one lives (Aspects & Koo, 2018). In today's rapidly evolving digital world, technological advancements have become deeply embedded in people's daily lives. As dependency on digital devices and the constant drive to remain connected online increases, individual social behaviors and interactions are being reshaped (Sharma et al., 2023). The widespread appeal of social media is often attributed to its convenience, speed, cost-effectiveness, and ability to facilitate relationships and engagement within one's network.

Human beings, by nature, are social creatures who have historically relied on community and group support for survival. This inherent need to belong and feel connected continues to play a crucial role in emotional and social Well-Being (SWB). While there is no universally accepted definition of SWB, it is generally understood as a multifaceted concept that encompasses various aspects of an individual's social environment, leading to a positive evaluation of their social life (Pressman & Kraft,

2023). Their findings also indicate that higher levels of social capital—marked by stronger feelings of belonging and increased social participation—are linked to improved public health outcomes and even crime reduction. This form of meaningful social engagement is considered vital to the development and maintenance of social Well-Being. For the Gen Z students in tertiary institutions, social capital is key and is evident as they join clubs, volunteer groups as well as in many online groups and activities. This is particularly important in offering emotional support and facilitating friendships, for the Gen Z the students in the new or otherwise challenging environment in the tertiary institutions.

Previous studies have indicated that higher levels of Well-Being are associated with a range of physical health benefits, including reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, fewer instances of stroke and sleep disorders, and enhanced productivity and creativity in both personal and professional spheres (Trabelsi, 2022). Trabelsi also emphasizes that Well-Being extends beyond the mere absence of illness; rather, it represents a complex integration of physical, mental, emotional, and social health. According to Aspects and Koo (2018), Well-Being should be understood as a dynamic and socially embedded process, shaped by how individuals engage with and respond to their surrounding environments. From this perspective, a person cannot be viewed in isolation from their social context, especially given that social Well-Being centers on the value of interpersonal relationships and broader societal experiences.

Aspects and Koo (2018) further conceptualize social Well-Being as comprising three interconnected dimensions: personal, relational, and societal Well-Being. Personal Well-Being refers to an individual's overall positive assessment of their life. Relational Well-Being is characterized by having meaningful, high-quality relationships and a generally positive attitude toward others. Societal Well-Being, on the other hand,

reflects individuals' perceptions of institutional quality, societal functioning, and optimism about social progress. Social Well-Being is typically highest when individuals feel connected to others and live within well-functioning communities that foster satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment.

These dimensions are now being linked to activities of social networking not only by the Gen Z students but also the entire population. This is important to this study because Gen Z students in tertiary institutions are at a critical stage in life where they are developing independence, forming new relationships, and managing academic pressures. According to Aspects &Koo (2018), the use of social media can provide both opportunities and challenges. Accordingly, it can facilitate academic collaboration and peer support but also distract from face-to-face interactions and add to the mental load, affecting their socio-emotional Well-Being. While self-promotion on social media often revolves around highlighting physical appearance and curated lifestyles, many young people are increasingly aware that much of what they see online is carefully staged to present a more appealing version of reality. It is common for youth to share snapshots of their daily lives not just for connection, but also to attract attention or admiration from their peers. However, alongside this trend, Tirochi (2024) notes that some young individuals are beginning to consciously distance themselves from the overly polished and often misleading world portrayed by social media influencers, recognizing the disconnect between online personas and real life.

According to Tirochi (2024), Gen Z do not view , a true influencer as just someone on social media but rather the so called Influential, who in this sense, can also be a friend that they are very influential because they help them to grow. The youth and in particular Gen Z find them important because they basically talk about everything (Tirocchi, 2024). Gen Z also place a strong emphasis on peer influence and trust within

their networks, often relying on recommendations from people they view as authentic, such as influencers, friends, or online communities. This is also important and linked to the study as it contributes to the socio-wellbeing of Gen Z. It also speaks to the objectives on online socio networking and socio-wellbeing of Gen Z students.

Sharma et al. (2023) observed that individuals who experience limited face-to-face social connectedness are more likely to engage in compulsive internet use, often turning to social media as a means to satisfy unmet social needs. Social media platforms facilitate real-time, interpersonal communication through digital means, making them an attractive outlet for those seeking connection. However, despite increasing opportunities for interaction, the overwhelming array of social choices available online can also contribute to heightened anxiety. Sharma et al. further argue that the fundamental human need to belong drives individuals to seek affirmation and social inclusion through these platforms. This is important for the study because Gen Z students want to be connected with as many people as possible. One of their online characteristic is to attract as many followers as possible in various forms of media platforms and are often seen asking that their posts be liked.

Additionally, studies found that teen participants felt more connected to their friends and family through social media. Social media is a tool to improve present relationships. Many aspects of social media are considered therapeutic and incredibly positive being described as humorous coping. Sending direct messages and watching or sharing funny videos with your friends is inherently positive and can reduce loneliness. One can have quality connections on social media through direct messages and video calling. Most studies point towards more “meaningful” forms of social connection as beneficial to our social Well-Being. This is according to Hsueh, (2022) In as much as studies have shown that social media offers opportunities for connection and self-expression, it also

introduces risks such as emotional distress, social comparison, and cyberbullying and this study attempted to fill the gap of understanding how different social networking platforms impact various aspects of socio-emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students in particular.

2.2.2 Emotional Well-Being (EWB)

According to Trabelsi 2022, Well-Being is strongly linked to happiness and life satisfaction and agreed with studies that suggest that higher levels of social networking site (SNS) usage are associated with reduced emotional Well-Being, emphasizing the complex interplay between individuals' attitudes toward SNS, their usage patterns, and their overall emotional health. Additionally, measures of emotional Well-Being were further categorized into life satisfaction, sense of purpose/meaning, happiness/positive affect, and self-esteem respectively (Goering et al., 2024).

Emotional Well-Being among youth can be defined as a generally positive emotional state characterized by high self-esteem, resilience, and the capacity to engage in health-promoting behaviors, ultimately leading to self-actualization and self-efficacy (Msn et al., 2019). The same study identifies three core attributes of emotional Well-Being in young people: the prevalence of positive emotions, strong self-esteem, and resilience. Positive emotions are reflected in frequent feelings of happiness, optimism, and satisfaction with life, as opposed to persistent experiences of negative emotions such as fear, anger, worry, or dissatisfaction. Furthermore, youth with high emotional Well-Being typically exhibit positive self-esteem, a trait consistently emphasized in literature on Generation Z. In contrast, the absence of emotional Well-Being and self-efficacy has been linked to increased engagement in risky behaviors, including substance use and unsafe sexual practices.

Wall et al. (2023) expand this understanding by outlining four key dimensions of emotional Well-Being: purpose and meaning, community and belonging, coping and stress management, and subjective Well-Being. Purpose and meaning refer to an individual's sense of direction and significance in life. Community and belonging involve social connection, trust, and the perception of safety derived from being part of a supportive community. Coping and stress management encompass resilience, adaptability, and flexibility in response to life's challenges, as well as the ability to manage anxiety. Lastly, subjective Well-Being reflects an individual's overall evaluation of their emotional and psychological state. The study in implications of online social networking on the socio-emotional well -being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions relates with to the above cited literature. Gen Z students regard belonging to groups of their peers and if they don't feel that sense of belonging, that aspect alone can impair their emotional regulation and contribute to mental health issues, detracting from their socio-emotional Well-Being.

2.3 Motivations Driving Gen Z Students' Engagement in Social Networking

Participation in social networking sites offers many potential benefits for students in tertiary institutions for instance the social process of adjusting to college can also be aided through social media unlike the traditional way of orientation which took more time. Therefore, teaching digital technology in education should go beyond simply introducing students to technological tools. Instead, it should focus on equipping them to leverage social media meaningfully as engaged learners on campus, as active global citizens, and as future professionals in their fields. Studies have shown that young adults often use social platforms to build digital competencies and foster social growth (Woods et al., 2019). Through regular interaction online, students are exposed to learning experiences that help them strengthen emotional regulation, develop tolerance

for differing perspectives, communicate their feelings in constructive ways, and enhance decision-making skills (Shieh, 2024). A study conducted in Bangkok further revealed that students' motivations for engaging with social media are closely linked to media literacy and critical thinking. Social networks offer them virtual spaces not only to manage their time and stay connected with friends beyond physical boundaries but also to explore personal growth and self-identity in a safe and expressive environment.

Gen Z students also use social media for entrepreneurship. A study that evaluated the "relationship between social media use frequency and entrepreneurial perceptions and attitudes among students" in colleges revealed that the frequency of use of the selected social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube) play a big role in promoting student participation in entrepreneurship and in entrepreneurship development centers that are financed by governmental organizations (Barrera-verdugo & Villarroel-villarroel, 2022). In the study, students also got motivated and expressed intentions of starting their own firms and running their own businesses. In this study, Gen Z students also alluded to the fact that they participate online because of checking for business opportunities as well as participate in online shopping.

According to Shieh (2024), motivation to use social networks correlated significantly positively with critical thinking. This means that students used social networks in order to enhance their critical thinking. The study further suggested that university students who demonstrated stronger abilities in gathering and applying information for learning also tended to excel in critical thinking and self-reflection. Findings indicated a clear link between students' motivation to engage with social networking platforms and their ability to reflect thoughtfully. In essence, those who were more inclined to use social media for academic or personal development purposes also exhibited more advanced reflective thinking skills. Again, curiosity is another reason why Gen Z students use

social networks. They do not want to be left behind and always want to find out what is trending, (Meşe & Aydın, 2019). Gen Zers use social networking sites for various reasons and for most individuals, social media is used to keep in touch with friends and extended family. On the other hand, some people will use various social media applications to network career opportunities, find people across the globe with like interests, and share their thought, feelings, insight, and emotions (Lad et al, 2020).

One study that adopted the Uses and Gratifications theory and employed a quantitative research method with a study sample 385 people among them Gen Z aged from 21-37 years old, and used Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube platforms revealed that participating in social networking helps in relieving feelings of boredom (Shihy & Awad, 2022). The results further indicated that through the interpersonal interactions online, individuals who are fond of their families are allowed other offline and outdoor leisure activities. Further, Individuals use these platforms to both satisfy their hedonic needs and manage their social relationships. With this review, further understanding of the implications of online networking on socio-emotional Well-Being of Gen Z was enhanced as one of the objectives was to find out the motivation for social networking and among the responses was killing boredom.

An exploratory study on Facebook and anxiety disorder among young people found out that young people use online networks to seek approval. This happens when they either receive or not receive Facebook “likes”(Calancie et al., 2017). The researchers also pointed out that whenever Facebook users share content be it photos, videos, posts, or comments there’s an opportunity for others to respond with a “like.” Receiving these likes, especially in large numbers, often triggers uplifting emotions among users. Many reported feeling more confident, excited, or validated when their content attracted positive engagement from others. When such happens, there is a contribution to the

happiness of the individual thus enhancing the emotional well- being. At the same time, if there are no likes, the individual gets disappointed and frustrated leading to low self-esteem, a negative aspect affecting their socio-emotional wellbeing.

An example of the Application that enables people to share experiences as they happen is Instagram which was launched in 2010 as a picture sharing SNS, claiming to "allow you to experience moments in your friends' lives through pictures as they happen"(Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). It is one of the most popular sites used by college students and therefore contributes to the socio-emotional Well-Being of students in tertiary institutions. This can either be positively or negatively depending on the emotions that will be at play. In this study, Gen Z students rated Instagram as one of the popular sites they visit in their social networking. Since most times they are seeking approval, they post pictures and share experiences with their friends and want to update on everything that is going on around them.

Pornsakulvanich (2017) discovered that individuals are more inclined to engage with social media platforms that offer a variety of features, particularly when seeking or offering emotional support. In Thailand, a cross-sectional survey explored how users interacted with platforms like Facebook and Instagram. The study examined connections between personality traits, attitudes toward social media, external social influence, platform usage patterns, and the level of online social support people experienced. Out of 460 participants, nearly half were aged between 18 and 25. The findings revealed that characteristics such as agreeableness, enjoyment derived from using social networking sites (SNS), attitudes toward the platforms, social pressure, and frequency of Facebook usage were key predictors of satisfaction with online support. Additionally, factors like perceived usefulness, the number of Facebook friends, time spent on Instagram, and peer influence significantly influenced how often users

received social support online. These elements played an important role in nurturing users' emotional and social wellbeing.

Engagement features such as likes, emojis, comments, and reactions often serve as digital affirmations, contributing to users' positive emotional states. A positive initial outlook on social media use generally led to greater satisfaction when seeking emotional support through these platforms (Pornsakulvanich, 2017). Kuss and colleagues (2017) broadened this perspective by suggesting that social gaming also constitutes a form of networking. When individuals connect through collaborative gaming experiences, they often communicate using built-in tools and form strong relationships through shared challenges and achievements. These interactions have been linked to enhanced emotional closeness and relationship satisfaction, adding to the overall social wellbeing of participants.

They further noted that social networking has expanded into realms like online dating, where digital platforms are specifically designed to meet users' emotional and romantic expectations. From a uses and gratifications standpoint, people turn to these platforms for a range of needs: acquiring information, shaping their online identity, or simply for entertainment. These behaviors align with the core premise of the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that people engage with media to satisfy specific psychological or emotional needs.

Khan et al. (2021) conducted research comparing wellbeing across Generation X, Y, and Z in India and found that all three generations reported similar levels of happiness and emotional health. However, not all motivations for social media use are beneficial. Some people engage in voyeuristic behaviors or cyberstalking, which can negatively impact both mental health and interpersonal relationships. Social networking also

intersects with Maslow's hierarchy of needs. According to this framework, digital platforms can fulfill a range of basic and psychological needs such as safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. For example, privacy settings allow users to control their exposure, meeting safety needs; networking functions fulfill social needs; accumulating likes and followers may enhance esteem; and self-actualization can be reached through self-expression and helping others online.

Ufuophu-Biri (2020) explored motivations for social media use among Generation Z college students and found that top reasons included flirting, chatting, making new friends, self-promotion, and even less constructive uses like spreading gossip, impersonation, and blackmail. This reflects the diverse and sometimes contradictory ways young people navigate digital spaces.

Social media is also increasingly being used to promote awareness and empathy among young people. According to Padmasolani et al. (2019), platforms allow youth to connect with peers globally and support one another through shared challenges. YouTube, in particular, serves not only as a source of entertainment but also as a powerful educational tool. It provides visual explanations and tutorials that go beyond what traditional classroom methods can offer.

Agusintadewi et al. (2021) found that many college students favor social media for educational purposes, especially for tasks that demand creativity. These platforms make learning more engaging, easier to understand, and more cost-effective. While some students feel that online learning reduces face-to-face interaction, most find it exciting and useful. Communication apps like WhatsApp and Line are preferred for theory-based learning due to their chat, voice, and file-sharing features, while platforms like Zoom and Webex are better suited for collaborative learning in disciplines like

architecture. Instagram and YouTube, on the other hand, are ideal for sharing visual content and presentations.

Some students value privacy and prefer to keep academic content separate from their personal social media presence. Educators are therefore encouraged to help students create professional online profiles. Many institutions and organizations already use social media to share academic and industry-specific content, helping students stay connected and informed.

Another reason students prefer social media for learning is the flexibility it offers. Materials are accessible at any time and can be shared easily. A study in Jordan found that Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube are the most popular platforms among university students, and many use them to discuss diet and physical activity habits (Al Ali et al., 2021). Similarly, at Nigeria's Obafemi Awolowo University, students use social media primarily for staying connected, accessing information, and academic learning (Tayo et al., 2019). This trend reflects a broader shift in youth behavior, where online interactions serve multiple functions.

Kaur (2021) observed that the primary reason young people, especially those aged 16–24, use social media is for entertainment. Humor and engaging content take precedence over social interaction or current events. As such, social media is gradually transitioning into a space for digital content consumption rather than interpersonal engagement. Interestingly, maintaining friendships was a lower priority for Gen Z compared to older generations, suggesting a shift in how younger people use digital tools. Following celebrities emerged as the most distinctive motive among Gen Z users.

The rise of "social gaming" was also highlighted as a major trend. These games offer genuine social interaction through shared interests, cooperation, and teamwork—often

replacing the negative aspects of traditional social networks. For younger users, gaming allows for meaningful connections that don't rely on personal disclosure. Kaur (2021) noted that players are motivated not just by competition, but also by the fun of playing with others and escaping boredom. Female gamers, in particular, reported feeling more authentic and less judged in these environments. Multiplayer games allow users to immerse themselves in alternate realities and engage on their own terms.

Generation Z tends to rely heavily on YouTube for self-guided learning. Research has shown that young men, in particular, gravitate toward this platform, and their gender may even affect how trustworthy they perceive the information to be (Kohnová & Papula, 2022). In the workplace, Gen Z's use of social media can either enhance or hinder Well-Being, depending on the motivations behind its use. Oksa et al. (2021) found that when social media use aligns with personal needs for autonomy, competence, and connection, it can reduce stress and prevent burnout. However, when driven by less fulfilling motives, it can contribute to digital fatigue.

Kaur (2021) argues that online gaming is evolving from a mere form of entertainment into a digital community hub. Unlike traditional social media, these spaces allow users to connect more genuinely without sharing private aspects of their lives. People are often drawn to gaming for relaxation and enjoyment rather than achievement or competition. The study also found that female gamers appreciated the freedom to be themselves in these environments, without fear of judgment. Online games provide not only escapism but also a structured way for people to socialize meaningfully. Arguably, this helps the Gen Z students not only connect but manage themselves as well and this will ultimately contribute to their socio-emotional wellbeing. Gen Z students engage in social networking primarily for entertainment, self-expression, validation, socializing, and identity-building. They are motivated by the need to connect with others who share

similar interests or experiences. These motivations implicate the socio-emotional outcomes of social networking. For instance, seeking and obtaining validation through the posts they share may lead to a boost in self-esteem which is positive but could also result in anxiety when validation is not received.

2.3.1 Generational Cohorts through Digitalization and Social Networks

The evolution of the digital world has introduced the concepts of "digital natives" and "digital immigrants," which distinguish between generations based on their familiarity and integration with digital technologies. With the advent of the internet, arguably the most transformative invention of the Digital Age, communities have undergone significant reformation. Individuals born within similar timeframes often experience comparable economic, cultural, and social conditions, which collectively shape generational identities.

Peredy (2024) describes a generation as a geographically connected group of people who share common experiences of significant social, technological, and cultural events during their formative years. These shared experiences foster a collective memory and shape common perspectives, values, and behaviors, exemplified in generational cohorts such as Generation X, Y, and Z. According to Eginli and Isik (2020), the generational concept relies on categorizing individuals born within the same time period, based on identifiable characteristics. Although each generation exhibits some internal differences, they also tend to share defining traits and values rooted in their shared historical and societal context.

Currently, the digital era presents six generational cohorts with different characteristics. The ranges of their years are not very specific and vary from author to author. The Silent Generation, born between 1925 and 1944, is characterized by a preference for

traditional forms of communication, often seeking interpersonal connections to avoid isolation and loneliness. According to the Institute for Digital Economy, this group typically consumes information through print media such as newspapers and journals and tends to subscribe to pay television services. They place high value on personal recommendations when making purchases and generally exhibit limited engagement with digital technologies (Creatividad, 2023). Online shopping is unfamiliar to them, and their decision-making is guided more by trust than by digital influence (ICEMD, 2017, as cited in Creatividad, 2023).

Following this is the Baby Boomer generation, born between 1945 and 1964. Often referred to as the "owners of the market" due to their considerable purchasing power, Boomers are largely motivated by a desire to remain youthful. Digitally, their preferred platform is Facebook, though some also engage with LinkedIn, especially for professional purposes (González Barranco, 2020; ICEMD, 2017).

Generation X, born between 1965 and 1979, is typically associated with values such as ambition, individualism, and a strong work ethic. They seek entertainment, social interaction, travel, and new experiences, with physical fitness playing a key role in their lifestyles. While they do not rely on the internet for enjoyment or daily functioning, they are open to digital tools that simplify life. Social platforms like Facebook and Instagram are commonly used by this group to maintain relationships with family and friends (ICEMD, 2017).

Generation Y, also known as Millennials (born 1980–2000), are experience-oriented and seek authenticity and uniqueness in brand interactions. They are empowered consumers, unafraid to question unclear or concerning brand messaging. Known for their humor and curiosity, Millennials thrive on being early adopters and sharing

discoveries. Rafee (2024) notes their deep connection to technology, which distinguishes them from prior generations. According to Pew Research (2019), Millennials experienced the rise of the internet and mobile technology, witnessing pivotal digital transformations as they came of age.

Generation Z, born between 2001 and 2011, is widely recognized as the first cohort to be fully immersed in digital life from birth. They are described as diverse, multicultural, and globally conscious. Soriano and Ortega (2021) emphasize their individualism and their use of social media as a platform for self-expression. This generation is socially responsible, highly visual, and fond of emojis, memes, and influencer culture. Their preferred platforms include TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, and they are avid consumers of video content reportedly twice as much as images. Due to their high-speed digital environments, they exhibit short attention spans averaging just eight seconds (ICEMD, 2017). These behaviors make Gen Z an important subject of study in terms of how social networking affects their social-emotional Well-Being.

The most recent cohort, Generation Alpha, includes those born from 2012 onward. As digital natives from infancy, this generation is expected to grow up surrounded by virtual and augmented realities, fundamentally shaping their communication, behavior, and learning. Soriano and Ortega (2021, as cited in Creatividad, 2023) suggest that audiovisual content will dominate their interactions, with many children consuming video content before they can read and independently seeking out content that interests them. Every cohort-group has comparable attitudes, traits, and adaptabilities in addition to sharing a group identity (Rafee.B, 2024). Generational cohorts are often categorized by distinct social, cultural, and technological influences. Gen Z is the first cohort to grow up fully immersed in digital technology, particularly social media an aspect that

exposes them to a myriad of experiences that have a bearing on their socio-emotional wellbeing.

2.3.2 Generation Z Cohort

Generation Z, often defined as individuals born after 1995, are widely recognized as digital natives due to their upbringing in an environment dominated by smartphones, high-speed internet, and social media (Wandhe, 2024). Their tech-savviness enables them to seamlessly use multiple devices and platforms simultaneously, and they are known for their preference for instant gratification and constant connectivity, which fosters strong multitasking abilities. Jayatissa (2023) describes this generation as entrepreneurial, socially conscious, pragmatic, and inherently diverse. They possess a forward-thinking mindset, shaped by continuous exposure to technological advancement, and are noted for their inclusive and distinctive perspectives on the world. Consequently, Gen Z individuals tend to have higher expectations particularly regarding their careers compared to previous generations. Gen Z is not only a new generation of technologically dependent learners but also the most diverse and career-oriented individuals (Lopez & Abadiano, 2023). The study concluded that Generation Z is a complex and dynamic cohort.

Generation Z individuals are accustomed to rapid access to information and function as both consumers and producers of knowledge. They exhibit a strong sense of self-trust and are characterized by open-mindedness, pragmatism, creativity, entrepreneurial spirit, and a clear orientation toward skills and goals. Their proficiency in handling digital devices is notably high, reflecting their deep familiarity with technology from an early age. According to Yalçin İncik (2022), this generation holds high expectations and prefers communication through social media, multitasking, personalized micro-experiences, and hands-on learning approaches. They tend to favor visual content such

as graphics over text, and respond most effectively to interactive and video-based instructional methods. Their learning is optimized through application-based tasks and networked environments. This review describes the practical nature of Gen Z and contributes to an understanding of how this generation operates. Platforms like Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and Facebook are integral parts of the daily lives of Gen Z students, making them key players in this study of exploring the intersection of digital technology through online social networking and socio-emotional Well-Being.

Historical events that have shaped Generation Z have significantly influenced their perception of safety and their modes of social interaction. Unlike previous generations, technological advancements particularly smartphones and social media have transformed how Gen Z communicates, socializes, and accesses information. According to Moscrip and Moscrip (2019), the unique experiences and attributes of this generation have also shaped their levels of empathy. Experiencing global events in real-time and witnessing their aftermath has enhanced Gen Z's ability to understand and relate to others' perspectives.

Uhlman (2018) posits that Gen Z is perpetually connected and views technology as a gateway to the world. They expect schools and institutions to embrace this reality by offering tech-friendly environments, while still maintaining the vital element of face-to-face interaction. Moreover, Gen Z prefers completing tasks and accessing information online, which underscores the need for engaging and robust digital platforms. For this generation, being online is not merely a pastime rather it is a fundamental means of connection, awareness, and engagement with the world. Uhlman adds that Gen Z values dialogue over conflict and appreciates diverse opinions, seeking communities that foster inclusivity and understanding.

Lopez and Abadiano (2023) further elaborate that for Generation Z, technology is not merely a tool, it is an extension of their identity. Their devices and social media profiles serve as personal extensions through which they express themselves and interact with the world. They are empowered by their ability to use technology for social change and to expand their horizons, which is crucial in understanding how and why they engage with social media, particularly in relation to their socio-emotional wellbeing.

Suat et al. (2023) emphasize that social media offers Gen Z a sense of community, emotional support, and access to mental health resources. Platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube have become avenues through which they seek and share mental health-related content. Social media thus presents an important opportunity to communicate positive and educational messages concerning mental Well-Being. Yadav and Rai (2020) echo this by noting that Gen Z uses social networking platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Tumblr, Instagram, and Twitter not only for socialization but also for identity formation. The feedback and assessments they receive from peers on these platforms shape their self-perception and social capital.

Miller and Mills (2019) argue that Gen Z lives in a "cyborg-like" reality, where their identities, actions, and emotions are intricately linked with technology. Unlike previous generations, global connectivity is a given, and they take uninterrupted access to information and others for granted. As digital natives, Gen Z is adept at navigating technology and uses it as a tool for self-expression and social engagement. They are also often described as diverse, entrepreneurial, socially conscious, and politically aware.

According to Lopez and Abadiano (2023), Gen Z seeks authentic and relatable content, favoring brands and platforms that acknowledge their diverse identities, experiences,

and voices. They expect inclusivity, representation, and real-world relevance over traditional stereotypes. Their embrace of digital platforms has fueled the growth of e-commerce, streaming services, and social media marketing.

While Generation Z shares many characteristics, the unique global and technological context of their upbringing has resulted in differences in attitudes, interests, and perspectives compared to previous cohorts (Association of Kenya Insurers, 2021). This generation leverages digital tools to manage their learning, think critically and creatively, collaborate effectively, solve complex problems, and engage with global issues from ethical and informed standpoints.

Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat have become the primary channels for Gen Z to connect, share, and explore. These platforms allow them to express themselves, represent their lifestyles, and engage with like-minded communities. They also serve as critical sources of news, trends, and pop culture updates. Moreover, social media offers spaces where Gen Z can express their opinions, participate in social discourse, and interact with influencers and brands (Pew Research, 2019).

Commodari et al. (2021) highlight that undergraduate students, many of whom belong to Gen Z, exhibit extensive digital literacy due to their ongoing exposure to technology. Penelitian (2023) identifies several defining traits of this cohort. Firstly, they are "phygital," meaning they perceive the physical and digital worlds as interconnected, with the virtual being an extension of reality. Secondly, they exhibit hyper-customization, striving to curate personalized identities to gain popularity. They are also pragmatic, focusing on realistic planning and future preparedness, in contrast to the idealism of Generation Y. Additionally, they experience Fear of Missing Out

(FOMO), which causes anxiety about being left behind or missing important events or trends. This literature relates very well to the findings of the study whereby most Gen Z students indicated that they check their phones before they sleep and immediately they wake up just to make sure they do not miss out anything.

Generation Z identifies themselves as "weconomists," a term reflecting their familiarity with and participation in a shared economy. They are inclined toward practical and cost-effective approaches and often seek innovative solutions through collaboration and partnerships. This generation strongly embraces the “Do It Yourself” (DIY) mindset, heavily utilizing platforms like YouTube to acquire new skills and knowledge. As digital learners, Gen Z believes in their ability to teach themselves anything, reinforcing their sense of independence and self-sufficiency. This independent spirit often places them at odds with the more collectivist values associated with Generation Y. Moreover, Generation Z is highly motivated by achievement; they tend to adopt a binary view of success, believing that one must either be a winner or a loser. As a result, they exhibit a more competitive disposition compared to previous generations (Penelitian et al., 2023).

2.3.3 Evolution of Social Media

Social media is a user-centered platform characterized by spontaneous communication, allowing individual users to produce, create, and disseminate content. It features real-time interaction, interactivity, connectivity, openness, and a sense of community (Peredy, 2024). Typically, the term “social media” refers to online platforms where users can actively participate, share, and create content. These platforms include websites, blogs, social networks, wikis, forums, and virtual worlds. Unlike traditional

media, which relies on print or broadcast channels to deliver one-way communication, social media utilizes the internet to foster interactive dialogue.

The rapid advancement of internet technology has contributed significantly to the growing popularity of social media. Many users are now leveraging these platforms to interact and share information quickly and without temporal or geographic limitations. As such, social media has increasingly replaced traditional mass media as a primary source for news, social interaction, and even commerce (Puteri et al., 2022). The internet has become a hub for billions of users globally and is now considered more engaging than conventional entertainment channels such as television, radio, and magazines (Juliyanti, 2023).

The origins of social networking trace back to the late 1990s, beginning as online gathering spaces. Classmates.com, launched in 1995, aimed to reconnect former classmates. This was followed by platforms such as SixDegrees.com, TheGlobe.com, and Tripod, developed between 1996 and 1997. These early sites focused on establishing direct links between users, primarily through chat rooms. They eventually incorporated user profiles and private messaging services, allowing friends to share personal information and engage in discussions on various topics (Abdalli & Hassan, 2019).

Additionally, they allude that although these sites provide services similar to those found in existing social networks, those sites have not been able to generate profits for their owners and have been closed. Then came a set of social networks that could not achieve much success between 1999 and 2001. By the beginning of 2002, the popularity of virtual social networks peaked and became global with the emergence of three sites, the first of which was Friendster in 2003 and then Bebo and then by the beginning of

2005 ,where the site of the famous American Myspace had a number of views more than google became one of the largest social networks in the world Along with his rival Facebook which also began to spread in parallel with Myspace until 2007, Facebook made it possible to create applications for developers, which increased the number of Facebook users significantly (Abdalla & Hassan 2019).

In view of the above reviews, the evolution of social media has seen a shift from basic communication tools to platforms where users engage in content creation, personal branding, as well as social activism. The increasing complexity of social media platforms means that users, including Gen Z students, are subject to a broader range of emotional influences that are both positive and negative. The literature on the evolution of social media helps contextualize the current state of online networking and its effects on Gen Z students. This background can explain why social media has such a powerful role in shaping their socio-emotional Well-Being, as it has evolved to be both an entertainment, educational, dating, and validation hub.

With the ever changing technological innovations, social media types are increasing as well as becoming very unique and advanced in their applications and use. A study focusing on media types as well as introducing a new data driven taxonomy identified eight types of social media (Koukaras et al., 2020). Online social networking refers to web-based services that enable individuals and communities to connect with real-world friends and acquaintances in virtual spaces. Users interact through features such as status updates, comments, media sharing, and private or group messaging. Prominent examples include Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn.

Blogging and Micro-blogging platforms allow users to contribute textual and multimedia content arranged in reverse chronological order, functioning much like an

online journal. Blogs are typically managed by individuals or communities. Examples include The Huffington Post, Business Insider, Engadget, WordPress.com, and Medium. Micro-blogs, which offer more limited content sharing capabilities, include platforms such as Twitter and Tumblr.

Wikis represent another category of social media, providing a collaborative editing environment in which multiple users can develop and update web pages collectively. Examples include Wikipedia, Wikitravel, and WikiHow.

Social news platforms enable communities of users to share, curate, and promote news stories and articles. These platforms foster collective evaluation and prioritization of content. Examples include Reddit, Slashdot, Digg, and Quora.

Social bookmarking services allow users to bookmark, categorize, store, and share web content. These platforms facilitate the organization and discovery of information across the internet. Examples include Delicious and StumbleUpon. Media sharing or streaming platforms are used for distributing multimedia content such as video, audio, and photos. These platforms often incorporate social features like comments, likes, and sharing. Notable examples include Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Flickr.

Opinion, reviews, and rating platforms are designed to collect and disseminate user-generated content in the form of subjective commentary and evaluations of products, services, businesses, entertainment, and destinations. Examples include TripAdvisor, Yelp, Zomato, CNET, and Epinions.

Finally, Questions and answe or knowledge-sharing platforms, often referred to as "Answer" sites, allow users to pose questions seeking advice, explanations, or factual information. Responses are provided by other users based on personal experience, opinion, or expertise, and are typically subject to community evaluation through voting

or comments. Examples include Yahoo! Answers and WikiAnswers (Koukaras et al., 2020). The types of social media enable people and organizations to connect, communicate, share information and form relationships. This is one of the most important uses of internet today. It is as a result of the presence of the many types of social media that college students are able to indulge through use of various social media platforms. Those that are common and would likely have an influence on the socio-emotional wellbeing of the students in tertiary institutions include but not limited to social networking, image based sharing sites, blogging and micro-blogging, discussion forums and entertainment forums. They use them also for different types of content which could be educational, inspirational, interactive, connecting, and promotional and entertainment.

The main types through which they achieve this are Facebook, Instagram, X, and Tiktok**.** Generation Z students in tertiary institutions use more visually-oriented platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat. Gen Z's preferences for short-form video, interactive content, and brief messaging are reshaping how online networking is conducted and hence possibly affecting their social emotional wellbeing. The literature on the types of social media platforms Gen Z students use play an important role in the study as it helped bring out clearly the varied effects of each platform on the Well-Being of Gen Z students. For instance, Instagram may contribute to social comparison, while TikTok might offer a platform for self-expression and creativity, aspects that each have an implication on their socio-emotional well -being.

Networking refers to the process of enhancing and establishing interpersonal connections within virtual spaces, enabling individuals to interact and build relationships. In today's digital age, social media has become the most dominant and accessible form of communication, particularly among Generation Z, who consider it

their primary means of interaction (Lad et al., 2020). Social networking services often include categorized communities, such as former classmates, self-descriptive user profiles for friend connections, and trust-based recommendation systems (Ismaila et al., n.d.). These services are typically classified into three main types: socializing networks (e.g., Facebook), which facilitate interactions with existing friends; networking networks (e.g., LinkedIn), which support professional and non-social communication; and social navigation networks, which assist users in finding specific information or resources.

Among university students, widely used platforms include WhatsApp, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, Instagram, Skype, LinkedIn, Telegram, YouTube, and Snapchat. Usage trends show that some platforms are more frequently used by female students, and most students engage with multiple platforms simultaneously (Chonge, 2020). In a descriptive study at Kibabii University in Kenya, Chonge (2020) found that social media use is deeply embedded in students' daily lives and recommended that institutions of higher learning should harness the power of social media to improve academic performance.

This is further corroborated by Tayo who found out that the social media platforms mostly used by the undergraduate students are WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube (Tayo et al., 2019). As for the preferred social media platform it has been established that WhatsApp remains the most popular social media application even among Gen Z students (Ogaji et al., 2017; Walubita, 2018). This literature is relevant to the study because the study also aims at finding out how exposure to social media can also enhance socio-emotional wellbeing of the Gen Z students in tertiary institutions.

According to Statista (2022), Facebook is the largest Social Networking Site on the web with over 2.9 billion monthly active users. Over time, Facebook has evolved into one of the most prominent social networking platforms, attracting over 400 million users every month. Its expanding user base has positioned it as an influential medium for organizing and mobilizing groups advocating for social change (Ajijola, 2023). Meanwhile, WhatsApp ranks as the second most widely used messaging application globally, trailing only behind Facebook, with approximately two billion active users each month. Known for its cross-platform compatibility, WhatsApp enables users to send messages ranging from text and images to videos and voice notes through mobile data or internet connections. Unlike many other messaging apps, WhatsApp identifies users by their phone numbers instead of usernames or PINs and allows limited personalization through features like customizable profiles, wallpapers, and notification settings.

According to Juliyanti (2023), the rapid advancement of technology in the current era of globalization is clearly evident, particularly in the area of communication devices such as mobile phones. Modern smartphones have surpassed earlier models in terms of functionality and accessibility, making them integral to daily communication. Juliyanti further emphasizes that the internet has become a primary platform for global activities, surpassing traditional forms of entertainment like television, radio, and print media in popularity.

Further still, the advancement of technology has turned the world to a global village which makes communication among students, accessibility to educational materials and sharing of such materials very easy. Obviously for years the introduction of short messages application has transformed the way people communicate with their love ones, in which the use of mobile instant messaging applications has added significant

push Such as WhatsApp which allows its users to send messages to friends and well-wishers (Bara & Salman, 2019).

YouTube, with around 2.2 billion active users, serves as a leading platform for watching and sharing video content online. Despite being a subsidiary of Google, it is widely acknowledged as an independent social media network and stands as the second largest search engine globally, following Google itself (Ismaila et al., n.d.). According to Ajijola (2023), X has significantly transformed the landscape of digital interaction. Its unique format, which limits individual posts or tweets to just 140 characters, enables quick and continuous exchanges of information. This brevity allows users to disseminate news and ideas rapidly, reaching millions of people almost instantly. The application is increasingly becoming popular among Generation Z College and out of college students in Kenya.

Ajijola (2023) notes that X, a real-time public microblogging platform known for breaking news first, currently boasts around 430 million active monthly users. It gained popularity primarily due to its iconic 140-character message limit, which allows for rapid, concise communication. Other widely used platforms include Instagram with over 2 billion monthly users, TikTok with 1 billion, and LinkedIn, which caters mainly to professionals seeking career advancement. LinkedIn profiles function like comprehensive résumés, featuring sections on work experience, education, certifications, volunteer work, and awards. Users engage with the platform not only to network but also to apply for jobs, participate in group discussions, and share articles, with approximately 250 million individuals active monthly.

Instagram has emerged as a dominant photo-sharing social network, designed for posting real-time images and short videos directly from mobile devices. With a user

base of around 2 billion, it allows people to visually communicate their experiences and social concerns almost instantly, making it a significant tool for raising awareness on various societal issues. Myspace, though less prominent today, still maintains a user base of about 20 million and serves mainly as a social site for chatting, making friends, and sharing resources. According to Ajijola (2023), platforms such as Facebook, X, and Instagram have played substantial roles in raising public awareness and influencing change in both personal and professional spheres.

Telegram, a cross-platform messaging application, has approximately 550 million active users and is known for its focus on user privacy and data security. Unlike other messaging platforms, it offers end-to-end encryption and self-destructing messages, features that have only recently been introduced on WhatsApp. Telegram's dedication to privacy has made it a popular alternative for users who prioritize secure communication.

For Generation Z, particularly those in tertiary institutions, the digital media environment has become a dominant space for social interaction, identity formation, and meaning-making. Torochi (2021) explains that these digital platforms, especially social media and instant messaging apps, serve not just as communication tools but as avenues for exploring new realities and opportunities that might not be available in their offline environments.

WhatsApp, for instance, is heavily used by university students to maintain contact with peers and family. TikTok, while known for entertainment, has also become an informal educational tool. Young users follow professionals like nutritionists and doctors for practical advice, and access videos that offer insights into topics often absent from formal education, such as sexuality. The platform is also used to view cooking tutorials

and academic tips shared by fellow students. TikTok's algorithm-driven personalization and short-form content contribute to its strong appeal, though its engaging nature can also be time-consuming. Some users even generate income from content creation. YouTube remains another valuable source for educational content, including tutorials and discussions on subjects like politics and science. Many young people find content relatable, often recognizing aspects of their own lives in meme-based videos or vlogs.

Skype, which is owned by Microsoft, is a widely used platform for voice-based communication and has about 300 million active users. Snapchat, another image-based messaging service, allows users to interact through photos and has a user base of approximately 538 million. Among individuals with college-level education, Facebook Messenger is the most used platform (40.8%), followed closely by Telegram (38.6%) and YouTube (38.3%). For undergraduate users, LinkedIn ranks highest (41.4%), followed by Pinterest (40.7%). Among those with postgraduate degrees, Skype leads in usage (14.9%), followed by LinkedIn (12.6%) and X (9.5%). Overall, Torochi (2021) emphasizes the widespread and active use of social media among individuals pursuing or holding higher education.

This research study focused on the major popular social networks used by Gen Z college students namely WhatsApp, facebook, X, Instagram, skype, telegram, YouTube, Tik Tok and LinkedIn. Interestingly, Generation Zs use certain features of social media platforms more for example instant message, seeing updates about others, watching videos from others, finding news and information and to find entertaining content (Curtis et al., 2018).

In the study by Chonge (2020), it was found out that some social network sites are used more by female students compared to the male students hence bringing in the issue of

gender as a moderating variable in this study. This research study therefore considered gender and sought to find out the difference in gender on social networking and the socio-emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya.

The above reviewed literature indicates that Social networking sites (SNS) differ in purpose and user experience as some are geared toward professional networking like LinkedIn, others toward casual socializing like Facebook while others toward entertainment and income generation like Tik Tok. These are the networks Gen Zs engage with therefore the need for study's exploration on how the different types of SNS influence Gen Z students' social interactions and emotional health. It contributes to the understanding of the contributions and impacts of these platforms for instance, professional platforms may boost self-esteem and career confidence, while casual platforms may foster deeper emotional connections or contribute to anxiety hence affecting the socio-emotional wellbeing of Gen Z students in and out of tertiary institutions.

2.4 Influence of Social Networking on Social Well-Being of Gen Z Students

Social networks and interpersonal connections play a crucial role in shaping a sense of identity and belonging, particularly among young adults, and can significantly influence their mental health and overall Well-Being (Aliverdi et al., 2022). The emergence of Online Social Networks (OSNs) has transformed the way individuals interact and communicate, introducing new patterns of engagement (Kaur, 2021). These platforms have expanded the scope of social interaction, creating complex digital environments where people engage, share, and form relationships. In essence, a social network comprises individuals or organizations linked through specific interdependencies, forming a dynamic web of connections (Estevão Goulart, 2017).

Within these networks, individuals contribute content, offer feedback, and engage in ongoing digital discourse, often shaping group norms and dynamics.

Studies focusing on university students reveal that the quality of their social connections is influenced by multiple factors, including the context and nature of their interactions (Smith et al., 2022). The depth of these relationships referred to as tie strength can vary depending on how meaningful, directional, and reciprocal the communication is. In the current digital landscape, numerous apps and platforms support social networking, and many modern relationships begin and evolve online. These platforms allow users to build semi-public profiles and connect within defined digital communities. In effect, social media has become a central space where individuals ranging from family and friends to influencers and brands congregate, interact, and share content regularly (USIU-Africa Simelab, 2020).

Doimer (2022) notes that Generation Z processes information differently due to their constant connection to technology and digital communication. Their experiences are often shaped by the rapid feedback and instant gratification they receive through mobile devices, which contrasts with the slower pace of traditional learning environments. This discrepancy can lead to disengagement and boredom in classroom settings. Social media, however, serves as a space where students can communicate, connect with peers and relatives, and exchange ideas. For many, it is also a tool to develop a sense of identity and refine social interaction skills. Students who are naturally introverted or have low self-confidence may find it easier to engage with others in virtual spaces, which helps them practice and improve their communication abilities (Samat & Orientation, 2018).

In institutions of higher learning, students frequently rely on social media to strengthen social bonds. Features available on these platforms often foster a sense of inclusion, which can reduce loneliness and enhance their overall academic experience (Lee, 2023). Lee further observed that college students also turn to these platforms to discover on-campus events and identify peers with similar interests, both of which contribute to forming real-life connections. Many students use platform-specific tools like group chats and shared calendars to stay engaged with their academic and social communities.

As Estevão Goulart (2017) emphasized, people from all backgrounds regardless of race, religion, social class, or occupation are actively producing and sharing digital content. The internet has become a powerful vehicle for creating and nurturing social and cultural ties that would otherwise be impossible without connectivity. Virtual communities operate beyond geographic and temporal boundaries, offering real-time interaction among users globally (Kircaburun et al., 2020).

Lopez and Abadiano (2023) pointed out that Gen Z students are deeply integrated into the digital world, accessing information anytime, anywhere. They are accustomed to digital convenience and are using technology to complete tasks that previous generations did manually. For this cohort, making connections online has become second nature. They interact with people across borders and cultures, often replacing face-to-face interactions with digital communication. While this offers vast networking opportunities, it also poses challenges. These students may find in-person communication more difficult and experience discomfort or social anxiety in real-world interactions. Technology has shaped their inner characteristics, often limiting their interpersonal development.

Furthermore, while Gen Z students can form expansive online networks, they may struggle with maintaining physical social bonds. Digital communication facilitates collaboration and creativity, helping students enhance critical thinking and explore new concepts. However, this digital immersion can lead to a decline in traditional social skills. Many in this generation experience difficulty initiating conversations or maintaining eye contact, and may feel awkward in unfamiliar social settings. These challenges can contribute to generational gaps in communication and an overall weakening of close personal relationships, both casual and romantic.

Abdalla and Hassan (2019) in their study in Algeria on “social networking sites new “face” of communication” opined that the strong growth of information and communication technologies is a challenge. The study sought to re-examine the social methodologies by analyzing electronic identity with its characteristics. They discussed how social media substituted the real world communication. They found out that social networks in real society within a virtual space and stated that we can replicate all our everyday actions and interactions with others in a virtual space. Likewise, the youth and in particular the Gen Z students in colleges relate very well with this replication. Additionally, they argued that since social networking through the various social networking sites provides many services to users enabling them to create an identity that they use for themselves while online for communicating with others. College students are very privy to this and the content of their communication consists of messages, links, friendships, pictures and videos.

They concluded that using social networks space is absent from the control of authorities giving way to violation of laws and non-respect. In turn, it gives users an incentive to practice deviant behavior. This research utilizes the uses and gratifications theory which resonates very well with the findings of Abdalla & Hassan (2019) that

social networks are a refuge that provide the user with all necessary gratifications that the community has not provided. They also say that the use of the networks represents a flight from real society's narrowness to a more welcoming and uncontrolled source of control. In relationship with this study, college Gen Zs are at home with social networking and their interpersonal relationships may be affected by this global phenomenon.

Parvez (2019) emphasizes that social networking platforms play a vital role in fostering, preserving, and even rekindling relationships, while also supporting the development of learning skills among teenagers. His study, conducted in India, focused specifically on how social networking sites (SNSs) influence the relationship dynamics of young individuals, particularly those in schools and colleges. In many developing countries, the accessibility of mobile phones has made internet use widespread, and social media now dominates how people communicate. Users frequently engage in chatting, messaging, sharing media, and staying connected with friends and family across the globe (Parvez, 2019).

The growing use of SNSs has significantly reshaped interpersonal relationships for adolescents—both with their peers and their families. Generation Z, in particular, tends to blur the lines between digital and physical friendships. For them, online friends are just as real and meaningful as offline ones. They are passionate about issues such as human rights, equality, diversity, sustainability, and social justice. This generation actively engages in conversations, values open dialogue, and is willing to explore different viewpoints, filtering out what resonates with their personal values and goals (Association of Kenya Insurers, 2021).

In addition, the Association of Kenya Insurers (2021) observed that while SNSs have deepened friendships among teens, they have also introduced noticeable changes in how these youths interact with their families. In some cases, social media has facilitated better communication within families, although it has also led to a redefinition of traditional interpersonal dynamics. At the same time, Generation Z's heavy reliance on virtual communication and shorthand digital language has impacted their ability to develop essential interpersonal and social skills (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021).

Findings from Pew Research Center (2019) suggest that Gen Z is especially comfortable using technology in their day-to-day interactions. However, their preference for texting as the primary mode of communication may have limited their ability to acquire key conversational competencies. These include listening attentively, asking thoughtful questions, offering respectful input during discussions, managing real-time conflicts, and cultivating meaningful relationships through direct dialogue.

In a study on "Social Media Dependency and the Implications of Technological Communication Use Among University Students", students were asked if they became more sociable during face to face interactions after starting to use social media, majority said they became better using social media whereas others disagreed that usage of social media gave them more confidence in talking to strangers face to face (Mahmud, 2018). The findings further showed that use of social media has some influence on the inter-personal relationships of the college students. It concluded that social media indeed contributes to the quality of relationships by which with distant friendship among students is improved.

Research shows that Gen Zers may have difficulty adapting to face-to-face interaction required in most modern organizations. It further says that they may have some anxiety

about working with others and prefer electronic communication methods as well as using innovative communication tools to increase inter- personal communication (Pichler et al., 2021). The study further posits that using technology to support interpersonal communication and new ways of working is especially relevant when it comes to Gen Z given their disproportionately higher rates of anxiety and depression.

Most of the young people use social media before or after every activity they do, they do not interact with their fellows but communicate with their social friends and are becoming less social (Rani & Padmalosani, 2019)**.** Also majority of young people use social media for social rather than educational reasons. Moreover, individuals belonging to Generation Z are naturally drawn to novelty and fresh experiences. They often seek out opportunities that challenge their worldview and allow them to adopt new perspectives. This exploration frequently fuels their creativity, as they are known for being curious, adventurous, and unafraid to take risks. Their exposure to diverse content through online platforms often sparks an eagerness to try new things. As they observe others' lives through social media, they begin to imagine, aspire, and sometimes replicate what they see in pursuit of their own personal growth and self-discovery (Lopez & Abadiano, 2023).

According to Cheng et al. (2024), social media plays a significant role in facilitating interactions and the formation of new social ties. However, these digital relationships tend to be more superficial and short-lived than those developed through in-person interactions. Many users find that connections made online often lack emotional depth and authenticity. In fact, when compared to bonds formed through face-to-face engagement with close friends and family, these online acquaintances fall short in terms of emotional quality and lasting impact. A substantial portion of students approximately

59% believe that excessive time spent on social media negatively affects the quality of their relationships with loved ones.

From the foregoing literature, online social networking facilitates both the creation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. However, it can sometimes lead to superficial relationships that lack emotional depth, leading to feelings of loneliness or dissatisfaction. The literature relates to the study in that it will provide insights into how social networking impacts their emotional health, especially considering the high prevalence of online-only friendships which is at the expense of one on one interactions amongst friends, hence impacting on their socio-emotional Well-Being.

Liu et al. (2021) observe that college students are among the most active users of digital media platforms, investing significant amounts of both time and money in their usage. Their internet behavior often reflects patterns typical of younger demographics, including tendencies toward internet dependency. Terms such as “internet addiction” and “network ring center” have emerged to describe these behaviors and have sparked widespread public concern. These phenomena have drawn attention from various social groups, particularly regarding the implications of excessive internet use and negative self-talk among college students. As students in college, they check everything on their phones and prefer to learn things with tutorials, because they find it faster. They also have the desire to always be informed and know other truths. For this reason, the majority are self-taught; their main source of information is the internet (Samacá-salamanca et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the main characteristics of the Gen Z like use of short messages liking to read little, using their own language whereby they use emojis and stickers to replace words and expressions, they have parallel conversations on various platforms, they

publish everything and they need constant validation from their social circle. Additionally, Generation Z individuals have an observing role on their social media profiles and use the Internet and social media as their main sources of information.

There are still more characteristics of the Gen Z students including the tendency to easily get bored in doing something, but on the other hand, is more creative in making projects. They tend to actively participate during class, such as in group discussion or explaining or debating and have a willingness to learn new skills and knowledge (Zaim et al., 2020). Additionally, with online social networks, students have an area to study, talk about, and share their ideas on a particular topic due to virtual learning. This improves communication, teamwork, and decision-making skills while also motivating students to take ownership of their education as they employ technology that is far more sophisticated and unique from that of previous generations. (Rafi B, 2024).

Zaim et al. (2020) discovered that young people increasingly prefer using online platforms for communication, especially for chatting and accessing various forms of information. Instead of relying solely on traditional learning methods or their lecturers, they often turn to online applications and YouTube to enhance their listening and reading skills. Generation Z, in particular, enjoys sharing content online ranging from educational materials to aspects of their daily lives—through video blogs and other social media platforms. This reflects their tendency to use digital tools both for learning and self-expression.

One study that explored College Adjustment in First-Year Gen Z Medical students and its contributing factors noted that Gen Z students possess unique characteristics that may affect their adjustment. Among the factors unique to Gen Z students was technology dependence (Zhuhra et al., 2022). The study further revealed that members

of Generation Z, while deeply immersed in technology particularly social media also place significant value on authentic, real-life experiences. They are often described as innovative, entrepreneurial, and focused on achieving personal goals. Their preference for customized, micro-level experiences, combined with a strong inclination toward skill development and practical engagement, shapes both their personal and academic lives. However, their constant presence on social platforms has been linked to a phenomenon commonly referred to as the fear of missing out (FOMO). This heightened connectivity, especially among medical students, was shown to interfere with learning effectiveness and the completion of academic tasks. Furthermore, when students form emotional or social bonds with their devices rather than with real-world relationships, it can hinder healthy social adaptation.

Gen Z's dominant mode of interaction is digital. They gravitate toward online spaces not only to stay updated but to be part of ongoing dialogues and to create and consume content. Their creativity and ability to blend various digital inputs into meaningful outputs mark them as a generation of content curators and collaborators. According to findings by Dunmade et al. (2023) on Nigerian undergraduate students, motivations for using social media vary widely, ranging from reading and discussion to improving writing skills. Although the platforms can support learning, they also pose distractions that negatively impact academic performance.

This aligns with findings from Zhuhra et al. (2022), who observed that Gen Z students frequently use digital tools to support learning activities whether for researching information, engaging in course discussions, or designing creative assignments. These students also expressed a strong preference for more technological integration in classroom instruction and assessment strategies.

Olipas (2022) adds that social media plays a crucial role in how Gen Z learners engage with their academic environments. These students often use digital platforms to share their daily routines and communicate instantly with family and friends. More importantly, social media has become a key driver of student engagement, influencing not only their participation in classes but also their involvement in university-led events, programs, and activities. According to Olipas, students who actively use social media tend to be more involved in a wide range of learning experiences that contribute to their overall growth and development.

A study attempted to confirm the use of web technologies among undergraduates in selected Malaysian public universities and found out that they were prone to use web technologies for social and entertainment purposes than for academic purposes. Besides their overall experiences with web technologies, the study explored the perceptions of their web technologies uses in their higher education learning involving how they accessed, processed, and assessed information for academic purposes from the study, it was observed and deduced that the responses indicated that they were familiar and experienced with web technologies (Majid et al., 2019). This further confirms their techno savvy nature, having been born in the digital era and thus their overall development revolves around the internet and its technologies. Consequently, Gen Z is quick to adapt to new tools and technologies, which is reflected in their networking habits since they are always learning new skills, whether it's mastering a new social platform or using cutting-edge software. This adaptability allows them to take advantage of emerging networking opportunities, such as virtual events, online communities, and collaborative platforms.

Social media platforms function primarily through mobile and web-based technologies, enabling dynamic and interactive environments where individuals and communities can

exchange ideas, co-create content, engage in discussions, and adapt shared information. These platforms have significantly transformed the way people communicate not only on a personal level but also in how organizations and communities connect and interact globally (Lad, et. al., 2020). It has increasingly been argued that the digital world has, in many ways, replaced traditional face-to-face interaction, particularly for Generation Z. For this cohort, online interactions often serve as the primary mode of communication. This shift is evident in how Gen Z students actively utilize digital tools to form groups, exchange content, and build virtual communities. The widespread availability of the internet has significantly altered communication patterns, introducing a new dynamic driven by platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Pinterest, Tumblr, and Reddit. These platforms are not only tools for social interaction but have also become integral to how young people express themselves and stay connected.

A study conducted at Kibabii University Kenya, explored the effects of social media use on academic performance and revealed that students commonly maintain multiple social media accounts. Specifically, 26.7% of the respondents reported having up to two accounts, 28.4% had three, while 28% used more than three platforms simultaneously. Only 16.9% indicated that they relied on just one social networking account (Chonge, 2020). This finding underscores the high level of digital engagement among university students.

Generation Z is often seen as having redefined the concept of social interaction, frequently preferring digital conversations over in-person discussions. This was supported by a study examining how Gen Z learners engage with education in the digital era. The research found that E-learning platforms are particularly well-suited to the learning styles of Gen Z students, offering flexibility and convenience (Cenita, 2023).

These platforms allow learners to access study materials from anywhere at any time using digital devices. Furthermore, E-learning empowers students with greater control over their learning processes hence enabling them to manage their own pace, submit assignments independently, participate in discussions, and receive immediate feedback from instructors. It fosters an environment where learners can express opinions, exchange ideas, and complete academic tasks efficiently through peer-based or online collaborative resources. All this happens in the absence of one on one or face to face communication. This literature is very relevant to this study as it helps to outline further how online engagements derive the Gen Z the opportunity for face to face communication contributing to the impact on social well- being.

In a study on "social media and how to interact with students and make use of self-segmentation, focusing on college student's behavior on Facebook", Anderson (2017) found out that people are unique. Users of social media platforms, particularly Facebook, can be grouped into distinct categories based on their online behaviors and motivations. The first group includes *entertainment chasers* or individuals who turn to social media primarily as a form of escapism, consuming bite-sized entertaining content to alleviate boredom. The second group comprises *attention seekers*, who are characterized by their frequent sharing of personal content, often prioritizing their own expression over engaging with others' posts.

A third category includes *Facebook devotees*, users who actively participate in both sharing and consuming content. For them, Facebook serves not only as a communication platform but also as a space to seek emotional relief and support, particularly when dealing with real-life challenges. The final group identified is the *connection seekers*. These users rely on social media to maintain or supplement personal relationships, especially during times when face-to-face interaction is limited

or unavailable (Andersson & Andersson, 2017). This categorization aligns closely with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which explains that individuals engage with media platforms to satisfy specific needs. For many users, particularly the Facebook devotees and connection seekers, the platform offers emotional reassurance and a sense of belonging, fulfilling their psychological need for connection and support in a digital environment. There are also connection seekers who use Facebook to enhance life friendships. This therefore resonates well with findings that media affect youth by shaping what they do and believe through adaptation and imitation (Kim & Kim, 2017). One of the objectives of this study was to find out the motivations for social networking among Gen Z students and so this literature contributes to understanding that aspect from the previous studies giving room for filling of the gap of new and emerging motivations.

Students and general users of social networking sites (SNSs) often engage in a range of interactive activities, with the most common ones being browsing through other people's profiles, searching for acquaintances, updating their own accounts, and observing others' online behavior without necessarily engaging, often referred to as digital eavesdropping (Parvez, 2019). Parvez also highlights that nearly half of teenagers (45.7%) prefer spending time online chatting, downloading videos, watching movies and dramas, and reading news, among other activities, via SNS platforms.

This behavior reflects a broad and diverse engagement with various applications and services available across social media. For example, while traditional SNSs like Facebook remain popular, their structure differs from earlier virtual communities. Facebook is often described as "egocentric" because it centers on personal profiles and walls where individuals present their identity through text, images, and videos. Unlike older platforms that emphasized shared interests among group members, Facebook

tends to mirror real-life social networks by connecting users primarily with people they already know. This personalization and self-presentation remain core reasons why many people are drawn to social networking sites (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

A study examining “fear of missing out and social network usage among students” with focus on assessing the levels of fear of missing out and time spent on social media by college students also found that with heightened Fear of missing out, college students may compulsively engage to more frequent internet use (Gino A. Cabrera, Andal Bernard A. Andal & Martin V. Kallarackal, 2019). On the other hand, the study identified that high social network time use may lead to social media addiction.

The findings of the study affirm that both the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and extensive engagement with social media contribute significantly to the rise of unhealthy internet usage patterns among university students. It was observed that these students tend to exhibit moderate levels of problematic internet behavior and report a noticeable presence of FoMO. On average, they spend more than four hours per day on social networking platforms. This constant exposure to the curated lives of others where individuals share their achievements, whereabouts, and possessions—often leads to feelings of inadequacy and fear of being left out. This emotional response drives them to compare themselves to others or feel that others are comparing them, which in turn deepens their dependency on these platforms (Samaa-Salmanca et al., 2023).

Peredy (2024) explores how Generation Z’s communication style has been shaped by growing up immersed in digital technologies. He notes that social media has become their primary means of interaction, enabling real-time communication that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries. This generation gravitates towards platforms that support brief and visually engaging content such as TikTok, Instagram Stories, and X

posts. Their conversations often consist of short, simple messages, and emojis are frequently used in place of words. Growing up in the digital era has equipped them with a distinctive “internet sense,” giving rise to a new kind of social language made up of internet slang and acronyms like “OMG” (Oh My God) and “YOLO” (You Only Live Once), which have become part of everyday speech among young people. In various countries, these expressions are even localized, with users developing their own abbreviated versions of widely recognized phrases.

This form of communication hinders meaningful and authentic interactions with others and can in one way or another affect the overall social Well-Being which thrives as a result of building and maintaining healthy relationships. This happens because the ideal effective communication should be concise, clear and complete in order to facilitate harmony leading to improved social-emotional and psychological Well-Being (Peredy 2024).

Social media has increasingly become a central tool in the daily lives of Gen Z college students, significantly shaping various aspects of their existence, including their approach to learning (Wickramanayake & Jika, 2018). Common activities on social networking sites (SNSs) include browsing through others' profiles, conducting casual searches, updating personal information, and passively observing online interactions. Gen Z users are also keen on monitoring the activity of people and organizations they follow whether friends, family, or brands keeping up with current trends, news, and product releases (Helal et al., 2018).

For many of these students, social media serves as their go-to source for information. It keeps them informed not only about personal and social circles but also about broader issues such as politics, health, entertainment, and global events. The content shared by

users ranging from comments and status updates to multimedia files and engagement data has become the driving force behind the vibrancy and functionality of these platforms.

A study conducted in Pakistan by Abbas et al. (2019) examined both the beneficial and detrimental effects of social media on students' mental and emotional states. The research highlighted that, for the sample studied, negative impacts on behavior were more pronounced than the positive. However, the authors cautioned that their findings may not be universally applicable, as they were based on responses from a specific population. Despite this, the study opened doors for further exploration by linking social media's creative and destructive influences with students' cognitive experiences. It also emphasized the importance of understanding the types of content Gen Z students engage with, especially within the context of higher education institutions.

Furthermore, some members of Gen Z leverage platforms like Instagram to stay ahead of evolving trends in areas such as fashion, lifestyle, and interior design often for academic or professional inspiration. They frequently tag brands in their posts, which helps in the discovery of emerging companies and start-ups (Helal et al., 2018). This behavior underscores how social media not only facilitates information-sharing but also acts as a bridge between users and commercial innovation. Some people as well as Gen Zs engage in social media and are constantly sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually explicit messages, photos, or pictures in other words 'sexting'. This is according to Samat & Orientation (2018).

On the other hand, Gen Z is consuming entertaining, authentic, and informative content. Recent data from the Global Web Index highlights that Generation Z leads all other age groups in daily engagement with social media. This group is gradually shifting its

preferences away from older platforms like Facebook, gravitating instead toward visually rich and video-centric apps such as TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube, where dynamic and interactive content dominates (Association of Kenya Insurers).

Tirochi (2024) adds that today's youth are particularly drawn to content that supports personal development and showcases professionals who inspire them, including educators, child development experts, and career mentors. Female users, for instance, often engage with profiles of mothers who share glimpses of their family life something that resonates with them emotionally and socially. These interactions on social media platforms play a significant role in shaping both personal growth and educational outlook among students in tertiary institutions.

Furthermore, social media is increasingly viewed by young people as a more immediate, transparent, and accessible source of information compared to conventional media outlets. The content shared on social media varies from entertainment and lifestyle to political opinions and self-help. Content can significantly impact the socio-emotional Well-Being of students, either positively by providing support or negatively through harmful comparisons.

Review of the literature related to content accessed on social media contributed to enhanced understanding of what content Gen Z students engage with for example seeking to identify with influencers, memes, academic discussions and entertainment. This helped shed light on the emotional effects of such interactions, helping the study assess the content's role in boosting or damaging students' socio-emotional well- being.

A range of factors influence how Generation Z makes decisions, particularly the rise of social media, advancements in information technology, and the evolution of

communication methods. These tools have become deeply integrated into their daily lives. Over the past few years, the way people access and exchange information has transformed significantly, largely due to the widespread adoption of social networking platforms (Djamaly, 2023). As a result, Gen Z is often seen as more self-reliant compared to earlier generations. Rather than relying on parental guidance, they often turn to peers or digital sources when navigating decisions.

Peer influence and word-of-mouth communication have emerged as two powerful forces shaping Gen Z's decision-making within family contexts. In a study conducted by Costa and Machado (2017), it was revealed that peer interactions play a particularly important role during the early stages of making decisions. This is primarily because trust is already established among peers, which makes their advice more credible and relatable. The researchers observed that young individuals are more likely to seek opinions and product reviews from those they connect with personally be it friends or online communities before forming judgments.

This peer influence tends to be strongest during the initial phase of evaluating options. During this stage, Gen Z often explores different products or services, comparing features such as quality, price, and appearance, either by visiting physical or online stores. They then gather feedback from those they trust. While they eventually consult with family members, the final decision is generally shaped by their own judgment, with minimal external pressure, except for parental guidance in some instances. Costa and Machado (2017) concluded that word-of-mouth is most impactful at the beginning of the decision-making journey, as it helps Gen Z gather experiential insights before arriving at a final choice.

The rise of online social networking has profoundly shaped how Generation Z, particularly college students, approach everyday decision-making. This demographic, born into a digitally saturated environment, increasingly relies on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) not only for entertainment and communication but also for information and social validation that often inform their choices. One of the most visible impacts of social networking is its role in influencing consumer behavior. Recent evidence suggests that social media trends, particularly on TikTok, significantly affect Gen Z's purchasing intentions. Bulazo, Sotto, and Baltazar (2025) observed that the authenticity and virality of content posted by influencers or brands frequently prompt impulsive decisions among young users, sometimes bypassing traditional evaluation processes.

Further, online interactions appear to shape students' values and priorities, which in turn steer their personal and academic decisions. A study conducted by RSIS International (2025) emphasized that exposure to online content affects how Gen Z evaluates aspects of identity, belonging, and cultural relevance factors that indirectly shape decision-making patterns. These networks not only influence what students choose but also why they choose it.

In the context of information processing, Hassoun et al. (2023) found that Gen Z does not approach information individually or in isolation. Instead, they rely on social consensus and digital cues to evaluate credibility. This "socially distributed cognition" suggests that decisions whether academic, social, or economic are often influenced by peer validation rather than objective analysis alone. When it comes to significant life decisions such as selecting a university, Le, Khuat, and Dao (2025) demonstrated that Gen Z students are highly receptive to social media marketing. Factors such as platform interactivity, customized messaging, and peer-shared testimonials were found to

significantly shape students' attitudes and intentions, often more than institutional credibility or academic rankings.

Social influencers also play a critical role in how Gen Z processes information and forms judgments. Nadanyiova et al. (2024) highlighted that emotional attachment to online influencers can foster trust, leading to increased susceptibility to their recommendations. This influence extends beyond consumer products to decisions involving lifestyle choices, beliefs, and even political attitudes. In addition to product- or brand-related decisions, lifestyle and self-presentation decisions are deeply intertwined with digital identity construction. Yasin, Julita, and Hidayat (n.d.) noted that for many Gen Z students, social media serves as a platform not only for consumption but also for image crafting, often leading to choices driven by aspirational identity and peer comparison rather than intrinsic preferences.

Lastly, a broader synthesis by Kumar (2023) points out that Gen Z's dependence on social media often overrides traditional brand loyalty and rational decision-making. The constant flow of user-generated content, peer reviews, and promotional trends fosters a decision-making environment that is rapid, reactive, and heavily socialized. Collectively, these studies suggest that for Gen Z college students, online social networking is not a passive backdrop but an active agent in their decision-making processes. Their choices are increasingly shaped by interactive, socially mediated, and emotionally charged digital environments, underscoring the need for more critical digital literacy in this demographic.

Decision making being one of the aspects of social Well-Being, the above literature suggests that at times Gen Z seek opinions from the family and make decisions and that they are not so influenced by others, except for their families that may control their

decision ability. The online environment, with its constant feedback loops and peer influence, affects the decision-making processes of Gen Z students, especially regarding lifestyle choices, academic choices, and social interactions. One of the objectives of the study looked at how online social networking influences the socio-wellbeing within which the decision-making is one of the sub components of social Well-Being of Gen Z students in terms of social behaviors, and how those decisions affect their emotional and social Well-Being.

Studies have shown that using social media can provide a sense of psychological relief, as it helps fulfill emotional needs and contributes positively to users' self-worth (Kaur, 2020). Generation Z, in particular, is widely recognized for crafting and maintaining personal brands online. A personal brand serves as a digital reflection of an individual's unique identity and has become a powerful asset for young people striving for recognition and success, regardless of their background or social standing (Vițelar, 2019). One of the most effective platforms for this type of self-presentation is Instagram, which young users favor for its ability to support both self-expression and identity formation. It allows them to build and maintain an appealing digital persona that aligns with their goals and values. Ariffin et al. (2024) also observed that Gen Z students generally demonstrate a solid grasp of emotional self-awareness. This skill enables them not only to understand their own emotional states but also to relate to the feelings of others, which is crucial in online interactions.

Traditionally, people tend to compare themselves to others in face-to-face social situations. However, social media has shifted this dynamic by allowing users to carefully curate their online presence. Individuals can now selectively share images and personal details that showcase their ideal selves. These digital portrayals ranging from personality traits and emotional expressions to lifestyle choices can turn users into

targets of either upward or downward comparison, depending on how others perceive and evaluate their content (Han, 2022). Young people engage in this habit greatly as some of them feel they area ware of themselves and want to show and compare themselves to others and are therefore constantly posting and updating their photos and stories online.

According to Han (2022), sharing and receiving compliments from others helps people develop their self-esteem and self-evaluation. Passive social media users, on the other hand, are less likely to receive feedback, which may harm their self-esteem. Social media offers platforms for self-reflection and expression. From the reviewed literature, while online networking by Gen Z, can encourage positive self-awareness, it can also foster self-criticism, especially if students are influenced by idealized images or online personas. Since self-awareness is part of social Well-Being, this literature helps shed light how online social networking contributes to or hinders the self-awareness of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions. Positive self-expression may lead to improved self-concept, while negative comparisons may damage self-esteem ad this formed part of what was explored by the study.

2.5 Impact of Social Networking on the Emotional Well-Being of Gen Z Students

The presence of social media in the lives of Gen Zers has affected their socio-emotional wellbeing it is acknowledged that social media can also exert substantial psychological and emotional impacts on students (Purnama, 2023). Moreover, the ongoing pressure to align with social standards and project an idealized image on social media often takes a toll on students' emotional Well-Being. This constant digital performance can result in mental fatigue, diminished self-worth, and a growing sense of loneliness. As Purnama (2023) notes, it is crucial to understand that the psychological effects of social media are complex and far-reaching. These impacts extend beyond surface-level

emotional responses, influencing students' long-term mental health, the quality of their relationships, and their ability to focus and succeed academically.

On the other hand, Pescadero & Cabahug (2023) in a study to determine the relationship of Social Media Engagement and Psychosocial Well-Being among Generation Z disclosed that students were highly engaged to various social media platforms for watching movies, getting relief from academic stress, sharing pictures, looking at funny sharing, keeping in touch with the relatives and getting information regarding current social events. Involvement in such activities was for providing them emotional relief from academic stresses.

One of the potential risks of relying on online technologies is cyberbullying and the use of social media among students including the Gen Z students in tertiary institutions has been associated with cyber bullying. While internet technologies offer convenience and global connectivity, prolonged and unfiltered exposure can pose significant risks to users' emotional, psychological, and even physical safety (Hossain, 2022). In a qualitative study conducted among university students in Bangladesh, Hossain (2022) discovered a strong link between experiences of cyberbullying and various psychological challenges. Victims of cyberbullying were found to suffer higher rates of emotional and behavioral disorders, highlighting the detrimental mental health effects of such online harassment.

The study further identified that most cyberbullying incidents occur on popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp with Facebook being the most commonly reported channel for such behavior among students. Hossain (2022) emphasized that cyberbullying has become a recurring issue, leading to a range of negative psychological consequences including anxiety, depression, social

withdrawal, and, in extreme cases, suicide—findings echoed by Samat and Orientation (2018).

In parallel, other studies have explored how digital engagement affects emotional intelligence and social functioning among Generation Z. Contrary to assumptions that screen time reduces social skills, research by Imjai et al. (2024) suggests that while social abilities remain relatively intact, emotional intelligence especially the ability to manage and interpret emotional states tends to decline with excessive digital interaction. Nonetheless, the development of strong social competencies can help counterbalance this decline, as such skills significantly contribute to emotional regulation and understanding in online environments.

Moreover, students' mental health serves as a crucial mediator in the relationship between technological stress and academic performance. According to Zali et al. (2018), overuse of digital devices is directly linked to reduced mental Well-Being, which in turn undermines students' academic effectiveness. The study also warned that excessive screen time is negatively impacting the holistic growth of younger generations. While digital tools can support learning and career advancement, they are simultaneously reducing opportunities for physical activity, a key component of both mental and physical development. Over-reliance on technology is gradually distancing students from healthy routines, potentially threatening their long-term Well-Being.

According to Mahmud (2018), youth that spend a lot of time interacting through a screen rather than real life had their concentration and self-esteem affected, hence significantly affecting their personal relationships. He further argues that youth tend to rely on social media for various reasons like allowing them to portray themselves differently from what they are in reality and managing different identities online. While

online platforms have brought numerous benefits to university students, they also come with significant drawbacks. A study by Aizezi and Chen (2021) points out that although digital media positively influences students' lives, it can also disrupt their sense of self. The constant exposure to curated online content may complicate the process of self-identity formation and even trigger identity crises, ultimately reshaping how students live and interact with others.

In a similar vein, research conducted by Tayo et al. (2019) revealed that social media contributes heavily to internet addiction and academic distraction among undergraduates. Their findings showed that some students habitually engage in chatting on social platforms during lectures, while others tend to delay academic work in favor of browsing social media. Additionally, several participants admitted to using social media simply to pass time rather than for academic enrichment. These patterns highlight the growing challenge of social media dependency within university settings and underscore the extent to which it can interfere with students' academic focus and productivity.

An investigation conducted in Turkey in a study group comprising of 137 university students aimed to understand why SNS usage makes youngsters happy. It was done using a phenomenological design, which is a qualitative research method to determine why SNS usage causes happiness in accordance with university student opinions and experiences. (Dogan, 2018). The findings showed several reasons attributed to the happiness experienced by use of social networking.

The reasons attributed to the happiness include but not limited to ease of accessing and disseminating information, as a leisure activity, ease of shopping and being up to date (Dogan, 2018). The research also highlighted that users of social networking sites

(SNS) tend to engage in constant communication, often driven by curiosity and a desire to stay informed. To maintain this connectivity, they rely on various digital devices and internet plans, ensuring they are always updated with current trends and news. Marciano et al. (2023) observed that sharing or watching humorous videos with friends is positively associated with increased feelings of happiness.

Many Generation Z students report experiencing a sense of life satisfaction when using social media platforms. For some, viewing or sharing content such as photos or status updates related to their social life brings a sense of fulfillment. However, the effect of social media on individuals' satisfaction with their physical environment is nuanced. On one hand, exposure to diverse cultures, lifestyles, and events through digital content can spark inspiration. On the other, it may also lead to feelings of inadequacy or dissatisfaction with one's current circumstances. For example, seeing others travel or experience luxurious settings can evoke a desire for change or foster envy. Ultimately, the impact depends on how individuals interpret what they see online, their mindset, and their ability to distinguish between curated digital portrayals and real life (Cheng et al., 2024).

In a study on social media addiction among university students in Saudi Arabia, majority of the respondents reported that they spend more than four hours on social networking sites and as a result this negatively impacts their academic performances. More than four hours a day, checking it while eating, and immediately they wake up. Further, majority of the students feel depressed and bored if the SNSs don't exist (Khormi et al., 2016). The findings align with evidence showing that emotional Well-Being can be negatively impacted by a phenomenon widely recognized as the *fear of missing out* (FoMO). This fear arises when individuals feel excluded from social experiences that others appear to be enjoying (Webster et al., 2021). The study further

emphasized that the type and presence of feedback received on social media whether affirmative, critical, or entirely absent can significantly influence a person's emotional state, determining whether the experience supports or undermines their mental Well-Being.

Kim (2017) posits that digital platforms have the potential to expand users' social circles, enhance interpersonal connections, and provide increased opportunities for emotional support. Online social interactions may reduce feelings of isolation, especially among adolescents, thereby supporting their overall psychological health. Furthermore, social media often serves as a coping mechanism for young people with limited face-to-face social skills. It enables them to engage in meaningful interactions, establish friendships, and explore personal identity in a way that might be difficult in traditional settings.

In a related study, it was revealed that many Generation Z students experience a distinct form of anxiety rooted in uncertainty about the future, an anxiety captured in the lingering question, "what comes next?" This apprehension is often amplified by their deep connection to social media. These platforms frequently reflect and reinforce stressors already present in students' lives, such as academic pressure, employment uncertainty, financial strain, maintaining an idealized digital persona, and a general fear of what the future holds (Type et al., 2024).

Social media can have both a positive and negative impact on an individual's self-esteem. The young people frequently post images of themselves ('selfies') online, a presentation of self that is linked to the perception of peer acceptance and level of belonging. When this happens, the number of likes or comments a student may receive through social media will indicate peer acceptance and level of belonging. A

correlational study that sought to establish an inventory of false presentation behaviors on face book found out that when one received many likes or positive comments, then that indicated peer acceptance. (Wright & Obst, 2018). On the other hand, some studies suggest that social media can play a supportive role in helping young people adjust to life in college. Digital platforms offer students the opportunity to engage meaningfully with campus life, connect with peers, and position themselves as proactive participants in both global conversations and future leadership roles (Woods et al., 2019). Through these platforms, students navigate social and academic environments, strengthening their presence as members of both their institutions and the wider digital community.

In a related study exploring the connection between attitudes toward social networking sites (SNSs), frequency of use, and emotional Well-Being, it was revealed that frequent SNS use has a notable impact on emotional quality of life, particularly contributing to negative emotional states. The research found that one's attitude toward social connection was the most influential predictor of SNS engagement, followed by perceptions of ease of use and personal confidence in navigating these platforms (Hunt & Krishnan, 2021). The findings underscore a nuanced relationship—while social media provides an outlet for connection, increased usage may diminish emotional Well-Being.

Moreover, internet use has become deeply intertwined with the routines of modern life, especially among youth who have grown up in a digital-first world. This generation, often referred to as digital natives, engages with the internet at exceptionally high rates. However, overwhelming evidence points to a correlation between excessive internet use and a rise in emotional challenges, including anxiety and stress (Mandi, 2024).

According to Muhamoud et al. (2025), members of Generation Z often perceive their social media followers particularly on platforms like Instagram as nonjudgmental audiences. This perception encourages them to express themselves more freely online. This represents a shift in how social validation is sought and obtained. Unlike previous generations who relied on face-to-face interaction for reassurance and acceptance, Gen Z increasingly seeks validation in virtual spaces, reshaping the nature of interpersonal feedback and emotional affirmation.

Online social networking platforms, such as Instagram, X, and TikTok, have become integral to daily life, influencing how individuals manage their time, emotions, and personal goals. Self-management, encompassing self-regulation, mental health maintenance, and personal productivity, is increasingly shaped by social media use.

A study examining the views of Generation Z and young millennials on a spiritual self-care app known as *Skylight* a platform featuring short videos uncovered several motivating factors behind its use. Participants reported turning to the app for various reasons, such as to unwind, find emotional balance, escape overwhelming thoughts, boost their mood, or simply support their overall Well-Being (Park et al., 2023). For many Gen Z users, *Skylight* served as a practical tool during moments of stress, helping them to regain composure and relax. Its accessibility during times of emotional distress made it a valuable resource for managing daily pressures and difficult life events, offering users a momentary refuge from the fast pace of their routines (Chatzoglou et al., 2020; Park et al., 2023).

Social media can enhance self-management by providing tools for self-expression, goal-setting, and community support. Popat and Tarrant (2022) conducted a qualitative review of 24 studies, exploring adolescents' perspectives on social media's role in

mental health and Well-Being. They found that platforms like Instagram foster self-reflection and emotional regulation through creative outlets like journaling or sharing positive content. Adolescents reported using social media to access mental health resources, such as mindfulness tips, which supported their self-management efforts (Popat & Tarrant, 2022).

Similarly, Zhang et al. (2023) investigated how social media supports self-regulated learning among college students. Their survey of 400 students using platforms like WeChat and LinkedIn revealed that social media facilitates goal-oriented behaviors, such as joining study groups or following educational influencers. The study used structural equation modeling to show a positive correlation between social media engagement and self-efficacy, suggesting that curated online interactions enhance personal discipline (Zhang et al., 2023).

Despite its benefits, social media can hinder self-management by contributing to distraction, stress, and reduced self-control. Meier and Reinecke (2021) conducted a systematic review of 68 studies, examining the relationship between social media use and Well-Being. They found that excessive use of platforms like Facebook and TikTok is associated with lower self-regulation, as users often procrastinate or engage in compulsive scrolling. Time-diary studies in their review highlighted that heavy social media use correlates with reduced productivity and poor time management (Meier & Reinecke, 2021).

A 2024 study by Lim and Kim explored the impact of social media addiction on mental health self-management. Their longitudinal study of 300 young adults showed that excessive engagement with Instagram and X increased anxiety and disrupted sleep patterns, impairing emotional regulation. The study used the Bergen Social Media

Addiction Scale to quantify addiction levels, emphasizing the need for interventions to promote mindful usage (Lim & Kim, 2024).

Moreover, users found that engaging with the app's content helped uplift their mood particularly during periods of sadness, anxiety, or when grappling with emotionally challenging experiences. What stood out to the participants was the app's varied content, such as motivational affirmations, which they found beneficial in addressing issues like depression and anxiety. Many users described *Skylight* as a convenient all-in-one platform that catered to multiple wellness needs. With options including prayer, meditation, yoga, and spoken affirmations, the app allowed users to personalize their self-care routines based on individual preferences and emotional needs (Park et al., 2023).

In a related study, it was found that symptoms of depression were positively correlated with the frequency of gaming. Interestingly, individuals who played video games more often reported experiencing lower levels of stress. This suggests that, for some users, gaming functions as a coping mechanism hence helping to relieve stress temporarily, even though it might also contribute to a decline in overall emotional Well-Being if overused (Brailovskaia, 2018). Additionally, the same research highlighted that individuals who spent more time online tended to report higher levels of self-esteem, resilience, narcissism, and satisfaction with life. Their experiences of receiving support in virtual spaces may contribute to greater emotional strength, helping them better handle criticism and real-world challenges by developing stronger psychological resilience.

Echoing this sentiment, Pescadero and Cabahug (2023) emphasized that when social media is used constructively for academic enrichment, social interaction, entertainment,

or staying informed. It significantly enhances the psychosocial Well-Being of Generation Z students. In this way, digital tools can play a positive role in shaping healthy mindsets.

Furthermore, emotional Well-Being is deeply influenced by both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. The development of self-awareness and emotional regulation enables individuals to identify and manage the triggers that provoke negative feelings. Such awareness is key to moderating anxiety, particularly during challenging circumstances. Being able to recognize one's emotional limits and respond constructively promotes adaptability and resilience two traits essential for navigating adversity (Warrier et al., 2023).

The foregoing literature on online social networking and Self-Management shows that online social networking influences students' ability to manage their emotions and behaviors. Also, constant online interaction may either help them develop coping strategies or exacerbate issues like stress. This is important to this study because it helped in exploring how Gen Z students use social media and how it relates to their emotions, and if they become more reactive and stressed by online interactions. This can provide insights into their self-management abilities while in college and even outside college.

Generation Z stands out as the first cohort to grow up entirely immersed in the digital era, with social media being a constant presence from a very young age. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) are not just tools but integral parts of daily life used for communication, entertainment, and sharing one's identity with the world (Tamar & Jayswal, 2024). Beyond being passive consumers, Gen Z actively contributes to the digital ecosystem. They share updates, opinions, photos, and videos,

often offering commentary—positive or critical—on global and local issues. This ongoing participation transforms them into content creators and influencers of public discourse (Muhamoud et al., 2025).

Research examining assertiveness in Gen Z reveals that emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in shaping their behavior. Individuals with strong emotional intelligence tend to be more self-aware, better at understanding others' emotions, and more capable of managing their own feelings. This helps them interact respectfully, express their thoughts and emotions clearly, and maintain healthy social relationships. These emotionally intelligent individuals are also more likely to be empathetic, motivated, and open in communication. On the other hand, those with lower emotional intelligence often struggle to recognize and manage emotions, resulting in poor self-regulation, reduced empathy, and difficulty in expressing themselves constructively. This can lead to social challenges, including an inability to respect differing opinions or communicate effectively (Rizqillah et al., 2022).

One notable characteristic of Generation Z is their comfort with expressing emotions online. Compared to earlier generations, they are more inclined to share their emotional states digitally, often turning to platforms that offer visual ways to capture and communicate everyday experiences. This preference for visual storytelling reflects their desire for both authenticity and connection in the digital space (Tolstikova, 2023).

Further studies show that many Gen Z students possess a relatively high ability to regulate and express their emotions in productive ways that can support their academic performance (Ariffin et al., 2024). These individuals demonstrate a mature understanding of their emotional states and often redirect their feelings toward achieving personal and academic goals. This emotional awareness suggests a strong

foundation for resilience and adaptability. However, despite their strengths in emotional expression and responsibility, there are still challenges. Many struggle with consistent emotional regulation and may not fully engage with their emotions during intense experiences. This makes them more vulnerable to emotional stress, highlighting a gap between emotional maturity and emotional mastery (Ariffin et al., 2024).

Social media provides Gen Z students with a platform for emotional expression, allowing them to share their feelings, experiences, and struggles. However, the need for validation can affect its use and affect the emotional well- being of Gen Z students who could use social media as an outlet for emotional expression. It contributes towards understanding whether online networking helps them process emotions or if it leads to emotional distress or management.

Social identity is usually analyzed in the context of social belonging (Journal et al.,2023). A characteristic feature of social belonging is the building of social connectedness. The media and communication media are increasingly being seen as part of these factors. The increasing reliance on digital platforms and prolonged internet use has led to the emergence of a virtual reality where identity is often shaped by how others respond to online content. For Generation Z, who have matured alongside platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter), identity development is frequently influenced by online feedback and validation. Because many of their social connections are cultivated in these digital spaces, their ability to interact socially is closely tied to their engagement with social media.

Chatzoglou et al. (2020) observed that members of Gen Z are drawn to social networking platforms because they seek a sense of belonging in virtual spaces, mirroring their offline social identity. A key motivation for their online activity is the

opportunity to interact and engage within these communities. Social media allows them not only to connect with others but also to actively shape and express their social identity through interactions and shared content.

Tolstikova (2023) argues that self-expression forms the core of socialization for Gen Z. Social media and particularly visually oriented platforms like Instagram play a central role in how this generation communicates and constructs its identity. He refers to this as "socialization at arm's length," where meaningful interpersonal interactions such as empathy, collaboration, and career development occur only beyond their immediate, protected digital boundaries. He further suggests that the internet holds a deeper influence over social development than often acknowledged. It shapes not just how Gen Z communicates but also their values, work habits, and learning styles.

Furthermore, the internet makes people more intelligent and lonelier at the same time. In relation to this study, this literature affirms that Social media plays a crucial role in managing and maintaining relationships, particularly in the context of long-distance interactions whereby Gen Z link with people from all over the world. Again, the nature of social media and all its happenings, online interactions can sometimes lead to misunderstandings and miscommunication therefore affecting the way Gen Z manage their relationships both online and offline. This could imply that the online interactions can contribute to or detract Gen Z students from their social and emotional Well-Being.

Cultural factors significantly shape how individuals use social media for relationship management. Kim and Lee (2022) conducted a cross-cultural study comparing social media behaviors in South Korea and the United States, focusing on platforms like KakaoTalk and Facebook. Their survey of 500 participants revealed that collectivist cultures like in South Korea prioritize group-oriented interactions, such as maintaining

family ties, while individualistic cultures like in the U.S. emphasize self-presentation and networking for personal gain. This suggests that relationship management strategies on social media must account for cultural norms to be effective (Kim & Lee, 2022).

The use of social media for relationship management raises privacy and ethical challenges. Bazarova and Masur (2023) explored how users navigate privacy boundaries on platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp. Their mixed-methods study, involving interviews and surveys with 300 participants, found that users often struggle to balance openness with protecting personal information, impacting trust in relationships. The study calls for platform designs that enhance user control over data sharing to support ethical relationship management (Bazarova & Masur, 2023).

Emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, are poised to further transform online social networking. A 2024 study by Chen et al. proposed a framework for AI-driven relationship management, where algorithms analyze user interactions to suggest personalized connection strategies. Their simulation-based study showed a 15% increase in engagement on platforms using AI recommendations, but ethical concerns about data usage remain underexplored (Chen et al., 2024). Future research should investigate how these technologies affect authenticity in relationships and address privacy concerns.

Online social networking has revolutionized relationship management across personal, professional, and commercial contexts. While platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn strengthen connections, challenges like privacy, cultural differences, and mental health impacts require further study. Longitudinal research and cross-cultural comparisons

could provide deeper insights into sustainable relationship management practices in the digital age.

2.6 Strategies that can Promote Healthy Use of Social Media by Gen Z Students

Review of existing literature highlights the growing necessity to mitigate the wide-ranging effects of social media on Generation Z through the implementation of well-structured digital Well-Being programs within schools and communities (Tomar & Jayswal, 2024). These scholars propose that such programs should incorporate elements like media literacy, digital citizenship training, and mental health awareness initiatives. By embedding these components into both academic and extracurricular frameworks, young people can be better equipped with the critical thinking skills and emotional resilience required to engage with social media in a more informed and responsible manner. Moreover, cultivating safe and supportive digital communities is seen as a key factor in enhancing the emotional and psychological Well-Being of this generation.

Tomar and Jayswal further identify practical coping mechanisms that are particularly relevant for Generation Z. These include periodic digital detoxes, mindfulness practices, and encouraging the maintenance of offline social relationships. Their research also presents important policy and practice implications, advocating for the establishment of comprehensive digital literacy programs, accessible mental health support systems, and regulatory frameworks aimed at reducing the negative consequences of social media exposure. According to them, incorporating these strategies can lead to the development of a healthier digital landscape that fosters Gen Z's long-term resilience and Well-Being.

In a similar vein, Muhamoud et al. (2025) stress the importance of reinforcing offline social support systems. They argue that encouraging Generation Z to actively engage

in face-to-face interactions and participate in nurturing real-world communities can strengthen their emotional health and reduce overdependence on online interactions. Camyra and Pradia (2024) also emphasize the need to redirect Gen Z's attention away from excessive social media use and toward academic pursuits. They advocate for educating students on effective time management strategies to help them avoid addiction and strike a healthier balance between entertainment and academic responsibilities.

Generation Z students, having grown up in a digital-first world, are often deeply immersed in social media. This constant connection to online spaces can affect their emotional Well-Being, concentration, and time management. As a result, scholars and mental health professionals have increasingly emphasized the need for intentional strategies to foster healthier social media engagement. One effective method involves embedding emotional self-regulation tools within social platforms. These tools help students recognize their emotional responses and manage them constructively while online. For instance, some digital features prompt users to pause and reconsider before reacting to emotionally charged content, a practice that encourages reflection rather than impulsivity (Verma et al., 2023). Such techniques reduce emotional overload and promote a calmer, more controlled online experience (Arora et al., 2024).

Designing platforms in ways that reduce negative self-comparison has also emerged as a critical strategy. Many Gen Z users experience anxiety and diminished self-worth when exposed to idealized or filtered portrayals of others' lives. To address this, some technology designers have proposed interface adjustments that allow users to filter or balance the type of content they engage with. Kang (2025) recommends offering viewing options that prioritize authenticity over perfection to reduce the pressure to conform to unrealistic standards. Alongside this, the promotion of mobile mental

wellness applications such as those offering mindfulness guidance, journaling tools, and breathing exercises has gained traction. These tools provide convenient and private means for students to manage stress and disconnect from the pressures of digital life (Wang et al., 2025; Lee & Chang, 2025).

Beyond individual tools, broader support systems are essential. Colleges and universities have begun adopting structured digital wellness programs, including scheduled breaks from devices, designated offline areas on campus, and workshops on media literacy. These measures encourage students to evaluate their digital behaviors and take control over their online presence. Peer-led awareness campaigns have also been effective, as students are often more responsive to relatable examples and shared experiences (Okello et al., 2024). These campaigns aim to promote online balance, address toxic digital environments, and highlight the importance of unplugging. When applied consistently, these strategies not only mitigate the risks associated with digital overuse but also contribute to more mindful, emotionally balanced, and socially responsible online behaviors among Generation Z students (Livingstone & Byrne, 2021).

Adding to this discourse, Mishra et al. (2024) explored the factors influencing sustainable social media consumption among Generation Z, specifically within the context of YouTube streaming. Their findings suggest that social media platforms should implement features such as screen time notifications and algorithm enhancements that promote a more balanced and inclusive content experience. These measures are recommended to ensure that digital streaming remains a socially constructive and beneficial tool for personal and educational development. They further posit that this would serve as a strategy that would enhance positive and responsible use of social media by Gen Z students considering that they spend so much time online.

Additionally, a study on Generation Z lived experiences on social media "Beyond the Screen. Suggested that the students should be enlightened to pay minimal attention to social media and focus more on their academic activities. (Camayra & Pradia, 2024). Further still, it goes on to recommend that the students should be familiarized with how to manage their time on social media to avoid addiction and to make them focus more on academics instead of entertainment rounding and engaging in hobbies: The emphasis is on finding activities that bring fulfilment and contribute to emotional Well-Being while exercising self-control. They advocate for finding constructive ways to keep busy and engaged and maintaining control over the time spent on social media.

According to Camayra & Pradia (2024), students should be encouraged to limit their use of social media and understand the difference between their online personas and real life responsibilities. Further, they need to recognize that the virtual world will not guarantee a prosperous future, while academic success can. This awareness can promote a more accountable and focused approach to their studies. To avoid distractions, students should strive to balance social media use with their academic responsibilities. They should aim to utilize social media primarily for learning purposes, such as gathering and sharing information, collaborating on projects, and seeking clarification from peers and teachers. They conclude that by reducing social media use for entertainment or idle purposes, students can ensure their academic focus remains sharp.

A recent study titled *Prevalence and Determinants of Depression among University Students: Case Study, Technical University of Mombasa* highlights the need for a comprehensive, multifaceted strategy to address depression among students (Aggrey et al., 2024). One of the primary recommendations is the establishment of peer counseling programs composed of well-trained students. These peer counselors should be equipped

to recognize early symptoms of depression, engage effectively in communication, and refer at-risk individuals to professional mental health services through collaboration with the university's guidance and counseling department. Such initiatives would not only support early intervention but also foster a culture of openness where students feel safe and encouraged to seek help.

The study also underscores the value of developing an anonymous online support platform. This would allow students to access mental health assistance discreetly, thereby addressing concerns around privacy and stigma. Features such as live chat support, self-assessment tools, and direct links to professional counselors could significantly enhance accessibility and comfort in seeking help.

Additionally, the researchers recommend that universities promote social engagement and stress relief through extracurricular involvement. Encouraging participation in sports, student clubs, recreational outings, and offering leisure spaces like campus parks can reduce social isolation, strengthen interpersonal bonds, and contribute positively to both physical and mental Well-Being.

Integrating mental health education into the academic curriculum is also highlighted as a critical measure. By equipping students with accurate information about depression, healthy coping strategies, and available support resources, institutions can help dismantle stigma and foster mental health literacy. This approach normalizes mental health conversations and empowers students to take proactive steps toward wellness.

Finally, the study advocates for cultivating an inclusive and supportive campus culture. Activities such as mental health awareness campaigns, seminars, and open discussions can engage the broader university community in addressing psychological challenges.

These collective efforts are instrumental in reducing the prevalence of depression and in building a resilient and mentally healthy student population.

Social media, much like a double-edged sword, offers both positive and negative effects on today's youth. While it has the power to inspire and drive young people toward achievement, it can equally lead to harmful outcomes. In this era marked by rapid globalization and technological advancement, social media has become deeply integrated into users' daily lives, offering engaging features that make it difficult to disengage. Despite its numerous advantages, such as providing easier access to information and fostering connection, the misuse or overuse of social platforms can also hinder personal development (Juliyanti, 2023). Research has shown that social networking site (SNS) usage can influence emotional and psychological Well-Being. For young users equipped with digital literacy, these platforms can enhance perceptions of support, affection, and security.

The rise of the digital era has significantly transformed how individuals access information and maintain relationships. In the education sector, the integration of internet technologies offers the opportunity to modernize instructional strategies, ultimately contributing to improved educational outcomes. Social media, in particular, is widely embraced by both students and educators as a tool to enrich the teaching and learning process (S. Ali et al., 2021). For Generation Z learners, who have grown up immersed in digital technology, traditional classroom methods often feel outdated. Instead, they gravitate toward digital learning environments, such as e-learning platforms, which they find more interactive and engaging. Learning for this generation typically emphasizes higher-order cognitive skills through activities like collaboration, critical thinking, discussions, problem-solving, and presentations (Zaim et al., 2020). Moreover, Gen Z students tend to prefer self-directed and flexible learning formats.

Although they are highly proficient in using technology, they frequently face challenges in face-to-face communication and interpersonal interactions. They value consistent feedback but often find it difficult to process and apply it effectively (Henry & Timm-Davis, 2017). This is supported as the Uses and gratifications theory states about gratifications sought as the Gen Z students engage in online networking in order to gratify specific needs.

This notwithstanding, online social networking has its pros and cons. A study on the Impact of Social Networking Sites on Interpersonal Relationship among Teenagers: A Sociological analysis in the District of Bagerhat, Bangladesh revealed that activities on social networks does not affect Face to Face relationships. Respondents said that SNSs are help to communicate with friends and family members more than before hence helps to strengthen relation with friends and family members (Parvez, 2019). Another study also revealed that it is easier to express opinions or any comments through social media (Reyes et al., 2022). Other findings indicate that being technologically dependent creates positive and negative effects on their personalities and aspirations of Gen Z students. It was also concluded that Generation Z's life depends on technology and they have different perceptions of life fulfillment and for education, Gen Z is independent and learner-centered with a short attention span (Lopez & Abadiano, 2023).

Parvez (2019) emphasizes that social media platforms can serve as powerful tools for building social credibility, enabling students to present themselves as knowledgeable individuals in specific fields. This, in turn, enhances their professional profiles and readiness for future careers. He further suggests that as educational institutions increasingly integrate social networks into learning systems, these platforms may soon become essential tools for resolving educational challenges. Social networks provide

valuable resources and tools that make learning more engaging and enjoyable, especially for students in Generation Z.

Similarly, Rajav and Rai (2020) observed that social media contributes not only to emotional and psychological comfort but also strengthens familial and social connections. These platforms support Gen Z users by meeting their emotional needs and fostering a stronger sense of self-worth. They also serve as efficient channels for delivering messages related to health, nutrition, spirituality, and broader societal issues particularly relevant to youth in developing countries. However, their use also introduces behavioral concerns such as oversharing, security and privacy risks, and challenges related to digital ethics.

Agusintadewi et al. (2021) found that many university students prefer using social media for academic purposes, especially when completing assignments that require creativity. These platforms make learning more dynamic and accessible, simplifying knowledge comprehension while saving both time and money. Although some students believe that online learning reduces real-world interaction, the majority still view these tools as exciting and beneficial to their educational experience. Additionally, students reported that digital submission of assignments is cost-effective, eliminates the need for printing, and is more environmentally sustainable.

Further insights from that same study show that Generation Z values social media for its ease of use and integration of technology with education. Students highlighted that such digital tools facilitate assignment completion more efficiently than traditional methods and promote environmental sustainability by reducing paper use.

In a related study, Sloup (2021) explored the mental health implications of social media among Generation Z and found that while digital platforms enable constant connectivity

and foster new opportunities for expression and support, they can also lead to social anxiety due to limited in-person interactions. Social media provides users with avenues to connect with like-minded individuals and express their emotions, serving as a source of emotional support. However, frequent passive browsing, especially on platforms like Instagram and Facebook, can lead to mindless engagement and procrastination.

Keles et al. (2020), in a comprehensive review, identified several factors linking social media use to mental health challenges among adolescents, including excessive screen time, habitual message-checking, emotional investment, and problematic usage patterns. Their findings highlight a significant association between social media engagement and issues such as depression, anxiety, and psychological distress. This is echoed by Pertiwi et al. (2022), who noted that the pressure to maintain a consistent online identity across different social circles can lead to emotional strain and diminished psychological Well-Being. Similarly, Sanci et al. (2022) reported that many university students from Generation Z experience moderate to high stress levels as a result of their social media habits.

In a more positive light, social media also has the potential to encourage healthy behaviors among young people. A study conducted in Jordan (S. Ali et al., 2021) discovered that a large proportion of university students use social media to share information about their dietary practices and health routines. Platforms like Snapchat and Facebook were commonly used to promote wellness, with students who posted about their physical activities being more likely to engage in regular exercise. These students also reported higher self-perceived activity levels and better overall health, contributing positively to their social and physical Well-Being.

Beyari (2023) also underscores the central role of social media in modern life, noting that platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become deeply ingrained in daily routines. His research on the mental health effects of social media among youth revealed that while features like likes, comments, and followers were highly valued, privacy considerations were often overlooked. The study concluded that the psychological impact of social media largely depends on how individuals interact with these features highlighting both positive and negative effects.

Additionally, a survey conducted in Singapore explored the connection between Instagram use, social comparison, and self-esteem-related anxiety. It found that frequent use of Instagram correlates with increased levels of social comparison. Many users, especially those with public profiles, engage with others they do not personally know, increasing the likelihood of unfavorable comparisons and the development of anxiety related to self-image. The results also showed that social comparison increase one's social anxiety (Jiang & Ngien, 2020). Further, the mediation effect of self-esteem is significant to note and the findings also indicated that social comparison significantly decreased self-esteem.

According to Kusuma, many college students are addicted with the use of SNSs. They cannot do without participating in the online activities and if they find themselves not able to access the internet, they really get disturbed. They further say that SNSs waste valuable time as well as increasing the status of crime and immoral activities. It has also led to an increase in monthly expenditures. Kusuma (2020) highlights that social media often encourages misleading messages and manipulated images, which can spark conflict among users and contribute to the breakdown of interpersonal and even international relationships. For young users who are often more emotionally vulnerable and less equipped to handle such challenges, these platforms can become avenues for

cyberbullying. The psychological toll of online harassment can be severe, manifesting in anxiety, depression, and, in extreme cases, self-harm or physical health deterioration.

In a more nuanced view, Imjai et al. (2024) argue that increasing reliance on virtual communication could gradually replace in-person interactions, potentially weakening essential social competencies such as verbal articulation, active listening, and empathy. However, they also note that when used appropriately, digital platforms may support the development of emotional intelligence and social skills, depending on the nature and quality of online engagement. Conversely, the ramifications of excessive digital connectivity, such as constant connectivity, distractedness, diminished face to face encounters, could present formidable impediments in the acquisition and application of emotional intelligence skills, and potential empathy deficits, all of which are correlated with excessive digital use among Gen Z students (Imjai et al, 2024).

Padmalosani (2019) conducted a study in Saveetha Engineering College, in India concentrating on the impact of social media on youth where a survey method was used to collect data from respondents belonging to the age group of 20-25. It concluded that technology has succeeded by going inside our body, and human blood and emotions. Further, it also emerged that Social media encourages unethical videos, chatting and images that generate difference of opinion among youth. Hsueh, (2022) asserts that because texting and sending funny videos is less conversationally complex than in-person communication, social media can perpetuate loneliness.

According to Yadav and Rai (2020), Generation Z tends to view their online networks as valuable social capital. However, this deep dependence on digital interaction can have serious psychological and social consequences. The tendency to overshare personal information in the pursuit of online validation and belonging can expose young

people to unwanted risks and complications. Excessive engagement with social media platforms has been found to impact various dimensions of individual Well-Being, including psychosomatic health, emotional stability, physical wellness, and broader societal functioning. The growing reliance on these platforms for entertainment, communication, emotional support, and even decision-making raises critical concerns about the long-term psychological implications of such usage among Generation Z.

Rupa Sanadi and Dhanasekara Pandian (2020) further explain that due to the developmental immaturity of youth, they are particularly susceptible to cyberbullying a digital threat that can severely impact mental and emotional health, sometimes even leading to suicidal ideation. The misuse of the internet and social networking sites can significantly disrupt daily routines and contribute to alarming trends in depression, anxiety, and other stress-related disorders, especially among college students.

Padmalosani (2019) also underscores the dangers associated with the lack of privacy on social media platforms, where personal information can be exploited by third parties. Furthermore, the rise of online interaction has contributed to a decline in face-to-face communication, which undermines authentic social relationships. Social media also serves as a conduit for spreading misinformation, false rumors, and amateur health advice—some of which can have life-threatening consequences. Given the similarity between the demographics of Padmalosani's study and those in the present research, there is a compelling need to explore whether these outcomes are replicated in different contexts.

Additionally, Olipas (2022) notes that while social media has both positive and negative effects on student life, its influence ultimately shapes their holistic development. This includes impacts on cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral domains—areas that

are critical in the academic journey of tertiary-level students. He further states that social media engagement significantly impacts college students since it was found out that social media by Gen Z can substantially impact its use for entertainment and socialization purposes, communication, and academic purposes.

According to Page (2022), cat fishing or fake profiles and identity on social media and befriending strangers on social media makes people focus more on social media than on maintaining real life relationship, due to this most of the time the person spends more time on social media than with the family member or loved one (Page, 2022). He further asserts that another way of causing stress among users is being unrealistic to achieve perfection on the social networking websites which causes the stress hormone to release cortisol which further lead to damage the gut by opening doors to immune inflammatory in the brain and body.

The study further discovered that there is restlessness as a result of excessive use of social media and its obsession causing the risk of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). This is due to urge of opening social media accounts in short intervals leads to the feeling of restlessness among youth as they thought they would miss something important. Also, the study revealed that Online social networking can led to anti-social Behavior and that due to the use and being highly addicted to social media the youth has distanced themselves from real life socializing, thereby behavior turns to be anti - social because they find happiness in likes, comments and followers on their social media profile.

2.7 Gender and Social Networking

Social networking as a global phenomenon has given people the opportunity to communicate and share information freely without limitation on gender. Social media

has become an integral part of students' lives, influencing nearly every aspect of their daily routines. From entertainment and staying in touch with friends and family to accessing current news, enjoying music and movies, and even engaging in academic activities, students consistently turn to social platforms to fulfill various needs (Vrahara & Jamil, 2021).

Attitudes toward gender equality among Generation Z college students have also undergone noticeable transformation over recent decades. Historically, traditional gender norms and stereotypes shaped social thinking, often resulting in systemic inequalities and limited roles for women. However, the growing visibility of feminist movements and an increased societal focus on gender-related issues have played a pivotal role in shaping Gen Z's outlook. Raised in an era that values diversity and inclusion, these students tend to embrace a broader spectrum of gender identities and are generally more supportive of gender equity (Ling & Chan, 2024).

Many studies suggest that students view social media in a largely positive light. Research findings overwhelmingly indicate that learners appreciate the role these platforms play in their lives, whether for communication, learning, or leisure (Ufuophu-Biri, 2020). When it comes to gender-based differences in social media usage, findings vary. Ufuophu-Biri observed that male and female students use social media in nearly equal proportions, with 49% of males and 50.41% of females reporting active use.

Further insight into how gender influences the purpose of social media usage comes from research conducted in urban settings in Greece. The study focused on how men and women use social media during the pre-activity phase specifically for planning events and making travel arrangements. Results showed that both genders rely heavily on social platforms for these purposes, but the content that influences them differs.

Visual content such as photos and videos had a notable impact on planning decisions for both men and women, though women appeared more influenced by such media when finalizing their choices (Karatsoli, 2020). These findings underscore the nuanced ways in which social media affects decision-making processes and highlight how gender can shape the way digital content is consumed and interpreted.

The same study also sought to find out the time of the day that participants frequently used social media and it was found out that majority of users (41% women and 25% men) said they use social media between 17.00 hours. A study conducted in Bangladesh sought to explore how university students use social media with a particular focus on gender differences, the platforms used for academic purposes, and the resulting effects on academic performance. Findings revealed that male students preferred and used Facebook more frequently, while female students showed a stronger preference for YouTube (Profile & Profile, 2021). In a similar investigation carried out in Pakistan, researchers examined gender disparities in social media habits and their impact on students' academic performance. The study noted that digital tools such as blogs and educational websites contributed positively to students' academic progress. While male students were more inclined to use social media for entertainment, female students primarily used it for gathering information and educational purposes (S. Ali et al., 2021).

The same research found that most students, regardless of gender, began using social media between the ages of 14 and 18. However, male students spent more time online than their female counterparts. Though the types of activities engaged in by both genders were largely similar, significant differences emerged in specific usage patterns. For instance, viewing YouTube videos and the underlying motivations for engaging with social media differed by gender. While both male and female students utilized

these platforms for academic-related tasks, a majority expressed concerns that excessive use could hinder their academic performance. Notably, female students were more likely to use social media for entertainment, staying updated on current events, maintaining social connections, and educational purposes. On the other hand, male students were more engaged in watching videos and expressing opinions online (Profile & Profile, 2021).

In another study examining the relationship between social comparison on social networking sites and users' Well-Being, researchers discovered a negative correlation between time spent on platforms like Facebook and Instagram and self-esteem. Women, in particular, reported lower body satisfaction and self-image. However, the same study suggested that in some cases, exposure to content that sparks upward social comparison could trigger "benign envy," which may enhance self-esteem and serve as a motivational driver for goal-setting (Han, 2022).

A technical report on the social media landscape in Kenya revealed that Kenyan men are more active on platforms such as Telegram (66.1%), LinkedIn (62.1%), and Skype (61.6%). Meanwhile, women were found to be more engaged on platforms like Snapchat (61.9%), TikTok (53.6%), and Pinterest (50%) (USIU-Africa Simelab, 2020).

Further research investigating social media addiction among university students in relation to age, gender, duration of usage, and daily screen time identified key gender-based distinctions. Female students predominantly used social media to maintain friendships, listen to music, and share content. Male students, in contrast, were more inclined toward joining interest groups, playing games, and meeting new acquaintances. The study also found that men displayed higher levels of addiction, especially in terms of the "conflict" dimension where excessive use of social media interferes with daily

responsibilities. This manifested in neglect of family, academic obligations, and even basic self-care activities such as eating and personal hygiene (Sciences, 2020).

Male users also reported more frequent negative effects, including strained relationships, back pain, and growing dependency on social media despite the awareness of its detrimental effects. Meanwhile, female users reported using social platforms primarily to communicate with current friends, share multimedia content, update statuses, and browse others' profiles. In contrast, male users were driven by the desire to be noticed, join groups, and explore new social connections (Sciences, 2020).

Psychological impacts of social networking sites were also explored in a study focusing on coping mechanisms among college students. The findings highlighted that male students were more likely to report negative psychological experiences associated with social media use than females (Rupa Sanadi & Dr. R. Dhanasekara Pandian, 2020). Female students, in contrast, used social media more often for emotional bonding, validation of appearance, and social reassurance, while male students were more likely to use these platforms for competitive interactions. Interestingly, both groups reported similar levels of exposure to online bullying, though the types of experiences varied. Female participants recounted higher incidences of harassment, abusive messages, and unauthorized access to their accounts, whereas males mostly reported uncomfortable encounters and inappropriate content shared by strangers.

This study also found that male college students tend to experience moderate levels of anxiety due to social media use, while female students demonstrated slightly lower levels. A recurring theme across the findings was the detrimental effect of excessive social media engagement on communication skills and relationship quality, often leading to anxiety and depressive symptoms.

Mandi, (2024) conducted a study with the aim of finding out the Effects of Gender and Social Network Use on High School Students' Emotional Well-Being during COVID-19. From the study, it was observed that there are strong gender effects on the presence of emotional problems. At the same time, the study revealed that there are significant gender differences in both the characteristics of social network use regardless of gender. The study concluded that students who use SNs more intensively have more emotional problems (Mandi, 2024).

Research showed interesting differences in the behavior on Social Media Platforms between men and women. Men are more inclined to utilize YouTube for seeking news, tutorials, or product reviews, with a significantly higher frequency compared to women. This trend suggests that male users, particularly within the sample studied, tend to view YouTube as an educational resource or an extension of their learning activities. In contrast, female users often turn to platforms like Instagram, Facebook, or Pinterest when looking for similar types of information.

Interestingly, while a vast majority of female respondents around 90% actively engage with YouTube, only a small fraction, about 10%, consider the content trustworthy. This contrast might stem from the differing purposes that men and women have when accessing the platform. Men typically use it for information-gathering and educational purposes, whereas women may be more drawn to entertainment or lifestyle content. Furthermore, Facebook and Instagram appear to hold greater appeal for women in Generation Z than for their male counterparts. Despite this difference in platform preference, both genders seem to hold similar views regarding the reliability of content found on these networks (Kohnová & Papula, 2022).

Gender is a moderating variable in this research and may or may not be a factor in the implications of social networking on the socio-emotional wellbeing of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions. Studies show that Well-Being varies significantly not only with age but also gender (Claudia & Garc, 2021; Riney & Ku, 2021). Gender was predominantly involved in the acquisition of the Well-Being outcomes, highly predicting problem-focused coping strategies. Studies conducted show that gender differences differ in purposes of social media use as both gender use social media depending on what they like. Even the time they spend on social media differs (Riney & Ku, 2021).

According to a study conducted by Ufuophu-Biri (2020) on gender and social media usage among students in tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria, the overwhelming majority of respondents (96.2%) expressed a positive perception of social media. Only a small portion, 3.2%, indicated a neutral stance, while 6% held a negative view. These findings suggest that social media is generally perceived favorably by most students within the study population.

The literature on Gender and online networking shows that gender differences in social media use are evident, with women generally using social media for social connections and emotional expression, while men may use it for entertainment or information gathering. These patterns may influence socio-emotional experiences differently in areas like emotional expression and relationships especially among peers.

2.8 Research Gap

Although existing literature provides useful insights into how students in tertiary institutions use social networking platforms, much of the available research has concentrated on general patterns of use, the popularity of different platforms, and the

advantages or disadvantages associated with online engagement. Most studies are anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory and largely explain *why* Gen Z students engage in social networking rather than *how* such engagement influences their socio-emotional well-being. The reviewed literature does not clearly articulate the specific social and emotional outcomes associated with online networking, and the variables linked to socio-emotional well-being are not comprehensively examined. There is gap in theory

Additionally, most of the existing studies largely focus on adolescents in western contexts mostly focusing on clinical indicators such as depression, anxiety, or internet addiction. This clearly shows the gap in study population as well as construct whereby the broader construct of socio-emotional wellbeing, which includes emotional regulation, social connectedness, self-esteem, and interpersonal relationships is not emphasized. Further still, within Kenya, available studies mainly investigated secondary school learners or university students in major urban centers such as Nairobi focusing on education, offering limited insights on socio-emotional wellbeing experiences of Generation Z students in tertiary institutions in rural counties.

The literature is dominated by mainly quantitative designs lacking context-specific, mixed-methods evidence on how online networking shapes the socio-emotional wellbeing of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County. This study utilized the mixed methods approach in order to get a clear understanding of the lived online socio-emotional experiences of Gen Z.

Furthermore, most of the studies reviewed rely on broad global statistics or generalized findings that do not adequately reflect the lived experiences of Gen Z students in specific local contexts. There is a noticeable scarcity of empirical research conducted

in Kisii County, despite the growing uptake of social media among young people in this region. The available studies also tend to overlook the role of gender differences, even though existing evidence shows that male and female students engage with social networks differently, which may shape their socio-emotional outcomes in distinct ways.

In addition, the reviewed literature does not sufficiently differentiate the influence of various types of social networking platforms such as professional, casual, or entertainment-driven sites on students' social interactions and emotional health. This leaves a gap in understanding how particular platform characteristics affect well-being. Although some studies mention strategies for responsible social media use, they do not directly link these strategies to measurable socio-emotional outcomes among tertiary-level learners.

These limitations reveal a clear gap in knowledge regarding the specific implications of social networking on the socio-emotional well-being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions, particularly within the context of Kisii County. This study therefore fills this gap by examining the social and emotional effects of online networking, considering the motivations for online networking and exploring how active engagement with online networking sites contributes to students' socio-emotional experiences.

2.9 Chapter Summary

The review of the literature on studies related to the implications of social networking on socio-emotional Well-Being of students in tertiary institutions showed that students in tertiary institutions indeed engage in social networking activities for various reasons. According to the uses and gratifications theory, literature shows that the use of networking is done according to the needs and gratifications that one needs to satisfy.

The literature reviewed focused on the motivations for online networking and looked at characteristics of Gen Z college students while online, types of social networking sites mostly used by the students, the influence social networking has on not only interpersonal relationships but also the content accessed and how it associates with their emotional well-being.

The review also looked at advantages and disadvantages of social networking among Gen Z students. From the studies reviewed, it is not out rightly clear about the implications of social networking on the socio-emotional Well-Being of students. The variables are not clearly discussed. The literature is limited on similar studies in Kisii County.

Reports from Statista (2023) indicate that globally, there are over 5.52 billion unique mobile users in the world today making 67% of active mobile users. There are 4.3 billion (57%) active internet users with 3.48 billion (45%) users of online social networks with 96 billion (54%) people using social media on mobile phones. This means that more than half of the world's population uses social media, with more young people involved. Growth trends indicate that an average of more than one million people start using social media every single day (Report, 2023) This shows that social media is popular and attracts more people among them the Generation Z students in tertiary institutions.

In the study by Chonge (2020), it was found out that some social network sites are used more by female students compared to the male students hence bringing in the issue of gender as a moderating variable in this study. This research study therefore considered gender and sought to find out the difference in gender on social networking and the

socio-emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya.

The above reviewed literature indicates that Social networking sites (SNS) differ in purpose and user experience as some are geared toward professional networking like LinkedIn, others toward casual socializing like Facebook while others toward entertainment and income generation like Tik Tok. These are the networks Gen Zs engage with therefore the need for study's exploration on how the different types of SNS influence Gen Z students' social interactions and emotional health. It contributes to the understanding of the contributions and impacts of these platforms for instance, professional platforms may boost self-esteem and career confidence, while casual platforms may foster deeper emotional connections or contribute to anxiety hence affecting the socio-emotional wellbeing of Gen Z students in and out of tertiary institutions.

Nonetheless, the studies reviewed have provided valuable insight on how social networking of students in tertiary institutions can influence their socio-emotional Well-Being. It also highlighted some of the strategies that would facilitate responsible media by Gen Z students such as guiding them, and encouraging them to engage in other activities as well as continuous sensitization about the advantages and disadvantages of non-regulated social media engagement. Most of the scholars focused on other aspects but none directly focused on the implications of social networking on the socio-emotional Well-Being of college students. In this regard, this study deliberately and specifically attempted to investigate how socio-emotional wellbeing of students in tertiary institutions is affected as a result of online social networking.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter gives a comprehensive overview of procedures that were used in conducting research on social networking and its implications on Social- Emotional Well-Being of Generation Z students in Kisii County, Kenya. This is in order to give answers to the research questions. It includes the researchers' research paradigm, methodology, design, research area, target population, sample and sampling procedures, data collection instruments, validity and reliability of research instruments, piloting, data collection procedures, data analysis and ethical considerations

3.2 Research Paradigm

This research study is based on pragmatic paradigm. Creswell (2018) explains that pragmatism does not adhere strictly to a single philosophical system or view of reality. This perspective aligns with mixed methods research, which enables researchers to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative approaches in their studies. He further notes that pragmatists reject the idea of a singular, unified reality. Similarly, mixed methods research embraces a variety of strategies for gathering and analyzing both numerical and narrative data, aiming to offer the most comprehensive understanding of a research issue (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Since pragmatism in its flexibility, opens the door to multiple methods, thereby integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods. This was beneficial for studying the implications of online social networking on the socio-emotional wellbeing of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions. Further, due to its methodological flexibility pragmatism allows researchers to use a variety of methods either qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods.

The choice of the pragmatic paradigm is informed by the complex nature of the study, which seeks to understand both the measurable patterns of social networking and the personal socio-emotional experiences of Gen Z students. Because a single methodological approach cannot adequately capture these dimensions, pragmatism offers the most suitable foundation by allowing the researcher to draw on both quantitative and qualitative methods that best address the research questions. This paradigm values practical, problem-focused inquiry, which aligns with the study's aim of generating evidence that not only describes the effects of social networking but also supports the development of meaningful strategies for promoting healthy digital engagement within tertiary institutions. It was best suited for this study since allowed for not only qualitative and quantitative data collection methods but also analysis.

3.3 Research Design

In order to achieve the research objectives and gain deeper understanding of the implications of online networking on the socio-emotional wellbeing of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, the study utilized convergent parallel mixed methods design. This design involved combining or integrating qualitative and quantitative research as well as data in a study in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. This is a one phase design where both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed and then compared to see if data confirms or disconfirms each other. The fundamental premise of this research approach is that integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods offers a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem than using either method independently. In this design, researchers usually gather qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously and then combine the findings during the interpretation phase of the study (Creswell, 2018).

The research utilized the mixed methods design whereby quantitative data was collected through structured questionnaires to measure frequencies and means. The qualitative data was collected through focus group discussions and interviews. It was therefore descriptive.

3.4 Research Area

Kisii County is among the 47 counties in the Republic of Kenya, situated in the southwestern region of the country. It is mainly inhabited by the Gusii community. The county borders Nyamira County to the northeast, Narok County to the south, and Homabay and Migori Counties to the west. Geographically, it is positioned at approximately latitude 0º 40’ 38.4” South and longitude 34º 34’ 46.61” East, covering an area of 1,317.5 square kilometers. It is among the Counties that straddle Lake Victoria and are part of the Lake Region Economic Block (LREB). The County is characterized by a hilly topography with several ridges and valleys. The climatic condition in the region is highly equatorial. Appendix K and L illustrates the location of Kisii County on the Kenyan map.

There are several tertiary institutions in Kisii County distributed across some Sub - Counties in Kisii. Some are within Kisii Municipality and others in the rural making the study location suitable since it involved participants from rural and urban settings.

Kisii County was selected for this study because it provides a contextually unique and academically under-explored environment for examining Gen Z students’ social networking behaviours. Guided by Social Networks Theory, the county’s strong community ties and distinctive peer-group structures offer an ideal setting for understanding how local network patterns shape socio-emotional outcomes. Similarly, Uses and Gratifications Theory supports this focus, as Gen Z students in Kisii exhibit

varied motivations for engaging with social media influenced by regional digital access, and institutional environments.

The research area was also preferred because most studies in Kenya focus on national samples in larger counties and more urbanized settings whereby Kisii County is under represented in the literature. The research contributes to filling this contextual gap and improves the generalizability of findings.

Kisii County was preferred for this study because despite the number of tertiary institutions that attract students from all over the Country and without, the County just like many other regions, both nationally and globally experiences an increase in internet access and smartphone use. At the same time, there is limited research on the implications of online networking on socio-emotional Well-Being of Gen Z in semi urban areas like Kisii so this research helped fill the gap.

The choice of Kisii County was therefore deliberate, as it presents a context where the phenomenon is widespread yet understudied, allowing the study to generate locally relevant insights that can inform institutional policies and student support interventions. Additionally, the diversity of the student population with students from various cultural and socio economic backgrounds offered unique insights into how online networking affects Gen Z students in a region that combines both rural and semi urban characteristics making the study representative of the two scenarios. Conducting the study in Kisii County therefore addresses a geographic gap in existing literature, captures regional variations in online behaviour, and generates locally grounded evidence that can inform both institutional and county-level student-support programs and policies.

3.5 Target Population

Since the study is about the implications of social networking on the Socio- Emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students, the population for the study comprised of first and second year students taking various courses from selected tertiary institutions in Kisii County. This was also based on the assumption that they interact with the social media. In Kenya, there are 2536 tertiary institutions (Education sector report) with Kisii County contributing to 177 tertiary institution (CIDP, 2023-2027).

The accessible population included all the students in the tertiary institutions since they are all active users of social networking but the study focused on the target population who are the Gen Zs and specifically the Gen Z cohort of the age bracket of 18-25 years old, taking various courses in tertiary institutions. The total population was 77,604 students in the tertiary institutions in Kisii County as per the offices of the registrars. Deans of students or heads of departments from the participating tertiary institutions were also included in the study as shown in table 1 below.

The purpose for selecting this particular cohort was because they fall within the age bracket of the Gen Z generation and are prone or more likely to spend most of their time using online social networks. According to the UN habitat (2017), youth under 30 years of age represent more than 77% of the Kenyan population and at the same time, college students have great interest and are very active with social media.

3.6 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

The study engaged students in the age range 18-25 who were selected from the first and second year students in all the institutions that were purposively selected to participate in the research.

Table 3.1: Sample Size

Institution	Total population	1st year males	1st year females	2nd year males	2nd year females	Total	Sample size
TI1	22319	3171	2795	3567	2779	12,444	134
TI2	16609	2756	3011	1447	2653	9973	107
TI3	11490	1123	1814	1406	1211	5614	61
TI4	9867	1415	1094	1122	898	4578	49
TI5	9012	930	1203	889	1144	4211	45
TOTAL	69297	9395	9917	8431	8685	36820	396

Source: Office of the Registrar of the institutions, 2023

3.6.1 Sample Size

The total population that was accessible for the study is 36820 (first and second year students) taking various courses in the tertiary institutions in Kisii County. The research focused on the Gen Z cohort basically in the first and second years of study. In order to arrive at the number of Gen Z students for the study; the formula for calculating sample sizes provided by Yamane (1967) was used.

The sample size of students was arrived by using (Yamane, 1967) formula

$$n=\frac{N}{1+N\,(e)^2}$$

Where n= sample size

N= total population e= margin error (0.05)

$$n=\frac{36820}{1+36820(0.05)^2}$$

$$n=\frac{36820}{93.05} \quad =395.70$$

n =396

Therefore, the sample size for the study comprised of 396 Gen Z students who were used as a study proportion to aid in obtaining the data. For the qualitative data, the researcher conducted three focus group discussions with a sample of 36 participants

drawn from the sample. The study selected focus group participants based on their direct experience with the topic, ensuring they shared similar backgrounds to encourage open and honest discussions. Care was taken to choose individuals who could clearly express their thoughts, were available for the session, and were comfortable sharing their views without overpowering others. In getting the sample, the researcher considered the year of study of the participants, stratified them by gender and ensured random selection of respondents within the strata. Each group represented a type of institution they were studying. There were also key informant interview schedule with 5 deans of students from the purposively selected tertiary institutions to participate in the study.

3.6.2 Sampling Procedures

The research adopted both stratified multi-stage and purposive sampling designs. First, the Gen Z students were stratified into various tertiary institutions, to create a sampling frame showing how many first and second years are enrolled in each institution. The population was taken from the institutions first by having students per their year of study, and in each year, according to gender. Here, multiple characteristics were employed at once. That is year of study, and gender which was in terms of male and female. They were further stratified as per their departments or schools. Since all students were eligible, systematic random sampling was useto select Gen Z students who participated in the study. For the Deans of students and or heads of departments, purposive sampling was employed. They were sampled purposively because they had specific characteristics or knowledge relevant to the study's objectives. Also, this was because in most cases, there was one head of the participating institution or their assignee.

3.7 Data Collection Instruments

The researcher utilized questionnaires for quantitative data collection and interview guide for focus group discussion for qualitative data collection. The reason for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data was to fuse the results from the two forms of data collection. By so doing, facilitated in bringing greater insight into the problem than would be obtained by either type of data separately (Cresswell, n.d. 2018)

For the quantitative data collection, a questionnaire was the key data collection instrument. The questions were carefully formulated to ensure consistency across all respondents. It comprised of closed ended questions with responses that the respondent selected what they felt applied to them. The questionnaire adopted the Likert scale because they are a practical and accessible method of collecting data.

Unlike open-ended questions, Likert scales are closed-ended and don't ask respondents to generate ideas or justify their opinions. This makes them quick for respondents to fill out and ensures they can easily yield data from large samples within a short time. It also comprised of close-ended items, rated responses as well as rank orderings. Since Likert scales assign numerical values to each response option for example 1 for Strongly Disagree, 2 for Disagree, they make the data easily quantifiable. This allows researchers to perform statistical analysis, such as calculating means, standard deviations, or conducting correlation studies and so was very ideal for the study

The quantitative data collection tool addressed online characteristics of Gen Z students, the type of content that is accessed through social networking and examined the implications of social networking on the socio-emotional Well-Being of the Gen Z college students. Triangulation of data collection methods was employed by use of focus group discussions and interviews. The Qualitative data tool comprised of Semi-

open ended items (Appendix D). There was also a guide for focus group discussions (Appendix E) and an interview schedule for the deans of students and or heads of departments (Appendix F).

3.7.1 Questionnaire for Students

The questionnaire comprised of seven sections with scales measuring different variables as per the research objectives (see appendix D). The first section (A) had 5 items and was about demographics and it included items that were classified as moderating variables, the items include; age, year of study, school and programme enrolled in. The respondent was required to tick the information that was applicable to him or her. The second section (B) was on the student's participation in social networking and had three items. Section C of the questionnaire had 5 items and was on online characteristics of students. The responses include Yes, Always, Often, Rarely and Never. Respondents were asked to put a tick on the response that best applied to them.

Section D of the questionnaire sought to establish the motivations for social networking and had 7 items and respondents were also asked to put a tick on what was applicable by choosing whether they agree, disagree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. Section E sought to find out about content accessed by the students on social media. It also had 6 items and respondents were required to put rank in order of priority on the content accessed.

Section F had six items and was measuring the implications of social networking on the emotional wellbeing of Gen Z students and was also to be ranked. Also there was section G that had five items and was about social networking and interpersonal relationships. The last section was H and had 5 items measuring Gender and its role in

social networking. It also had 5 items. Section I had 7 items on strategies that can promote healthy use of social media

3.7.2 Interview Schedule for Deans of Students

In qualitative interviews, the researcher gathers information through face-to-face conversations, telephone calls, or focus group discussions typically involving six to twelve participants per group. These interviews use a small number of unstructured, open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to share their perspectives and opinions (Creswell, n.d., 2018). The interviews delved into the personal experiences and perceptions of the Gen Z students on online networking and their socio-emotional wellbeing. It also allowed the researcher to ensure that same important and necessary information was elicited from each participant, while also providing for the flexibility to probe more deeply into the rich descriptions of experiences that participants shared.

3.7.3 Focus Group Discussions for Students

The flexibility of this convergent parallel mixed methods design allows for the discovery or elaboration of information that is important to participants thus eliciting more information. The qualitative tools addressed how online social networking affects the inter-personal relationships, motivations for online social networking, social media sites preferred by the students, the content accessed and the socio-emotional Well-Being of the Gen Z students in the tertiary institutions.

3.8 Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments

Although validity and reliability are interconnected concepts, they refer to distinct characteristics of a measurement tool (Sürücü, 2020). According to the author, a tool can be reliable without being valid; however, if it is valid, it is also likely to be reliable. Nonetheless, reliability on its own does not guarantee validity. A test may consistently

produce the same results, yet still fail to accurately measure the intended trait or behavior. Therefore, it is essential for researchers to assess both the validity and reliability of any measurement instrument to ensure it meets both criteria.

3.8.1 Validity

Validity assesses whether the measurement methods are accurate and truly capture what they are meant to measure. The researcher evaluated content, construct, criterion, and face validity by confirming that the questionnaire effectively measured the intended variables, accurately represented the relevant content, was suitable for the target sample, and was thorough enough to gather all the necessary data to fulfill the study's objectives. This was accomplished through the support of research professionals and supervisors who went through the items and provided feedback for the required corrective action.

3.8.2 Content Validity

This involves assessing whether the items in the measurement tool accurately represent the concept being studied. In this case, the researcher examined whether the questionnaire adequately captured the full scope of online networking and its impact on the socio-emotional Well-Being of Generation Z students. According to Sürücü (2020), content validity refers to the extent to which each item in the instrument effectively serves its intended purpose. To ensure this, the researcher sought input from subject matter experts to review each item in the questionnaire, verifying that all relevant aspects of online networking and socio-emotional Well-Being were thoroughly addressed and no important elements were overlooked.

3.8.3 Construct Validity

Construct validity refers to the extent to which a measurement tool accurately captures the concept, behavior, idea, or theoretical construct it is intended to assess. In simpler terms, it reflects the instrument's ability to differentiate between individuals who possess the targeted trait or behavior and those who do not (Sürücü, 2020). To make sure the research truly captured the idea it set out to measure, the study began by clearly defining the concept using well-known theories. The survey questions were carefully chosen because they had already been proven to work well in similar studies. Pilot testing was done before the main data collection that identified and corrected issues with the constructs being measured. On the other hand, the interview questions were crafted to dig deeper into the same ideas, giving more context to the numbers. Both types of data were collected from similar groups of people to keep the comparison fair. Once the information was analyzed, the two sets of results were compared side by side. When both pointed in the same direction, it gave confidence that the study was measuring what it was meant to.

3.8.4 Face Validity

Face validity is a subjective judgment made by the researcher, relying on their perception, intuition, and personal evaluation of how effectively the measurement tool appears to measure what it is intended to assess (Sürücü, 2020). To ensure face validity, the researcher made sure that the items were appropriate for the intended purpose, that the language was clearly understood by the participants, that they were attractive and readable and were at the level of the study participants.

3.9 Reliability of Instruments

Reliability refers to the stability of the measuring instrument used and its consistency over time. In other words, Reliability is the ability to measure instruments to give

similar results when applied at different times. It involves internal consistency across all the constructs, or reproducibility, of test scores that is the degree to which one can expect stability of the scores over time when the instrument is administered a second time (Sürücü, 2020). Further still there are techniques that can be used and Cronbach's alpha is one of the techniques that can be used to test the Validity and Reliability of the scales used in quantitative research. In this research therefore, it was applied to measure internal consistency.

Reliability refers to the statistical consistency of a tool in measuring a specific construct (Heale & Twycross, 2015). In this study, the reliability of the questionnaires was evaluated through a pilot test, which also helped the researcher determine the clarity of the questionnaire items. According to Ratumanan and Laurens (2011), reliability can be categorized using an Acceptable Reliability Table, with values ranging from below 0.59 (considered unacceptable) to above 0.9 (rated as excellent), as outlined in Table 3.2. The alpha coefficient, which ranges from 0 to 1, indicates the internal consistency of the instrument, with higher values reflecting greater consistency among the items in measuring the intended concept.

Table 3.2 : Reliability Acceptable Table

No.	Coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability Level
1	More than 0.9	Excellent
2	0.8-0.89	Good
3	0.70-0.79	Acceptable
4	0.6-0.69	Questionable
5	0.5-0.59	Poor
6	Less than 0.59	Unacceptable

Source: Ratumanan & Laurens, (2011)

The researcher administered the instrument during a pilot study and collected data from 30 participants that were not included in the study sample. The participants for the pilot

study were selected from two tertiary institutions from the neighboring Nyamira County. Following data collection, the information was entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26, and reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. This coefficient was calculated for each item to assess the reliability of the research instrument. Additionally, Cronbach's Alpha was computed for each variable to further evaluate the instrument's reliability.

Table 3.3: Reliability Statistics

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Students' Online Characteristics Scale	.723	5
Student's motivation for social networking scale	.840	7
Content Accessed Online	.772	5
Social networking and student's socio-emotional Well-Being scale	.801	5
Social networking and interpersonal relationships	.821	5
Students' Gender	.825	5
Strategies for healthy use of media	.830	7
Overall	**.743**	**39**

From the results it was established that all the variables in the instruments considered (Students' Online Characteristics α=.723); Student's motivation for social networking scale (α=.840); Content Accessed Online (α=.772); Social networking and student's socio-emotional Well-Being scale (α=.801); Social networking and interpersonal relationships (α=.821) Students' Gender (α=.825); healthy use of social media (α=.830) had Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficient of above 0.7.

The overall Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.743, calculated from 39 items, exceeded the threshold of 0.7. A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.7 or higher is considered indicative of satisfactory internal consistency for the instrument. According to Bryman (2012), an alpha coefficient above 0.7 is generally accepted as a reliable measure. Based on the pilot responses, the questionnaire was refined by revising items that needed

improvement to enhance clarity and meaning before the main data collection commenced.

3.9.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the level of confidence in the accuracy of the research findings. It determines whether the results genuinely reflect the participants' original data and provide a faithful interpretation of their true perspectives (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The researcher made sure this was achieved by encouraging honesty from the participants and using appropriate research methods which were focused group discussions, interview schedules and questionnaires.

3.9.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of qualitative research can be applied or generalized to different contexts, settings, or groups of participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The researcher ensured that there was full description of the study to the participants, making sure the study was also put in the context of Gen Z and participants had all the characteristics of Gen Z as well as taking into account those dealing with Gen Z on a day to day basis.

3.9.3 Dependability

This is about the consistency, stability and reliability of findings over time. Dependability involves participants' evaluation of the findings, interpretation and recommendations of the study such that all are supported by the data as received from participants of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The researcher reported the processes within the study by documenting every step of the research process as well as what was planned to be done and how it was executed**.**

3.9.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the results of a research study can be validated or corroborated by other researchers. It focuses on ensuring that the data and interpretations are grounded in the actual evidence collected, rather than being influenced by the researcher's personal biases or assumptions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The researcher reported the study findings accurately and made sure that own biasness was avoided.

3.9.5 Reflexivity of the Researcher

This refers to the process of critically reflecting on oneself as a researcher, including personal biases, preferences, and assumptions, as well as examining the research relationship specifically, how the researcher's connection with participants may influence their responses during the study. (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The researcher ensured this by respecting the participants while fully aware of own preferences and accepting the fact that the participants are free to respond as they understand and feel.

3.9.6 Scoring of the Instruments

The questionnaires designed for data collection were of the Likert scale type. The scale helps quantify subjective data and makes it easy to analyze patterns and trends. They were designed to collect quantitative data on the implications of social networking on the socio-emotional wellbeing of Gen Z students in the tertiary institutions. The likert scale consists of a range of statements and respondents indicated their level of agreement or frequency based on a scale. The respondents choose the statements that best described their experience. The questionnaires were in two sections. Part A contains bio data information and Part B onwards has items based on the objectives of the study. The responses to the questionnaires are varied and not confined to one type.

As illustrated, the likert scale (see appendix D Sections D, F G) has five response categories ranked and abbreviated as follows:

5- Strongly Agree (SA)

4- Agree (A)

3- Moderately Agree (U)

2- Disagree (D)

1-Strongly disagree

Other scales included responses or categories namely; Always, Often, and Never. When this scoring is scored, always has the highest score and never has the least. Others include ranking in order of priority. Discussions and conclusions were done as per the scores in that those who strongly agreed had a high score of 5 while those who strongly disagreed had the lowest score of 1. The maximum score on a response depends on the number of items per scale for instance in section D of the questionnaire there are seven items but the highest score is 5. The scores should be for every section

For the Focus group discussions, recordings were done and field notes were taken in order to capture all the information as it was being discussed. Also, the exact notes were important as they helped in the analysis stage because they captured the precise statements made by the participants and were used as exact quotes to answer the questions of the research. This was then presented according to the themes as per the study objectives. These data was analysed thematically.

3.10 Piloting of Research Instruments

Piloting was done in three tertiary institutions in the neighboring Nyamira County. This was because the Gen Z Students in the neighboring county were not participating in the

study. A population of 30 Gen Z students in tertiary institutions participated in the pilot study. The reasons for pilot testing were as follows;

(i) To determine whether the questions developed were appropriate for addressing the research study's objectives. This allowed for the revision or removal of questions that were not relevant.

(ii) To identify and correct any errors prior to distributing the final questionnaires to the actual respondents.

(iii) To ensure that the questionnaire's structure, layout, and instructions were clear and easy to follow.

(iv) To evaluate the average response rate across different data collection methods.

(v) To confirm the content and construct validity of the instrument's scores and to refine the questions, format, and measurement scales accordingly.

(vi) To verify the reliability of the research instruments

(vii) To improve the study design in preparation for the main study

Analysis was done and the findings helped in adjusting and making better the research instruments to ensure that they measure what they were intended to measure.

3.11 Data Collection Procedures

After obtaining approval of the research proposal by the board of graduate studies and subsequent permission from the National Council for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), the researcher embarked on the process of data collection. First, data collection for piloting was done in order to pretest the research instruments and thereafter actual data collection followed. The researcher with the research assistants (who had been trained) visited the tertiary institutions, explained to the deans

and principals about the intention to collect data as well as the purpose and significance of the study. The researcher presented copies of the permits and provided consent institutional consent which were signed by the authorities. The researcher then sought and obtained the permission of the college administration before proceeding to the respondents.

The researcher then requested to meet with the first and second year Gen Z students and introduced self and the research assistants. The research assistants were taken through their roles in order to maintain the ethical standards as well as data credibility. Data collection was done in two phases with the first one being the pilot whereby the data collection instruments were pretested. Then the second phase was the collection of the actual study data using the instruments.

The researcher explained to the respondents about the study and the reasons why it was important. Then the researcher went ahead and explained about the structure of the questions and allowed the participants to ask questions in case they might have any questions with regards to the study. Data collection tools were then distributed to the respondents and they were given time to respond. For some institutions, the respondents asked that the questionnaires be left with them so that they are collected later. This was because of their busy schedule. This was respected and the research assistants went back the following day to collect the filled questionnaires. After collection the questionnaires were then coded in readiness for analysis and analyzed.

Similarly, for the qualitative data, three focus group discussions were held and interviews with the deans or heads of departments were held. Each focus group for the Gen Z students had 12 members. The researcher requested the deans or heads of institutions or their assignees to help in identification of the participants for the focus

group discussions. The researcher assembled the respondents, together with the research assistants and leading the discussions, the researcher welcomed the participants and thanked them for accepting to take part in the study. After establishing the rapport and creating a free atmosphere, the ground rules were set. The rules included issues like participating in the group was voluntary, and participants had the right to abstain from discussing any issue that they were not comfortable with. Also emphasized was the respect for each other, valuing each participants' contributions, that the participants would do most of the talking. They were also assured of confidentiality.

During the discussions, the researcher and the assistants were keen to listen actively without interrupting in order to allow free flow of information. The consent was sought from the participants of the study so that the research assistants would take notes and also do an audio recording. This was to back up the notes taken so as to ensure nothing was left out. The information was later arranged into themes according to the objectives for analysis. The process was the same for the three groups. As for the key informant interview, the researcher conducted one on one interview with the deans of students, using an already prepared interview schedule (APPENDIX F). The researcher thanked the interviewees, presented the informed consent and stressed the importance of the interview. In the same breadth, notes were taken so as to fully capture the views. All the information gathered from the interviews and focus group discussions was analyzed and is discussed alongside the quantitative data gathered through the questionnaires.

3.12 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative data analysis approaches. The Data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed, interpreted and presented on the basis of objectives of the study. Quantitative data was analyzed descriptively using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26

software and inferential descriptive statistics. Since this study is descriptive in nature, a descriptive statistics method was employed for getting the frequency, mean, and percentage. The influencing factors were measured using descriptive statistics. Qualitative analysis was done on the data obtained from the semi-open ended items, interview schedule and the focus group. The qualitative data was also categorized in themes in accordance with research objectives and discussed along with quantitative presentation. The focus group discussion aided in filling the gaps by providing in-depth information in responding to the objectives, corroborating the numeric data from the quantitative data.

According to Creswell (2018) descriptive design is key on collecting qualitative and quantitative data, this is obtained through using both open ended and closed questionnaires. This study was guided by the same ideal while collecting data. The data was discussed and presented through tabulation, graphs, charts, and diagrams where inferences were made.

Table 3.4: Data Analysis Process

Objective	Data Analysis Process			
	Variables		Quantitative Results	Qualitative Results
To establish the motivation for social networking by Gen Z students	IV	DV		
	Social networking	Motivation for social networking	Means, percentages, Descriptive	Thematic Coding
To determine the influence of online networking on the social Well-Being of Gen Z students	Social networking	Social Well-Being	Frequencies, means and percentages	Thematic Coding
To establish the influence of social networking on the emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students	Social networking	Emotional Well-Being	Frequencies Means	Thematic Coding
To find out the difference in gender on social networking and socio-emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students	Gender – Moderator variable	Socio-emotional Well-Being	Means, Percentages and Frequencies	Thematic Coding
To identify the strategies that can promote healthy use of social media by Gen Z students	Social networking	Socio-emotional Well-Being	Means, Percentages and Frequencies	Thematic Coding

3.13 Ethical Considerations

The researcher sought approval from the University Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC), National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation

(NACOSTI), the County Education Office, The County administration, and also gained local permission from the institutions where the Gen Z students undertake their studies.

In order to conduct research in a morally acceptable way, the participants were provided with an informed consent form (Appendix C) which they read asked questions once satisfied, they signed. The respondents were notified about the study and why it is being conducted. They were assured that the information collected from the study is purely for academic purposes. They were encouraged to fill the questionnaires in private if they so desired. They were also informed that participation was voluntary and they could stop if they felt uncomfortable and that there was no penalty for stoppage. Issues of confidentiality were discussed and the researcher assured the participants that all information would be treated with utmost confidentiality. The researcher sought the consent of the participants and informed them that participation was voluntary and that they were free to stop participating any time they felt like. The researcher respected the privacy and the anonymity of the participants. This was done as the participants were not required to write their names or give their true identity.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Overview

This chapter presents and discusses the research findings based on the objectives of the study. This chapter is divided into seven sections, namely: Response rate, demographic characteristics, the motivation for social networking by Gen Z students, influence of social networking on the social Well-Being of Gen Z students, impact of social networking on the emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students, gender perspectives on social networking and socio-emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students and strategies that can promote healthy use of social media by Gen Z students.

4.2 Response Rate

Data was collected from students drawn from Tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya. A total of 396 questionnaires were issued; out of which 330 were returned and used in the analysis which representing a response rate of 83.33%. Table 4.1 represents the response rate to the questionnaire.

Table 4.1: Response Rate Questionnaire

	Count	**Percentage (%)**
Returned	330	83.33
Non-returned	66	16.67
Total	**396**	**100**

This resulted to 83.33% overall response rate. The response rate for the study was within the recommended levels as argued by Ruth & Peter (2013), who stated that a response rate of 75% is considered excellent and a representative of the population (Ruth & Peter, 2013). The high response rate achieved was attributed to self-administration of the questionnaires applied by the researcher. This was also as a result of prior notification of the intended data collection to the prospective respondents and

the presence of research assistants who helped the researcher. Even though the respondents were left with the questionnaires in order for them to fill, they were allowed to call in case they needed any clarifications or had any questions. This contributed to the achieved response rate.

4.3 Demographic Characteristics

On the demographics, the study sought to determine some characteristics of the respondents who participated in the study which included age, gender and year of study.

4.3.1 Age of students

With regard to age, 132 (40%) participants were aged between 18 and 22 years, majority of 164 (49.7%) respondents were aged between 22 to 25 years while 34 (10.3%) respondents were aged over 26 years as shown in Table 4.2. The findings implies that most Gen Z students that participated in the study were aged 22-25 years.

Table 4.2: Age of the Students

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
18-22 years	132	40.0	40.0
22-25 years	164	49.7	49.7
26 years	34	10.3	10.3
Total	330	100.0	100.0

4.3.2 Gender of the students

The study sought to find out the gender of the students that participated in the study. Table 4.3 summarizes the findings.

Table 4.3: Gender of students

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Male	150	45.5	45.5
Female	180	54.5	54.5
Total	330	100.0	100.0

From the results, majority of 180 (54.5%) students were female and 150 (45.5%) were male as shown in Table 4.3. The results indicated that there were more female Gen Z students studying in Tertiary institutions in Kisii County.

4.3.3 Year of Study

The study sought to find out the respondents' year of study. Table 4.4 summarizes the responses.

Table 4.4: Year of Study

Year of Study	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
First	133	40.3	40.3
Second	197	59.7	59.7
Total	330	100.0	100.0

From the study 133 (40.3%) respondents were in first year and majority of 197 (59.7%) respondents were in the second year of study as shown in Table 4.4. The results indicated that second year students involved in the study had enough experience about the effects of social networking and their socio-emotional Well-Being.

4.4 Motivations driving Gen Z students to engage in Social Networking

The first objective was to analyze motivations driving Gen Z student's engagement in social networking in Tertiary Institutions in Kisii County, Kenya. This comprised of characteristics of social networking by Gen Z students in Tertiary Institutions as discussed below:

Table 4.5: Gen Z Students' motivations for engaging in social networking

Aspect	Yes	No
Cell phone ownership	325 (98.5%)	5 (1.5%)
Participation in online social networking	321 (97.3%)	9 (2.7%)

From the study, majority of 325 (98.5%) Gen Z students in Tertiary Institutions in Kisii County that responded owned a cell phone and only 5 (1.5%) reported to not owning a

phone as shown in Table 4.5. This implies that Gen Z students owning a phone was important to the study in establishing the influence of social media on their socio-emotional Well-Being. On their participation in online social networking, the study found out that majority of 321 (97.3%) respondents said yes while 9 (2.7%) respondents indicated no. This indicated that Gen Z students participate in online social networking. These findings are in agreement with the findings of the study done by Anderson & Jiang, (2018) who found out that 95% of teenagers owned or had access to a smartphone**,** showing that smartphone access among Gen Z is nearly universal and possessing it is a precursor to their engagement in social networking.

4.4.1 Method of Accessing the Internet

The study sought to establish the common method of accessing the internet by Gen Z students. Table 4.6 summarizes the results.

Table 4.6: Method of accessing the internet by Gen Z students

Method	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Cyber	9	2.7	2.7
Personal computer	25	7.6	7.6
Mobile Phone	296	89.7	89.7
Total	330	100.0	100.0

From table 4.6, the study found out that 9 (2.7%) respondents that participated in the study accessed internet through cyber, 25 (7.6%) respondents accessed through personal computer and majority of 296 (89.7%) Gen Z students that participated in the study accessed internet using mobile phone. The findings imply that almost all Gen Z students are accessing the internet using mobile phones, therefore, access to internet for them is easy. These findings corroborate the findings of the study done by Woods et al., (2019) who asserted that young adults often use social platforms to build digital competencies and foster social growth.

4.4.2 Content Accessed Online

The study sought to establish the content accessed through social networking by Gen Z students in Tertiary Institutions in Kisii County, Kenya**.** This was aimed at providing more understanding to the motivations underlying the engagement of Gen Z students in social media**.** Table 4.7 summarizes the findings.

Table 4.7: Content Accessed Online

Content	Most preferred		Preferred		Not sure		Sometimes preferred		Least preferred	
Type of content	**Freq**	**%**	**Freq**	**%**	**Freq**	**%**	**Freq**	**%**	**Freq**	**%**
Music	148	44.8	51	15.5	36	10.9	49	14.8	46	13.9
Educational material	198	60.0	48	14.5	34	10.3	23	7.0	27	8.2
Christian or religious	106	32.1	62	18.8	56	17.0	57	17.3	49	14.8
Movies	81	24.5	45	13.6	79	23.9	37	11.2	88	26.7
Relationships	50	15.2	54	16.4	31	9.4	51	15.5	144	43.6

From table 4.7, a total of 5 statements were used to determine the type of content the students accessed through social networking. On whether they access music online as a content, majority 148 (44.8%) respondents most preferred, 51 (15.5%) respondents preferred, 36 (10.9%) respondents were not sure, 49 (14.8%) respondents sometimes preferred while 46 (13.9%) respondents least preferred. Therefore, majority of the respondents preferred accessing music online. These resonate well with what Samat & Orientation (2018) assert that Gen Zs consume entertaining, authentic, and informative content in social media.

On whether they access educational materials online, majority of 198 (60%) respondents most preferred, 48 (14.5%) respondents preferred, 34 (10.3%) respondents were not sure, 23 (7%) respondents sometimes preferred while 27 (8.2%) respondents least preferred. Therefore, majority of the respondents most preferred accessing online materials online. This was also alluded to during the key informant interviews with the

deans of students who remarked that the Gen Z students use platforms like Whatsapp, telegram and you tube for academic discussions, accessing learning materials and also watching academic videos. From this response, social networking is helpful and the content that the Gen Z students check online varies. However, majority of students preferred accessing educational material. Accessing content related to relationships brings about the aspect of social wellbeing and could impact on the students positively or negatively.

On the access of Christian or religious content online, majority of 106 (32.1%) respondents most preferred, 62 (18.8%) respondents preferred, 56 (17.0%) respondents were not sure, 57 (17.3%) respondents sometimes preferred while 49 (14.8%) respondents least preferred. Therefore, majority of the respondents most preferred accessing Christian or religious content online (Wickramanayake & Jika, 2018).

On the access of movies as content by the Gen Zs, 81 (24,5%) respondents most preferred, 45 (13.6%) respondents preferred, 79 (23.9%) respondents were not sure, 37 (11.2%) respondents sometimes preferred while majority of 88 (26.7%) respondents least preferred. Therefore, majority of the respondents least preferred accessing movies online. On accessing online for relationships as content by the Gen Zs, 50 (15.2%) respondents most preferred, 54 (16.4%) respondents preferred, 31 (9.4%) respondents were not sure, 51 (15.5%) respondents sometimes preferred while majority of 144 (43.6%) respondents least preferred. Therefore, majority of the respondents least preferred building relationships online. Samat & Orientation (2018) asserted that Gen Z is consuming entertaining, authentic, and informative content.

Therefore, this implies that the most common preferred content online Gen Z students was music, educational material and Christian or religious content. On the educational

material, Samat & Orientation (2018) also found that students used social networking to seek for knowledge. To add on the preferences, it turned out that the least preferred content was on movies and relationships.

More findings were generated from focused group discussions. And this is how one member responded;

> *"Social media is very good. All manner of things are found on internet and youth like entertaining content like movies and things that are fun on TikTok. We also check educational content and also musical videos from YouTube".* **FGD 1 group Member**

These findings therefore corroborate with the findings that were done by Tirochi (2024) who asserted that due to the use of various media and different types of content accessed, the students in tertiary institutions consume and interact with content that may not only be useful but also harmful to their socio-emotional wellbeing. They are useful in that they can use them to access educational materials online while on the other hand might be harmful in that spending long hours online may affect their quality of life leading to addiction and development of soft skills. This is as a result of the freedom that comes with the use of social media, they may also be prone to abuse and addiction and this would have an impact on their socio-emotional Well-Being.

4.4.3 Students' Behavior with Social Media

The study sought to establish the online characteristics (behavior) of Gen Z students in Tertiary Institutions in Kisii County with regard to social media. Table 4.8 summarizes the findings.

Table 4.8: Students' Behavior with Social Media

Statement	Always		Often		Rarely		Never	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
I use social media while eating	72	21.8	66	20.0	91	27.6	101	30.6
I use social media for long hours in the evening	175	53.0	86	26.1	43	13.0	26	7.9
I check on social media the last thing before I sleep	211	63.9	53	16.1	35	10.6	31	9.4
I check social media immediately I wake up	154	46.7	65	19.7	65	19.7	46	13.9
I use social media when lectures are going on	80	24.2	36	10.9	95	28.8	119	36.1

A total of 5 statements were used to determine the student's behavior with social media. On whether they use social media while eating, 72 (21.8%) respondents indicated that they always use social media while eating, 66 (20%) respondents indicated that they often use social media while eating while 91 (27.6%) and majority of 101 (30.6%) respondents indicated that they rarely and never use internet while eating respectively. The results agree with the findings of the study done by Zaim et al. (2020) who discovered that young people increasingly prefer using online platforms for communication, especially for chatting and accessing various forms of information.

On whether they use social media for long hours in the evening, majority of 175 (53%) respondents always use, 86 (26.1%) respondents indicated that they often use, 43 (13%) respondents rarely use while 26 (7.9%) respondents never use social media in the evening. When asked whether they check on social media the last thing before they sleep, majority of 211 (63.9%) respondents said they always check, 53 (16.1%) respondents said they often, 35 (10.6%) respondents indicated that they rarely while 31(9.4%) respondents indicated that they never check. These findings corroborate the findings by Zaim et al. (2020).

When asked whether they check social media immediately they wake up, majority of 154 (46.7%) respondents indicated that they always check, 65 (19.7%) respondents indicated that they often, 65 (19.7%) respondents and 46 (13.9%) respondents indicated that they rarely and never check respectively. When asked whether they use social media when lectures are going on, 80 (24.2%) respondents indicated 'always', 36 (10.9%) respondents indicated 'often', 95 (28.8%) respondents indicated 'rarely' while majority of 119 (36.1%) respondents indicated that they never use the social media while the lectures are ongoing. Tirochi (2024) reported that many teenagers check their social media every morning they wake up.

Therefore, from the findings, it implies that the Gen Z student behavior with social media varied with majority using social media for long hours in the evening, checking on social media the last thing before they sleep and immediately, they wake up and this is corroborated by Nesi (2020), and Cheng et al (2024) who also found that the Gen Z students make sure they check on their social media pages before going to bed and immediately after waking up. This also resonates and agrees with the findings of a study conducted in Australia in which According to Sanci et al. (2022), college students indicated spending up to two hours per day on social media. However, international students reported higher usage, with many spending between three and five hours daily, and 13.8% of them using social media for six hours or more each day.

The findings are further supported by findings of a research study by Aliverdi et al., (2022) that also found out that the amount of time spent on the internet and involvement in online emotional relationships greatly affected their quality of life. Again from the findings, students checking their phones before they sleep and doing the same first thing in the morning could lead to anxiety and fear of having missed out or being curious to

find out what is happening. That in turn could lead to too much dependence on social media.

4.4.4 Descriptive Statistics for Gen Z students' motivations for engaging in social networking

Descriptive statistics were applied to provide a clear summary of the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires. Participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale, where: 1 indicated strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree. The mean scores were analyzed on a continuous scale, with values below 1.5 interpreted as strongly disagree, 1.5 to 2.5 as disagree, 2.5 to 3.5 as neutral, 3.5 to 4.5 as agree, and scores above 4.5 representing strongly agree. A total of 7 statements were used to determine the student's motivation for social networking and responses elicited on a 5-point Likert scale as shown in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: Gen Z Student's Motivation for engagement in Social Networking

Statement	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD
I use social media for educational purposes	11 (3.3%)	2 (0.6%)	27 (8.2%)	96 (29.1%)	194 (58.8%)	4.39	0.92
I use social media for entertainment	2 (0.6%)	11 (3.3%)	21 (6.4%)	142 (43.0%)	154 (46.7%)	4.32	0.79
I use social media to communicate with friends	11 (3.3%)	16 (4.8%)	11 (3.3%)	83 (25.2%)	209 (63.3%)	4.4	1.0
I use social media to make money	39 (11.8%)	79 (23.9%)	71 (21.5%)	92 (27.9%)	49 (14.8%)	3.1	1.26
I use social media for online shopping	54 (16.4%)	58 (17.6%)	48 (14.5%)	97 (29.4%)	73 (22.1%)	3.23	1.4
I use social media to catch up with news	19 (5.8%)	28 (8.5%)	26 (7.9%)	91 (27.6%)	166 (50.3%)	4.08	1.2
I use social media to kill boredom	41 (12.4%)	12 (3.6%)	12 (3.6%)	113 (34.2%)	152 (46.1%)	3.98	1.33

From table 4.9, majority194 (58.8%) of respondents strongly agreed when asked whether they use social media for educational purposes. However, 96 (29.1%) respondents agreed, 27 (8.2%) respondents were undecided, 2 (0.6%) respondents

disagreed while 11 (3.3%) respondents strongly disagreed. The mean for this was 4.39 with a standard deviation of 0.92. The findings of this study on motivation for use of social media are similar to the study by Agusintadewi et al.,(2021) whose findings revealed that Gen Z students participated in online networking for educational and learning purposes and to pass time and kill boredom (Sloupe 2021, Shihy & Awad 2022) among other motivations.

On whether they use social media for entertainment, 2 (0.6%) respondents strongly disagreed, 11 (3.3%) respondents disagreed, 21 (6.4%) respondents were undecided, 142 (43.0%) respondents agreed while 154 (46.7%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean for this was 4.32 with a standard deviation of 0.79. This is so because majority of the respondents strongly agreed. These findings agree with the findings of Samat & Orientation (2018) who discovered that Gen Zs consume entertaining, authentic, and informative content on social media.

When asked whether they use social media to communicate with friends, 11 (3.3%) respondents strongly disagreed, 16 (4.8%) respondents disagreed, 11 (3.3%) respondents were undecided, 83 (25.2%) respondents agreed while 209 (63.3%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean and standard deviation for this was 4.4 and 1.0 respectively. This is so because majority of the respondents strongly agreed. This was further corroborated through the Focus group discussions with a member stating;

> *"You cannot avoid participating in online social networking. Through social media, we get in touch with people, friends, relatives and we also get various updates including academic stuff.* **A member of FGD group 1.**

From the sentiments, it is a clear indication that technology and connectivity is deeply embedded in Gen Z students' daily routines. On whether they use social media to make

money, 39 (11.8%) respondents strongly disagreed, 79 (23.9%) respondents disagreed, 71 (21.5%) respondents were undecided, 92 (27.9%) respondents agreed while 49 (14.8%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean for this was 3.1 with a standard deviation of 1.26. This is so because majority of the respondents agreed thus agreeing with study done by Wickramanayake & Jika (2018).

When asked whether they use social media for online shopping, 54 (16.4%) respondents strongly disagreed, 58 (17.6%) respondents disagreed, 48 (14.5%) respondents were undecided, 97 (29.4%) respondents agreed while 73 (22.1%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean and standard deviation for this was 3.23 and 1.4 respectively. This is so because majority of the respondents agreed. These findings are in line with what Salazar (2017) found.

Furthermore, they were asked whether they use social media to catch up with news, 19 (5.8%) respondents strongly disagreed, 28 (8.5%) respondents disagreed, 26 (7.9%) respondents were undecided, 91 (27.6%) respondents agreed while 166 (50.3%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean and standard deviation for this was 4.08 and 1.2 respectively. This is so because majority of the respondents strongly agreed (Salazar, 2017)

Lastly, when asked whether they use social media to kill boredom, 41 (12.4%) respondents strongly disagreed, 12 (3.6%) respondents disagreed, 12 (3.6%) respondents were undecided, 113 (34.2%) respondents agreed while 152 (46.1%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean for this was 3.98 with a standard deviation of 1.33. This is so because majority of the strongly respondents agreed. These findings align with findings of the study done by Cenita (2023), who discovered that young people interact through social media when they feel bored.

From the findings of the study, it was evident that responses to the 7 statements show that majority of the respondents were agreeing with the statements used to measure student's motivation for social networking. The students were motivated to use social networking for various purposes. These findings reflect the clear triangulation of the theories applied. According to the Uses& Gratifications Theory, the motivation and usage patterns are seen because it focuses on gratifications sought. Because of the gratifications, the Gen Z actively choose the media through which they meet their gratifications. It further says that people are motivated by four needs that is for entertainment, information, social identity and interaction. These needs are seen from the motivations. These results align with those of Cenita (2023), who found that Generation Z learners' views on digital education are shaped by the flexibility it offers in terms of time and location, the collaborative opportunities provided through online interactions, the skills and knowledge gained from digital tools, and the potential for personal development. Similarly, the findings are consistent with a study by Agusintadewi et al. (2021), which indicated that social media is particularly beneficial for Gen Z students by allowing them to access and share information more quickly and widely, enhancing their learning experiences, and giving them the freedom to engage with educational resources beyond the college environment.

They also use social media for entertainment, to communicate with friends, to catch up with news and kill boredom. Sometimes the social media was used for online shopping and a few of them used it to make money. Similar sentiments were expressed by participants during the focus group discussions. During the group discussions on the sites that are popular and commonly used by the Gen Z students, sites mentioned included Facebook, Whatsapp, X, Instagram, Tiktok and YouTube.

> *"I use FB (Facebook) all the time for me it's everything, I can say any time is Facebook time, there, I can catch up with all that is happening almost instantly. There is a lot of fun on Facebook and if anyone was to take away any of my accounts, they should take them all but leave Facebook''*
>
> *"For most of the students, Whatsapp is most preferred when it comes to academic coordination, group discussions, and social interaction. As for Instagram, and Tiktok, we prefer them when it comes to entertainment, self-expression and making some little pocket money.*
> **FGD 2 Group member**

Further, the members also echoed the fact that among the reasons for online social networking is to get news which they said are instant, catching up with friends, for entertainment, movies, music, online businesses and for educational purposes. They appreciated that it has made their academic work manageable since they can be able to access information and send assignments and even have online meetings with their peers and lecturers.

The use of social media for academic purposes emerged as a significant theme. Most respondents acknowledged that social media platforms particularly WhatsApp, YouTube, and Telegram are frequently used by students to share notes, discuss assignments, and access educational videos. These platforms facilitate informal peer learning, especially in group settings.

However, concerns were raised about the tendency of students to overuse social media for non-academic content, leading to distractions and reduced academic focus. As one Dean noted*, "Some students begin by using YouTube for tutorials and end up spending hours on unrelated content."* He continued to say that this trend reveals that while social media has the potential to support learning, it may also hinder academic progress if not used responsibly.

Another reason why they use social media according to a Gen Z student in the FGD;

> *"Sharing information is so fast, I spend less energy, less money because it is cheap and most times we use college bundles, I write anything without any fear, it's the best thing that ever happened I love it because its private"* **FGD 1 Group Member**

> *"I participate in social networking for very many reasons. What is good about social media is that I can communicate easily, sometimes I do business online as a hustle, I get updates on what is going on, I also use it in class and even for research on assignments given and I also don't like missing anything happening"*. **FGD 3 Group Member**

Additionally, the interviews held with the deans of students elicited similar sentiments on the reasons why Gen Z students use social media.

> *"The Gen Z students use social media because of the availability of free WIFI, students need to be up to date, they exchange information, they use online library services, and they link up with family and friends as well as fellow students. They are seen crowded at points in the college where the signal is strong and it is just interesting how each has their heads bent and eyes fixed on their mobile phones"* **Dean of students one institution.**

The discussions also affirmed that Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, are digital natives just like their counterparts globally who are naturally drawn to social media because of the many platforms it offers. The students use the platforms for social interaction, entertainment and self-expression. They however noted that social media has the downside whereby many students also spend excessive time on non-educational content, especially during study hours, which leads to procrastination and reduced academic focus. This therefore leads to the crucial need of striking a balance.

4.5 Influence of Social Networking on the Social Well-Being of Gen Z Students

The second objective was to evaluate the extent to which Social networking influences social Well-Being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya. A descriptive analysis of the questionnaire responses was carried out to assess

participants' perceptions of online networking and its impact on social Well-Being. Five statements on a 5-point likert scale were utilized to evaluate the respondents' social Well-Being as shown in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10: Gen Zs' Perceptions on the Influence of Social Network on their Social Well-Being

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD
I always say no to my family and friends when using social media	41 (12.4%)	50 (15.2%)	43 (13.0%)	90 (27.3%)	106 (32.1%)	2.48	1.4
I have more friends on social media than I have in real life	42 (12.7%)	79 (23.9%)	21 (6.4%)	55 (16.7%)	133 (40.3%)	3.62	1.46
Too much use of social media keeps me aloof with my family	43 (13.0%)	55 (16.7%)	55 (16.7%)	108 (32.7%)	69 (20.9%)	2.68	1.32
When I find it difficult to handle issues, I resort to online activities	50 (15.2%)	62 (18.8%)	63 (19.1%)	68 (20.6%)	87 (26.4%)	3.21	1.42
Being online uplifts my spirits more than when with other people	58 (17.6%)	62 (18.8%))	40 (12.1%)	80 (24.2%	90 (27.3%)	3.25	1.47

From Table 4.10, 41 (12.4%) respondents strongly disagreed when asked whether they always say no to their family and friends when using social media. However, 50 (15.2%) respondents disagreed, 43 (13.0%) respondents were undecided, 90 (27.3%) respondents agreed while 106 (32.1%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean for this was 2.48 with a standard deviation of 1.4. This is so because majority of the respondents strongly agreed. Many Gen Z individuals often choose to spend time on social media instead of interacting face-to-face with family and friends. During the FGDs some students admitted that they found it easier to express themselves online than face to face especially when discussing very sensitive issues. One participant reflected

> *"When you are online, you can think before to talk but when face to face, it is real"!*

This growing preference for online engagement over in-person connections reflects deeper trends like social media dependence, shifts in how young people communicate, and changes in how they build and maintain relationships (Jones, 2022).

When asked whether they have more friends on social media than they have in real life, 42 (12.7%) respondents strongly disagreed, 79 (23.9%) respondents disagreed, 21 (6.4%) respondents were undecided, 55 (16.7%) respondents agreed while 133 (40.3%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean and standard deviation for this was 3.62 and 1.46 respectively. This is so because majority of the respondents strongly agreed. These findings align with the findings of the study done by Anderson & Jiang (2018) who discovered that majority of teenagers prefer having more friends on social media than in real life. According to the social Networks theory, relationships are based on ties and nodes. Gen Z students desire to join many groups and present themselves online for approval.

On whether too much use of social media keeps them aloof with their families, 43 (13.0%) respondents strongly disagreed, 55 (16.7%) respondents disagreed, 55 (16.7%) respondents were undecided, 108 (32.7%) respondents agreed while 69 (20.9%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean for this was 2.68 with a standard deviation of 1.32. This is so because majority of the respondents agreed. This was supported further by the findings from the focus group discussions whereby Gen Z students reported that platforms like Whatsapp helps them maintain communication with their families because they have family chat groups. Despite that, they also agreed that too much use leads to reduced physical interaction especially for those studying far from their homes. They further said that social media strengthened their friendship connections since they

are able to check on each other daily and stay connected. This really reinforces offline relationships (Anderson & Jiang, 2018).

Additionally, one dean of students from one of the institutions observed that social media has both connected and distanced students interpersonally. He continued to say that while it facilitates communication, especially across campuses and institutions, it has also reduced the quality of face-to-face interaction.

> "*Many students in our institutions tend to isolate themselves even when in social settings, as they are engrossed in their phones. This has affected the development of soft skills such as teamwork, conflict resolution, and verbal communication, which are crucial both academically and professionally*". **Dean of students from one institution**.

Furthermore, they were asked whether when they find it difficult to handle issues, they resort to online activities. 50 (15.2%) respondents strongly disagreed, 62 (18.8%) respondents disagreed, 63 (19.1%) respondents were undecided, 68 (20.6%) respondents agreed while 87 (26.4%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean and standard deviation for this was 3.21 and 1.42 respectively. This is so because majority of the respondents strongly agreed. These findings corroborate with the findings of the study done by Soldatova & Rasskazova (2016) who asserted that adolescents frequently use the internet and social networking sites as a way to cope with emotional problems, reduce stress, and seek social support when dealing with issues they find difficult to manage offline. Additionally, Park et al., (2023), says that *Skylight* which is a platform that features short videos serves as a practical tool for Gen Z during moments of stress as it helps them to regain composure and relax.

Lastly, when asked whether being online uplifts their spirits more than when with other people, 58 (17.6%) respondents strongly disagreed, 62 (18.8%) respondents disagreed,

40 (12.1%) respondents were undecided, 80 (24.2%) respondents agreed while 90 (27.3%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean for this was 3.25 with a standard deviation of 1.47. This is so because majority of the respondents strongly agreed. Teenagers frequently use the internet and social networking sites as a way to cope with emotional problems, reduce stress, and seek social support when dealing with issues they find difficult to manage offline (Soldatova & Rasskazova, 2016).

According to the focus group discussions, the students confirmed that social networking increased their network of friends as they made new friends online. The findings are related to the findings of Chatzoglou et al., (2020) who opined that the Gen Z students participate in online networking so that they can be part of the online community hence increasing their social capital.

> *"I have made more friends due to social networking and, I catch up with them online, I check new trends, upcoming events, and my relationship with my family is even better because we can do video call and it's kind of bringing family together. Sometimes families can break little by little as people prefer to be on phone than interacting"*. FGD 3 Group Member

A similar view was advanced during the interview with one of the deans of students who asserted that:

> *'The student's engagement in online networking greatly enhances relationships and makes them stronger. At the same time, it may spoil some students because of some of the negativities they may be exposed to'.* **Dean of students in one institution**

From the above findings, Gen Z students find social networking valuable because of its instant nature however there is need for the students to tread carefully, owing to the negative exposure. Having more friends online than in real life poses a risk to the Gen Z as this could lead to loneliness and diminishing face to face interactions leading to poor social skills. Also relying on Social media as an escape from stressful events could mean not valuing the traditional methods of problem solving but relying on technology.

4.6 Impact of Social Networking on the Emotional Well-Being of Gen Z Students

The third objective was to assess the impact of social networking on the emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya. Descriptive analysis of questionnaire responses was conducted to identify Gen Z students' perception on their emotional Well-Being. A total of 5 statements were used to determine the emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students and responses elicited on a 5-point likert scale as shown in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11: Emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students

Statement	SD	D	U	A	SD	Mean	SD
Social networking influences my feelings	48 (14.5%)	57 (17.3%)	58 (17.6%)	94 (28.5%)	73 (22.1%)	3.26	1.36
I express myself better on social networks	37 (11.2%)	55 (16.7%)	41 (12.4%)	95 (28.8%)	102 (30.9%)	3.52	1.37
Social networking has improved my self-awareness	23 (7.0%)	22 (6.7%)	28 (8.5%)	114 (34.5%)	143 (43.3%)	4.01	1.19
Social networking helps me calm down after difficulties	28 (8.5%)	45 (13.6%)	46 (13.9%)	114 (34.5%)	97 (29.4%)	3.63	1.27
It matters a lot how people view me online	73 (22.1%)	68 (20.6%)	32 (9.7%)	80 (24.2%)	77 (23.3%)	3.06	1.51

From Table 4.11, 48 (14.5%) respondents strongly disagreed when asked whether social networking influences their feelings. However, 57 (17.3%) respondents disagreed, 58 (17.6%) respondents were undecided, 94 (28.5%) respondents agreed while 73 (22.1%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean for this was 3.26 with a standard deviation of 1.36. This is so because majority of the respondents agreed. These findings are align with findings of the study done by Woods & Scott (2016) who found out that high social media engagement among adolescents relates to increased emotional distress, including feelings of worry, sadness, and sleep-related emotional issues

When asked whether they express themselves better on social networks, 37 (11.2%) respondents strongly disagreed, 55 (16.7%) respondents disagreed, 41 (12.4%)

respondents were undecided, 95 (28.8%) respondents agreed while 102 (30.9%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean and standard deviation for this was 3.52 and 1.37 respectively. This is so because majority of the respondents strongly agreed. On whether social networking has improved their self-awareness, 23 (7.0%) respondents strongly disagreed, 22 (6.7%) respondents disagreed, 28 (8.5%) respondents were undecided, 114 (34.5%) respondents agreed while 143 (43.3%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean and standard deviation for this was 4.01 and 1.19 respectively. This is so because majority of the respondents strongly agreed (Woods & Scott, 2016).

Furthermore, they were asked whether social networking helps them calm down after difficulties, 28 (8.5%) respondents strongly disagreed. However, 45 (13.6%) respondents disagreed, 46 (13.9%) respondents were undecided, 114 (34.5%) respondents agreed while 97 (29.4%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean for this was 3.63 with a standard deviation of 1.27. This is so because majority of the respondents agreed. According to Tefertiller (2018), young people use online platforms for compensatory purposes, meaning they go online to cope with stress, calm down, or escape from difficulties they cannot manage offline.

Lastly, when asked whether it matters a lot how people view them online, 73 (22.1%) respondents strongly disagreed, 68 (20.6%) respondents disagreed, 32 (9.7%) respondents were undecided, 80 (24.2%) respondents agreed while 77 (23.3%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean for this was 3.06 with a standard deviation of 1.51. This is so because majority of the respondents agreed.

Further findings from interviews indicated that social networking influences Gen Zs feelings, expression, improved their self-awareness and helps them calm down during difficulties. The findings are as follows;

> *"Social networking can affect the emotional Well-Being of students, it can arouse a lot of emotions especially when it comes to online dating. Some of the things happening online can be very detrimental".*
> **Principal one of the Tertiary Institutions**

On the issue of emotional wellbeing and online interactions, most Gen Z students described it as exciting, addictive whereas some felt empowered by the ability to connect with many people instantly, while others mentioned experiencing pressure to maintain an image or respond promptly to conversations.

> *"When I do a post and get more likes, I feel good and it makes me happy but when I don't get few likes, I get depressed and at times loose hope"* **FGD 1 Group Member**

On the same breath, according to the Principal of one institution, also agreed social media plays a significant role in shaping students' emotional wellbeing. He said

> *"In this institution, we have observed cases where students face anxiety, depression, or self-esteem issues due to cyberbullying, online comparison, or pressure to maintain a certain lifestyle online. At the same time, social media can also offer support through motivational content, spiritual guidance, or access to mental health resources. The key is to guide students in using these platforms mindfully and critically".*

Respondents unanimously agreed that social media has a profound influence on students' emotional wellbeing. The study found that students often experience anxiety, low self-esteem, and even depression resulting from cyberbullying, unrealistic comparisons, and the pressure to maintain a certain lifestyle online. Based on the study done by Frison & Eggermont (2017) who claimed that adolescents' emotional Well-Being is directly shaped by their interactions on social media positive interactions improve mood**,** while negative interactions increase sadness and stress. Further, Hossain, (2022) also discovered a strong link between experiences of cyber bullying and psychological challenges. This supports the assertion by the one institutional head

and hence the need for Gen Z students to be guided and supported in order to strike this delicate balance of social networking and emotional well being.

However, it was also noted that social media can serve as a platform for emotional support and motivations for engaging in social networking vation when students engage with uplifting or educational content. One respondent stated*:*

> *"If we can guide them to follow mental health and motivational pages, social media can actually help rather than harm."*

This finding is in agreement with that of Park et al., (2023) who also found out that use of social networking among students sometimes helps them divert from stressful situations. Additionally, online platforms are preferred by some Gen Z students because they can communicate freely and even those that are shy find it easier to communicate.

4.7 Gender perception on Social Networking and Socio-Emotional Well-Being of Gen Z Students

The fourth objective was to determine the gender perception on social networking and socio-emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students in Tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya. This was achieved by describing the Gen Z students' perception on gender and how it affects their social-emotional Well-Being. Descriptive analysis of questionnaire responses was conducted to identify Gen Z students' perception on gender. A total of 5 statements were used to determine the Gen Z students' perception on gender and responses elicited on a 5-point likert scale as shown in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12: Gen Z Students' Perception on Gender

Statement	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD
Female students spend more time on social media than male	42 (12.7%)	21 (6.4%)	35 (10.6%)	102 (30.9%)	130 (39.4%)	3.78	1.36
Male students use social media to maintain existing offline relationships	42 (12.7%)	52 (15.8%)	63 (19.1%)	106 (32.1%)	67 (20.3%)	3.32	1.31
There is gender disparity in student's use of social media	39 (11.8%)	72 (21.8%)	63 (19.1%)	82 (24.8%)	74 (22.4%)	3.24	1.34
Men are more likely to use social media to seek information	29 (8.8%)	32 (9.7%)	43 (13.0%)	108 (32.7%)	118 (35.8%)	3.77	1.27
Social networking provides satisfaction to both male and female	10 (3.0%)	21 (6.4%)	31 (9.4%)	111 (33.6%)	157 (47.6%)	4.16	1.04

From Table 4.12, 42 (12.7%) respondents strongly disagreed when asked whether female students spend more time on social media than male. However, 21 (6.4%) respondents disagreed, 35 (10.6%) respondents were undecided, 102 (30.9%) respondents agreed while 130 (39.4%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean for this was 3.78 with a standard deviation of 1.36. This is so because majority of the respondents strongly agreed. The study agrees with the findings of a study that study that was conducted to examine "gender-based differences in the use of social networking sites among students" at Koforidua Technical University in Ghana whose findings disclosed that female students spent more time on SNSs than their male counterparts (Asante, 2023).

When asked whether male students use social media to maintain existing offline relationships, 42 (12.7%) respondents strongly disagreed, 52 (15.8%) respondents disagreed, 63 (19.1%) respondents were undecided, 106 (32.1%) respondents agreed while 67 (20.3%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean and standard deviation for this was 3.32 and 1.31 respectively. This is so because majority of the respondents agreed.

On whether there is gender disparity in student's use of social media, 39 (11.8%) respondents strongly disagreed, 72 (21.8%) respondents disagreed, 63 (19.1%) respondents were undecided, 82 (24.8%) respondents agreed while 74 (22.4%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean for this was 3.24 with a standard deviation of 1.34. This is so because majority of the respondents agreed. This also agrees with a study that found out that there is a significant difference between men and women in terms of motivation, self-management, relationship management, and social skills on social media which is a reflection of socio-emotional Well-Being (Innovation, 2024). Similarly,

Furthermore, they were asked whether men are more likely to use social media to seek information and on this 29 (8.8%) and 32 (9.7%) respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. However, 43 (13.0%) respondents were undecided, 108 (32.7%) respondents agreed while 118 (35.8%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean for this was 3.77 with a standard deviation of 1.27. This is so because majority of the respondents agreed. These findings corroborate with the findings of the studies done by Frison & Eggermont (2017) & Profile & Profile (2021), who found that male students used Facebook more frequently with female students showing preference to You Tube indicating a disparity in the use of social networking platforms.

Lastly, when asked whether social networking provides satisfaction to both male and female, 10 (3.0%) and 21 (6.4%) respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. However 31 (9.4%) respondents were undecided, 111 (33.6%) respondents agreed while 157 (47.6%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean for this was 4.16 with a standard deviation of 1.04. This is so because majority of the respondents strongly agreed. These findings are in line with the findings of the study

done by Frison & Eggermont (2017) who asserted that teenagers enhance their satisfaction by using social media. Again, according to the Uses & Gratifications theory, users choose a media and seek gratifications online. Therefore the majority of respondents agreed that social media provides satisfaction to both male and female. This could translate to them achieving the gratifications they seek online leading to satisfaction.

Additionally, the findings showing that there is disparity in use of social media in terms of gender support is supported by findings in a study that discovered that duration of media usage and daily screen time identified different activities of both males and females (Sciences 2020).

4.8 Strategies that can Promote Healthy Use of Social Media by Gen Z Students

The fifth objective was to explore strategies that can promote healthy use of social media by Gen Z students in Tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya.

Table 4.13: Students' Perceptions on Strategies that can Promote Healthy Use of Social Media

Statement	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD
Regular discussions on the emotional impacts of social networking should be integrated into student support programs	25 (7.6%)	11 (3.3%)	37 (11.2%)	135 (40.9%)	122 (37%)	3.96	1.14
Providing digital counseling services can help students manage anxiety or stress caused by social media	53 (16.1%)	32 (9.7%)	31 (9.4%)	77 (23.3%)	137 (41.5%)	3.65	1.491
Institutions should implement awareness campaigns highlighting the link between social networking and emotional Well-Being	32 (9.7%)	63 (19.1%)	29 (8.8%)	84 (25.5%)	122 (37%)	3.61	1.395
Peer mentorship programs can promote emotionally healthy social media habits among students	33 (10%)	44 (13.3%)	31 (9.4%)	117 (35.5%)	105 (31.8%)	3.66	1.317
Training students on emotional regulation while using social media can reduce the negative effects of online interactions	21 (6.4%)	31 (9.4%)	11 (3.3%)	156 (47.3%)	111 (33.6%)	3.92	1.147

From Table 4.13, 25 (7.6%) respondents strongly disagreed when asked whether regular discussions on the emotional impacts of social networking should be integrated into student support programs. However, 11 (3.3%) respondents disagreed, 37 (11.2%) respondents were undecided, 135 (40.9%) respondents agreed while 122 (37%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean for this was 3.96 with a standard deviation of 1.14. This is so because majority of the respondents agreed. These findings align with the findings of the study done by Camayra& Pradia (2024) who recommended that students should be familiarized with how to manage their time on social media to so as to avoid addiction and focus on their studies. This clearly points towards regular discussions on matters social networking among Gen Z students.

When asked whether providing digital counseling services can help students manage anxiety or stress caused by social media, 53 (16.1%) respondents strongly disagreed, 32 (9.7%) respondents disagreed, 31 (9.4%) respondents were undecided, 77 (23.3%) respondents agreed while 137 (41.5%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean and standard deviation for this was 3.65 and 1.491 respectively. This is so because majority of the respondents strongly agreed.

Furthermore, when asked whether institutions should implement awareness campaigns highlighting the link between social networking and emotional Well-Being, 32 (9.7%) respondents strongly disagreed, 63 (19.1%) respondents disagreed, 29 (8.8%) respondents were undecided, 84 (25.5%) respondents agreed while 122 (37%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean and standard deviation for this was 3.61 and 1.395 respectively. A study conducted at Technical University of Mombasa highlights the need for a comprehensive multifaceted strategy to address depression among students and this strategy includes counselling (Aggrey et al., 2024).

The students also acknowledged that social media can be detrimental to their wellbeing as discussed in Focus group discussions and felt the need for promoting its healthy use. They raised concerns like time wastage, cyber bullying and peer pressure. Some even reported witnessing or experiencing online harassment. They felt the need for the institutions to hold wellness workshops and train them on responsible usage. They also wished that there should be integration of social media literacy into first year orientation programmes.

> *"Sometimes you check messages and before you know it, one hour is gone. However, we cannot avoid social media, all we can do is to learn how to use it wisely*" **FGD 3 group member**

On whether peer mentorship programs can promote emotionally healthy social media habits among students, 33 (10%) respondents strongly disagreed. However, 44 (13.3%) respondents disagreed, 31 (9.4%) respondents were undecided, 117 (35.5%) respondents agreed while 105 (31.8%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean for this was 3.66 with a standard deviation of 1.317. As recommended by Aggrey et al., (2024), colleges need to establish peer counseling programs composed of trained students.

To address the negative aspects of social media use, the Deans proposed several strategies aimed at fostering healthy digital habits among students. These include integrating digital literacy and time management workshops into student support programs, organizing mental health talks, and using official institutional channels to promote academic content online. One respondent suggested peer-led campaigns, stating,

> *"Students listen more to their fellow students. If we empower peer mentors, they can influence more responsible social media habits."* **Dean of students**

The emphasis on community-based and peer-driven approaches highlights the need for culturally relevant and context-specific interventions in Kisii's tertiary institutions. These findings are in agreement with the findings of the study done by Frison & Eggermont (2017).

Lastly, they were asked whether training students on emotional regulation while using social media can reduce the negative effects of online interactions. On this, 21 (6.4%) %) respondents strongly disagreed, 31 (9.4%) respondents disagreed, 11 (3.3%) respondents were undecided, 156 (47.3%) respondents agreed while 111 (33.6%) respondents strongly agreed. The mean for this was 3.92 with a standard deviation of 1.147. This is so because majority of the respondents agreed. According to the study done by Gross (2015), gross' emotion regulation theory shows that when young people are trained to identify, understand, and manage their emotions**,** they experience fewer negative social and psychological outcomes even in online environments.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Overview

This chapter presents summary of the study findings, conclusion, and recommendations of the study and areas of further research. The purpose of the study was to establish the connection between Social Networking and Social- Emotional Well-Being of Gen Z Students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya. The findings were drawn from the following objectives: To analyse the underlying motivations driving Gen Z students' engagement, to evaluate the extent to which social networking influences the social Well-Being, to assess the impact of social networking on the emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students, to explore strategies that can promote healthy use of social media by Gen Z students andt compare gender differences in patterns of social networking and their effects on the socio-emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya.

5.2 Summary of the Findings

5.2.1 The Motivation for Social Networking by Gen Z Students

The first objective analyze the underlying motivations driving Gen Z students' engagement in social networking by Gen Z students in Tertiary Institutions in Kisii County, Kenya. Gen Z students in Tertiary Institutions in Kisii County owned a cell phone and participated in online social networking. The most common method of accessing the internet by most of the Gen Z students was via mobile phone.

The most common preferred content online among Gen Z students was music, educational material and Christian or religious content and the least preferred content

was movies and relationships. Gen Z students used social media for long hours in the evening and going as far as checking on social media the last thing before they sleep and immediately, they wake up.

The Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County were motivated to use social networking for various purposes. The students used social media for educational purposes. Furthermore, they use it for entertainment, to communicate with friends, to catch up with news and kill boredom. Sometimes the social media was used for online shopping and a few of them to make money. Also, they used social media to be updated about the upcoming events, checking on the trending news, as well as get new friends.

Findings from the interviews indicate that Gen Z students in Kisii County are highly attracted to social media platforms due to their immersive, interactive, and real-time nature. Respondents observed that students use social media not just for communication but also for identity formation, entertainment, and information access. The proliferation of affordable smartphones and improved internet access within the region has further enabled this generation to integrate digital platforms into their daily routines.

5.2.2 Influence of Social Networking on the Social Well-Being of Gen Z Students

The second objective was to evaluate the extent to which Social networking influences social Well-Being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya. The findings revealed that a majority of the Gen Z students that participated in the study strongly agreed that they always say no to their family and friends when using social media and have more friends on social media than they have in real life. Also, when they find it difficult to handle issues, they resort to online activities since being online uplifts their spirits more than when with other people. Furthermore, majority of the agreed that too much use of social media keeps them aloof with their families. Further

findings focus group discussions indicated that social networking increases their network of friends as they make new friends online. Also their engagement in online networking greatly enhances relationships and makes them stronger. At the same time, it may spoil some students because of some of the negativities they may be exposed to and affect their interpersonal relationships.

5.2.3 Impact of Social Networking on the Emotional Well-Being of Gen Z Students

The third objective of the study was to assess the impact of social networking on the emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya. The findings revealed that a majority of the Gen Z students that participated in the study agreed that social networking influences their feelings and helps them calm down after difficulties. Also, majority of the agreed that it matters a lot how people view them online. However, majority of the strongly agreed that they express themselves better on social networks and it has improved their self-awareness. At the same time, some students expressed that they felt anxious if they missed to be online as they thought they will be missing out on what is going on.

5.2.4 Gender perception on Social Networking and Socio-Emotional Well-Being of Gen Z Students

The fourth objective of the study was to determine the gender perception on social networking and socio-emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students in Tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya. The findings revealed that a majority of the Gen Z students that participated in the study strongly agreed that female students spend more time on social media than male and that social networking provides satisfaction to both male and female. On the other hand, majority of them agreed that male students use social media to maintain existing offline relationships and thus existing gender disparity in student's

use of social media. Also, the study revealed that majority of them agreed that men are more likely to use social media to seek information.

5.2.5 Strategies that can Promote Healthy Use of Social Media by Gen Z Students

The fifth objective of the study was to explore that can promote healthy use of social media by Gen Z students in selected Tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya. The findings revealed that a majority of the Gen Z students that participated in the study strongly agreed that providing digital counseling services can help students manage anxiety or stress caused by social media and therefore, institutions should implement awareness campaigns highlighting the link between social networking and emotional Well-Being. However, majority of them agreed that regular discussions on the emotional impacts of social networking should be integrated into student support programs including the orientation programme. They also felt that strongly that peer mentorship programs can promote emotionally healthy social media habits among students. Also, training students on emotional regulation while using social media can reduce the negative effects of online interactions. The Deans of Students advocate for a balanced approach that includes awareness, digital literacy, and structured student support systems to harness the benefits of social media while mitigating its negative effects.

5.3 Conclusion

The results show that social networking influence the social and emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya.

On the motivation for social networking by Gen Z students, the study concluded that most Gen Z students owned a cell phone and participated in online social networking. Also, the most common preferred content online among Gen Z students was music,

educational material and Christian or religious content and the least preferred content was movies and relationships. Furthermore, they were motivated to use social networking for educational purposes, entertainment, communicate with friends, catch up with news and kill boredom. Sometimes the social media was used for online shopping and a few of them to make money.

On how social networking affect the social Well-Being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions, the study concluded that they always say no to their family and friends when using social media and have more friends on social media than they have in real life. Also, when they find it difficult to handle issues, they resort to online activities since being online uplifts their spirits more than when with other people. Too much use of social media keeps students aloof with their families, however, social media increases network of friends.

On how social networking affect the emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions, the study concluded that social networking influences one's feelings and helps them calm down after difficulties. Also, it matters a lot how people view someone online and social network helps one express him/herself better and improves self-awareness.

On how the difference in gender perception on social networking and socio-emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students in Tertiary institutions, the study concluded that female students spend more time on social media than male and social network provides satisfaction to both male and female. Also, there is gender disparity in student's use of social media having male students using social media to maintain existing offline relationships. The study also concluded that men are more likely to use social media to seek information.

On the strategies that can be put in place to promote healthy use of social media among Gen Z students in tertiary institutions, the study concluded that regular discussions on the emotional impacts of social networking should be integrated into student support programs while providing digital counseling services to help students manage anxiety or stress caused by social media. Also institutions should implement awareness campaigns highlighting the link between social networking and emotional Well-Being and peer mentorship programs can promote emotionally healthy social media habits among students. Lastly, training students on emotional regulation while using social media can reduce the negative effects of online interactions.

5.4 Recommendations of the Study

This study focused on implications of social networking on the social- emotional Well-Being of Gen Z Students in Tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya. Based on the findings, the researcher recommends as follows:

1. Incorporate emotional wellness and digital counseling into student support systems

Given that social networking plays a significant role in shaping students' emotions and self-perception, tertiary institutions should prioritize emotional wellness as part of their student support services. This can be achieved by organizing regular forums or discussions focused on the emotional impact of social media. In addition, institutions should provide access to digital counseling services to help students effectively cope with stress, manage anxiety, and build resilience in handling emotionally charged online experiences.

2. Establish peer mentorship initiatives to strengthen real-life social bonds

The findings revealed that many students favor online interactions over in-person relationships, often distancing themselves from family and friends. To address this,

institutions should introduce structured peer mentorship programs that encourage students to form meaningful offline connections. These programs can create a supportive environment where students learn from each other how to balance their digital presence with face-to-face engagement, ultimately enhancing their social Well-Being.

3. Develop gender-responsive social media awareness campaigns

With the study showing clear gender differences in how students use social media with female students spending more time online and male students using it mainly for information and maintaining relationships, it is important to adopt a gender-sensitive approach. Institutions should design awareness campaigns that reflect these varying experiences. Such initiatives should aim to promote responsible and emotionally healthy social networking practices among both male and female students, while respecting their unique patterns of use.

5.5 Areas for Further Studies

i) The scope of the study was limited to Gen Z students in tertiary institutions, which is insufficient to draw a definitive conclusion regarding the implications of social network on social and emotional Well-Being. Consequently, this research recommends conducting a similar investigation involving millenials and other generational cohorts and in different institutions.

ii) The study recommends longitudinal analysis of social networking and socio-emotional wellbeing among Gen Z students to examine how sustained exposure to social networking sites shapes the socio-emotional development of gen z students over time.

iii) Comparative study of online networking and socio-emotional well-being between two generations Gen Z and Alpha

iv) Further investigation is needed to determine how institutional factors such as campus policies, student support services, and digital literacy programmes that moderate the relationship between social networking and socio-emotional Well-Being.

v) An investigation on the gender differences in online social networking and socio-emotional well being

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Introductory Letter

School of Education, Moi University

P.o Box 3900

Eldoret

Dear Participant, my name is Leonida Orwaru, a student pursuing Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Psychology in Moi University, Eldoret Kenya. I am conducting a study titled Social Networking: Implications on the Social- Emotional Well-Being of Gen Z Students in Tertiary Institutions in Kisii County, Kenya.

The Purpose of this study is to establish the connection between Social Networking and the Social- Emotional Well-Being of Gen Z Students. The study also envisages coming up with a blueprint that will guide on healthy and responsible use of social media thus contribute to the realization of the Sustainable Development goals (SDGs) numbers 3 and 4 on health and education respectively. The questions below are designed to provide a better understanding of the topic under study.

For each question, you will give an answer which best describes your experiences according your opinion. The data obtained will be confidential and anonymous. No details will be collected that could possibly reveal your identity or personal information. If you feel uncomfortable to continue, you are free to withdraw and there is no penalty.

I would like to welcome you and thank you in advance for taking your time to respond.

Appendix B: Institutional Consent

RESEARCH TITLE: IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING ON SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING GEN Z STUDENTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN KISII COUNTY, KENYA

I give consent for my institution to participate in the above study. The purpose for the research has been explained to me and I have read and understood the information required for this research. I also understand that the information the students and I shall provide will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

I have been assured that since participation is voluntary, the students and I can withdraw anytime and shall not be penalized.

Name of Institutional Head ----------

Signature ---------- Date ----------

Appendix C: Informed Consent for Participants

RESEARCH TITLE: SOCIAL NETWORKING: IMPLICATIONS ON SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OF GEN Z STUDENTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN KISII COUNTY, KENYA

I, the undersigned, confirm that I have read the information on this consent form about the above study. I understand that participation in this study is voluntary and that I cannot be coerced into participation. I also understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. I understand that I can withdraw from the study any time and there is no penalty for not participating or for withdrawing from the study.

I agree to my interview being audio-recorded. I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially

Participants' Initials ……Sign ……. Date ……...

Name of the researcher ……... Sign ……. Date …….

RESEARCH TITLE: SOCIAL NETWORKING: IMPLICATIONS ON SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OF GEN Z STUDENTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN KISII COUNTY, KENYA

Appendix D: Questionnaire for Students

Instructions:

- This questionnaire has **Eight (8)** sections. Kindly respond to all the items in the questionnaire.
- Kindly read all the items and give sincere responses to each item.
- Respond to all items by ticking or indicating the response that best suits you
- Do not write your name
- Your responses will be treated with confidentiality

Section A: DEMOGRAPHICS

Please tick the response that applies to you

1. What is your age bracket?

a) 18-22 ☐

b) 22-25 ☐

c) 26 and above ☐

2. Sex: a) Male ☐ b) Female ☐

3. What year of Study are you in?

(a) First year ☐ (b) Second Year ☐

4. Indicate your faculty/department or school

5. What degree/diploma/certificate programme are you enrolled in?

SECTION B: STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL NETWORKING

Please respond to the following questions on your participation in social networking by putting a tick [√] and write the response that best applies to you

6. Do you own a cell phone? a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

b) If yes which type?

_____

7, Do you participate in online social networking? a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

If yes, which network sites?

a) Facebook ☐
b) X ☐
c) Instagram ☐
d) WhatsApp ☐
e) You Tube ☐
f) Any other (specify)_____

8. What is your commonest method of accessing the internet?

a) University cyber café ☐
b) Personal Computer ☐
c) Mobile phone ☐
d) Any other (specify)_____

SECTION C: STUDENTS' ONLINE CHARACTERISTICS SCALE

Please rate your behavior online by ticking the statement that best applies to you.

The responses are as follows;

Yes, Always- A, Often-O, Rarely-R, Never -N

S/N	Item description	A 4	O 3	R 2	N 1
9	Do you use social media while eating?				
10	Do you use social media for long hours in the evening?				
11	Is Checking social media the last thing you do before you sleep?				
12	Do you check social media immediately you wake up?				
13	Do you use social media when lectures are going on?				

SECTION D: STUDENT'S MOTIVATION FOR SOCIAL NETWORKING SCALE

Please indicate your personal motivation for social networking. Tick appropriately in the scale provided.

Strongly Agree (SA) Agree (A) Undecided (U) Disagree (D)

Strongly Disagree (SD)

S/N	**Item Description**	**SA 5**	**A 4**	**U 3**	**D 2**	**SD 1**
14	I use social media for educational purposes					
15	I use social media for entertainment					

16	I use social media to communicate with friends					
17	I use social media to make money					
18	I use social media for online shopping					
19	I use social media to catch up with news					
20	I use social media to kill boredom					

SECTION E: CONTENT ACCESSED ONLINE BY GEN Z COLLEGE STUDENTS SCALE

Please identify by ranking in order of preference by putting a ranking number between 1 and 5 on the content you access online (where 1 is the most preferred and 5 is the least preferred)

	Type of content	**Rank**
21	Music	
22	Educational material	
23	Christian or religious	
24	Movies	
25	Relationships	

SECTION F: SOCIAL NETWORKING AND STUDENTS SOCIO-EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING SCALE

Please indicate your personal opinion on social networking and student's socio-emotional Well-Being using provided. Tick appropriately in the scale provided.

Strongly Agree (SA) Agree (A) Undecided (U) Disagree (D) Strongly Disagree

S/N	Statement	SA 5	A 4	U 3	D 2	SD 1
26	Social networking influences my feelings					
27	I express myself better on social networks					
28	Social networking has improved by self-awareness					
29	Social networking helps me calm down after difficulties					
30	It matters a lot how people view me online					

SECTION G: SOCIAL NETWORKING AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Please put a tick on the response that best describes your opinion on social networking and interpersonal relationships using the scale provided

Strongly Agree (SA) Agree (A) Undecided (U) Disagree (D) Strongly Disagree

S/N	Statement	SA 5	A 4	U 3	D 2	SD 1
31	I always say no to my family and friends when using social media					
32	I have more friends on social media than I have in real life					
33	Too much use of social media keeps me a loof from my family					
34	When I find it difficult to handle issues I resort to online activities					
35	Being online uplifts my spirits than when with other people					

SECTION H: STUDENTS' GENDER AND SOCIAL NETWORKING SCALE

Please put a tick on the response that best describes your opinion on gender and social networking using the scale provided

Strongly Agree (SA) Agree (A) Undecided (U) Disagree (D) Strongly Disagree

S/N	Item description	SA 5	A 4	U 3	D 2	SD 1
36	Female students spend more time on social media than male					
37	Male students use media to maintain existing offline relationships					
38	There is gender disparity in student's use of social media					
39	Men are more likely to use social media to seek information					
40	Social networking provides satisfaction to both male and female					

SECTION I: STRATEGIES THAT CAN PROMOTE HEALTHY USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

S/N	Item description	SA 5	A 4	U 3	D 2	SD 1
41	Regular discussions on the emotional impacts of social networking should be integrated into student support programs.					
42	Providing digital counseling services can help students manage anxiety or stress caused by social media.					
43	Institutions should implement awareness campaigns highlighting the link between social networking and emotional Well-Being.					
44	Peer mentorship programs can promote emotionally healthy social media habits among students.					
45	Training students on emotional regulation while using social media can reduce the negative effects of online interactions.					
46	Monitoring and balancing social networking time can improve students' social-emotional Well-Being.					
47	Tertiary institutions should create safe online platforms that encourage positive interactions among students.					

Appendix E: Focus Group Discussion Guide

Thank you for accepting to be part of the focus group. I appreciate your willingness to participate. I am conducting this focus group discussion in order to explore the Implications of online networking on the socio- emotional wellbeing of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya. This is strictly an academic research activity. I therefore need your input and request that you share your honest and open thoughts freely.

Introductions- Moderator and researcher and break the ice

Ground rules

1) You will do most of the talking
2) We would like everyone to participate
3) There are no wrong or right answers
4) Everyone's opinion is important
5) Respect each other's opinion even if you disagree
6) We will be recording the discussions since we want to capture everything
7) We won't identify anyone by name in our report we will remain anonymous

Questions/ Guide

1. When you hear about social networking what comes in your mind
2. In this digital era, almost every one of us participates in some online networking. let's talk about that
3. What types of social networks are popular with students?
4. What are the reasons for using online social networking?
5. Tell me about interaction with many people online and how it makes you feel
6. What do you like about online social networking?

7. Tell me about social networking and your relationship with
    a) Family
    b) Friends
    c) Other students
8. Sometimes people feel more comfortable communicating with people online than face to face. How is it in your case?
9. Is there anything we haven't discussed about online social networking and students that you think is important? Let's us share
10. In your view, what strategies should be put in place to mitigate /promote healthy use of online social networks among Gen Z students?

Thank you for your time and cooperation

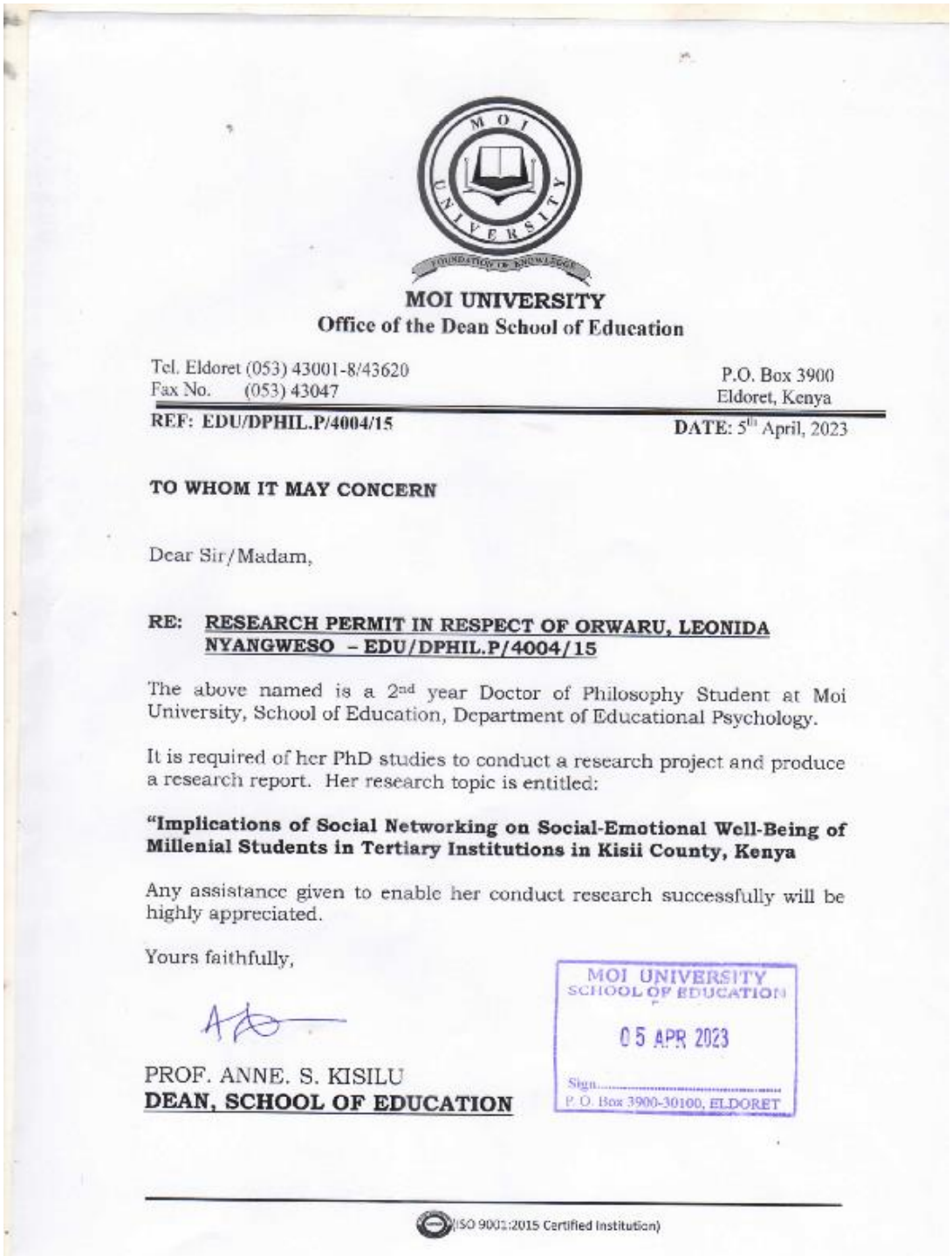
Appendix F: Interview Schedule for Deans of Students

I am conducting this research in order to explore the Implications of online networking on the socio- emotional Well-Being of Gen Z students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya. This is strictly an academic research activity. I therefore need your input in order to assist this study that may help us understand how to support the Gen Z student and help them use social media in a healthy way.

1. Why do you think the Gen Z students in your institution are attracted to social media?
2. Tell me about the use of social media and its contribution to academic performance of the Gen Z students in your institution
3. What strategies can you put in place to enhance healthy use of social media by the students?
4. What is your feeling about social media and the interpersonal relationships of the - Gen Z students?
5. Socio-media can influence the emotional wellbeing of Gen Z students. What do you think

Thank you

Appendix G: Approval from the School Of Education



MOI UNIVERSITY
Office of the Dean School of Education

Tel. Eldoret (053) 43001-8/43620
Fax No. (053) 43047

P.O. Box 3900
Eldoret, Kenya

REF: EDU/DPHIL.P/4004/15

DATE: 5th April, 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: RESEARCH PERMIT IN RESPECT OF ORWARU, LEONIDA NYANGWESO – EDU/DPHIL.P/4004/15

The above named is a 2nd year Doctor of Philosophy Student at Moi University, School of Education, Department of Educational Psychology.

It is required of her PhD studies to conduct a research project and produce a research report. Her research topic is entitled:

"Implications of Social Networking on Social-Emotional Well-Being of Millenial Students in Tertiary Institutions in Kisii County, Kenya

Any assistance given to enable her conduct research successfully will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

PROF. ANNE. S. KISILU
DEAN, SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

MOI UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
05 APR 2023
Sign.....
P. O. Box 3900-30100, ELDORET

(ISO 9001:2015 Certified Institution)

Appendix H: Nacosti Permit

REPUBLIC OF KENYA

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Ref No: 319545

Date of Issue: 25/April/2023

RESEARCH LICENSE

This is to Certify that Ms.. LEONIDA Nyangweso ORWARU of Moi University, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Kisii on the topic: Implications of Online Social Networking on Social-Emotional Well-Being of Millennial Students In Tertiary Institutions In Kisii County, Kenya for the period ending : 25/April/2024.

License No: NACOSTI/P/23/25272

319545

Applicant Identification Number

Director General
NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Verification QR Code

NOTE: This is a computer generated License. To verify the authenticity of this document, Scan the QR Code using QR scanner application.

See overleaf for conditions

Appendix I: Authorization by the County Director of Education

REPUBLIC OF KENYA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
State Department for Basic Education

Telegram: "EDUCATION"
Telephone: 058-30695
Email address: cdekisii@gmail.com
When replying please quote

COUNTY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
KISII COUNTY
P.O. BOX 4499 - 40200
KISII.

REF: CDE/KSI/RESEARCH/V/8/137

Date: 2nd May, 2023

LEONIDA NYANGWESO ORWARU
MOI UNIVERSITY
P.O.BOX
ELDORET.

RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION.

Following your research Authorization vide your letter **Ref.NACOSTI/P/23/25272** to carry out research in Kisii County,this letter refers.

I am pleased to inform you that you can carry out your research in the County on **"Implication on Online Social Networking on Social –Emotional Well-Being of Millennial Students in Tertiary Institutions in Kisii County,Kenya"** for a period ending **25th April,2024**.

Wish you a successful research.

COUNTY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
KISII COUNTY
P. O. Box 4499 - 40200, KISII.

Philip Chirchir
County Director of Education
Kisii.

Appendix J: Permission from the Institution

KISII UNIVERSITY

Telephone: +25420 2352059
Facsimile: +254020 2491131
Email: research@kisiiuniversity.ac.ke

P O BOX 408 – 40200
KISII
www.kisiiuniversity.ac.ke

OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR RESEARCH AND EXTENSION

16th May, 2023

Leonida Nyangweso Orwaru
Moi University
P.O B.O.X 3900
Eldoret

Dear Madam,

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO COLLECT DATA

The above subject refers;

This is to inform you that your request for permission to collect data for your research project on **"Implications of online social networking on social-emotional well-being of millennial students in tertiary institutions in Kisii County, Kenya"** has been approved with effect from **16th May ,2023.**

You will be required to acknowledge Kisii University in your write up and publication for this access.

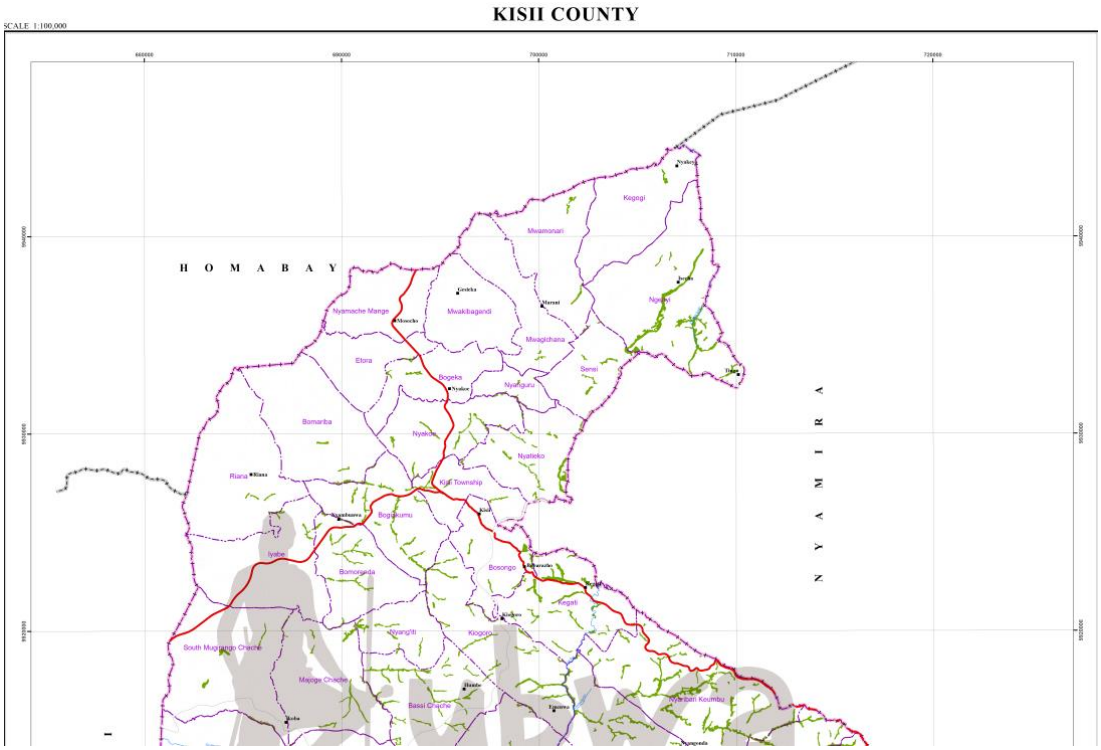
Thank you

Dr. Evans K. Okemwa, PhD

Ag. Registrar (REERM)

Appendix K: Map of Kenya Showing Kisii County

Appendix L: Map Showing the Location of the Study



Appendix M: Plagiarism Awareness Certificate

SR978

ISO 9001:2019 Certified Institution

THESIS WRITING COURSE

PLAGIARISM AWARENESS CERTIFICATE

This certificate is awarded to

ORWARU, LEONIDA NYANGWESO

EDUL/DPHIL/P/4004/15

In recognition for passing the University's plagiarism

Awareness test for Thesis **entitled: SOCIAL NETWORKING: IMPLICATIONS ON SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OF GENERATION Z STUDENTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN KISII COUNTY, KENYA with** similarity index of 4% and striving to maintain academic integrity.

Word count: 51603

Awarded by

Prof. Anne Syomwene Kisilu
CERM-ESA Project Leader Date: 07/08/2025