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What Is the Extent of the Church's Influence on Behavior Change among Adolescent Students in Catholic Secondary Schools of Murang'a East Sub-County in the Presence of Social Media?

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Abstract:

Social media has become an integral part of the lives of adolescents, granting them access to online networks and shaping their behaviors. This study examines the influence of the Church on behavior change among adolescent students in Catholic secondary schools of Murang'a East Sub-county amidst the presence of social media. The objectives of the study were to identify the social media platforms accessed by students, assess the effects of social media on behavior change, examine the Church's role in behavior change influenced by social media, and propose solutions to mitigate the negative effects of social media-induced behavior change. The study adopted a descriptive survey method, with a sample size of 345 respondents drawn from three Catholic-sponsored secondary schools. Data were collected through questionnaires, key informant interviews, and focused group discussions. The findings revealed that a majority of the students were actively involved in religious activities and accessed social media platforms, with Facebook being the most preferred site, followed by Instagram, Whatsapp, TikTok, and others. Students utilized social media for various purposes, such as chatting with friends and connecting with family, and discovered new skills and talents. Negative effects of social media use, including low self-esteem, cyberbullying, and misplaced ambitions, were also identified. The study established a positive correlation between social media usage and behavior change while recognizing the significant role of religion in shaping and preserving moral values. In conclusion, the study highlights the importance of religion in students' lives and confirms the impact of social media on behavior transformation. Recommendations include collaboration between the government and religious organizations to address internet-related challenges faced by students, as well as enhancing the capacity of teachers and school administrators to navigate social media and its associated issues.

Keywords: Social media, behavior change, church influence, adolescent students, catholic secondary schools

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

Social media has revolutionized global communication, meeting the increasing demand for faster and more interactive means of interaction since its emergence in the late 1990s. Numerous platforms and media, such as social networking applications and websites, facilitate electronic communication, allowing individuals to produce, share, exchange information, and engage in virtual communities and networks (Richards, Caldwell & Go, 2015). Popular social media platforms include Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and TikTok (Heinonen, Bartels Kaushal, 2022; Williams, 2015; Brannan, 2016). These platforms have become instrumental in facilitating social interactions, connecting individuals, and sharing content, thoughts, messages, and videos (Bertot et al., 2010; Gammon, 2021; Virkus, 2008).

The widespread use of social media is evident, with Facebook alone having over 1.8 billion users worldwide (United Nations, 2020). In the United States, approximately half of the teenage population is active on Facebook (Duggan & Smith, 2013). People across age groups utilize social media platforms through various devices, such as laptops, tablet computers, and smartphones, to stay connected and receive updates from friends, co-workers, and family (Duggan & Smith, 2013; Kendall, 2011). However, concerns have arisen regarding the potential negative effects of social media use, including detrimental impacts on mental health, sleep patterns, and academic success (OECD, 2016; Koehler, 2020).

While social media offers opportunities for creativity, socialization, and learning, it has also been associated with disseminating deviant behavior among young people. Concerns have been raised about the exposure of children and

adolescents to harmful content, cyberbullying, and radicalization (Farwell, 2014; Mendolia et al., 2019). Research has indicated that excessive social media use is associated with depressive symptoms, anxiety, low self-esteem, and addiction (Koehler, 2020; Centre for Mental Health, 2018). Moreover, it has been found that social media can contribute to the deterioration of social relationships, attention span, creativity, conduct, sleep patterns, and physical activity among children (Floros & Siomos, 2013; Wartella et al., 2013).

In the Kenyan context, the use of social media has become increasingly prevalent, with various organizations utilizing these platforms for marketing, communication, and customer service purposes (Standard Digital, 2014). However, the lack of proper regulations has resulted in incidences of scams and fraud among online platform users (Standard Digital, 2014). Additionally, social media has been found to play a role in negative behavioral repercussions among youth in disadvantaged communities, such as joining criminal gangs and engaging in sexual immorality (Philista & Arne, 2015).

Religion has been identified as a mitigating factor against the negative impact of social media, as it helps shape societal values and morality (Fagan, 2006). Religion, through religious education, promotes positive attitudes and values that contribute to the development of character among young people (Moulin Stozek et al., 2018). Moreover, religiosity has been found to influence individual decision-making, behavior, and economic phenomena, such as educational attainments and trust in others (Guiso et al., 2003; Cohen-Zada, 2005). Religious beliefs can also influence how individuals use social media and how much they allow their religion to guide their behavior (Eyal & Doron, 2014; Choi, 2010).

In light of these considerations, this study aims to investigate the effects of social media on behavior changes among high school students and the role of the Church in Murang'a County, Kenya. The focus will be on "Generation Z," the age group primarily born between 1995 and 2015, as they are particularly susceptible to the influences of social media (Gammon, 2021). Murang'a County was chosen as the study area due to the representative nature of its schools, which include National, Extra-County, County, and Sub-County institutions.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The key purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of the Church on behavioral changes among adolescent students in Catholic secondary schools of Murang'a East Sub-county, specifically in the context of social media.

1.3. Research Questions

What is the extent of the Church's influence on behavior change among adolescent students in Catholic secondary schools of Murang'a East Sub-County in the presence of social media?

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Role of the Church in Adolescent Behavior Change

Christian church organizations have a dominant presence in many parts of the world, and religion plays a significant role in shaping human behavior and attitudes (Baazeem, 2020). Religion has been found to have a causal influence on social behavior (Berger, 1961). People's religious beliefs often serve as justifications for their actions and attitudes, acting as guiding principles in their lives (Delener, 1994). A large portion of the global population, approximately 84%, practices various religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, or Islam (Harper, 2012). Religion also has an impact on the education system, which is crucial to society. Many religious communities, including Muslim and Christian communities, actively support the education system, and some even operate their own schools, such as Catholic schools, which positively contribute to society by empowering individuals (Pardini et al., 2000; Wainaina, 2007).

The concept of education sponsorship in Kenya was introduced during the government-initiated Ominde Commission of 1964, which acknowledged the significant role of the church within the community (Wachege & Joel, 2019). As religious sponsors in secondary schools, the church plays a vital role in supporting students' moral, social, psychological, and spiritual growth by emphasizing Christian-based principles within educational institutions (Kagama, 2022). As sponsors, the church is expected to have a positive and constructive influence on students' lives by providing moral guidance, spiritual experiences, role models, community leadership skills, coping skills, cultural and social capital, as well as extra-community connections. This holistic approach promotes developmental maturity and enhances social, moral, spiritual, and academic competencies and understanding among students (Kagama, 2021).

The Roman Catholic Church, for instance, has taken the lead in developing policies in its schools to ensure the seamless operation of school programs. The teaching of Religious Education and pastoral work are some of the ways through which moral values are inculcated. Previous research suggests that Catholic schools excel in boosting the achievement of low-income and minority students (Greely, 2017). The Roman Catholic Church plays a significant role in instilling moral principles in secondary school students through its pastoral program. This fosters a positive environment for students to internalize moral values, and Catholic-sponsored schools have historically performed well compared to other schools (Mulwa, 2018). Moreover, the Roman Catholic Church supports interfaith moral value instillation.

Catholic-sponsored schools provide a comprehensive, value-based education that emphasizes the long-term development of moral, intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual aspects (Makokha et al., 2020). Catholic education aims to foster the growth of the whole person through spiritual and academic means based on gospel values. It also creates an environment where young people can contribute to the common good and become active members of the faith community and society at large (Francis, 2022). In the teaching of Christian religious education (CRE), the attitudes of both teachers and students have been found to impact its effectiveness. A study by Kasomo (2012) revealed no significant differences

among respondents of different backgrounds in their attitudes towards CRE, suggesting the need for an integrated Religious Education (RE) program to lead students towards religious education.

Research conducted by Othoo and Aseu (2022) found that students' moral development was greatly influenced by Christian religious education (CRE) and the teaching methodologies employed by teachers. The study provided valuable feedback to teachers, encouraging reflection on their teaching methods and their impact on students' character development. In Namibia, Hausiku et al. (2020) assessed the involvement of the Catholic Church in the provision of quality education in public secondary schools, revealing that the church contributes to education by promoting student discipline and providing spiritual and moral guidance to both students and teachers. Conversely, Muthamba (2017) found that moral education was not adequately implemented in Catholic-sponsored secondary schools in Kitui central deanery, highlighting the need to incorporate moral education into both the curriculum and co-curricular activities.

Catholic church-sponsored schools have shown exceptional performance in both academic and non-academic areas (Nduku, Onyancha & Ayiamba, 2016). The Kenya Basic Education Act of 2013 empowers religious sponsors to participate in the appointment of principals and the provision of instructional, financial and infrastructural resources to the schools they sponsor (Osman & Ali, 2019). Guidance and counseling programs in schools play a crucial role in managing discipline by instilling good moral ideals in students. The cultivation of strong moral standards equips students to navigate the challenges of today's highly interactive and technologically advanced society, where face-to-face interactions and media coverage play a significant role (Kay, Muola, & Ondima, 2019).

Overall, the church, particularly Catholic-sponsored schools, plays a significant role in shaping the behavior and character of students. Through the provision of moral guidance, spiritual experiences, role models, community leadership skills, and holistic education, the church contributes to the development of students' moral, social, psychological, and spiritual well-being. However, there is still a need for continuous improvement in implementing moral education programs to ensure their effectiveness and address any existing gaps.

3. Research Methodology

Research methodology refers to the approach used to extract and understand data. It involves the planning, organization, collection, and analysis of data to provide answers to research questions. This chapter presents the research design, target population, sampling strategy, data collection instruments and process, and data analysis.

3.1. Research Method

In the social sciences, two general research methods are commonly used: quantitative and qualitative research. Qualitative research aims to provide a detailed description using words, pictures, or objects, while quantitative research involves classifying features, counting them, and constructing statistical models to explain observations. This study adopts a blended approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Qualitative research, as defined by Denscombe (2003), focuses on understanding the meaning and patterns of behavior. It involves building a complex, holistic picture using words, reporting detailed views from a smaller number of informants, and conducting observations in a natural setting.

3.2. Research Design

Research design encompasses the planning, organization, collection, and analysis of data. In this study, a descriptive survey methodology was employed through a case study approach. A descriptive survey investigates the "what," "how," and "who" of a phenomenon. It allows for the presentation of data using simple statistics, tables, mean scores, percentages, and frequencies. The case study design was used to investigate and collect data in-depth, providing a detailed understanding of occurrences. Through interviews and observation, the researcher examined students' attitudes, views, and experiences related to their interactions with social media.

3.3. Research Site Description

The research was conducted in Murang'a East Sub-County, Kenya. This site was selected due to its high concentration of schools and the convenience for the researcher. The sub-county includes Catholic-sponsored boys' boarding schools, Catholic-sponsored girls' boarding schools, and Catholic-sponsored day secondary schools, providing appropriate data for the research.

3.4. Target Population

The target population for this study consisted of 3,342 students from three Catholic-sponsored secondary schools in Murang'a East Sub-County, Murang'a County, Kenya. Additionally, 30 Young Christian Society (YCS) leaders and 6 key informants were included in the study.

3.5. Sampling Size and Techniques

3.5.1. Sampling Frame

The sampling frame is a list of all members of the population from which a representative sample is drawn. For this study, the sampling frame was a list of students from the three Catholic-sponsored public secondary schools in Murang'a East Sub-County, sourced from the Ministry of Education.

3.5.2. Sampling Technique

A combination of random sampling and quota sampling techniques was used. Quota sampling determined the number of students to be selected from each school based on their class, gender and age. Random sampling was then employed to select respondents from each school. Quota sampling ensures that the sample has the same distribution of characteristics as the population under study. The researcher purposefully selected schools and students based on the required data for the study, using purposive sampling.

The sample size was determined using the appropriate formula (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

3.6. Data Collection Instruments and Process

The data collection instruments used in this study included interview schedules, observation, and questionnaires. The interviews and observations provided an opportunity to gain firsthand insights into students' attitudes and behaviors related to social media. Questionnaires were used to gather data on social media usage patterns, including the platforms used and frequency of usage.

The data collection process involved administering the questionnaires, conducting interviews, and observing participants in their natural settings. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly followed throughout the data collection process.

3.7. Data Analysis

Data analysis will involve organizing, summarizing, and interpreting the collected data. Qualitative data will be analyzed thematically, identifying patterns and themes within the data. Quantitative data will be analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques, such as descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research findings.

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined the research methodology employed in this study. It discussed the research method, research design, research site description, target population, sampling size and techniques, data collection instruments and process, and data analysis. These methodological choices were made to ensure the collection of robust and reliable data for the study.

4. Discussion of Findings

This chapter contains the study's findings, analysis, and interpretation of the data that were collected.

4.1. Role of Church in Shaping Behavior

In an attempt to investigate the role of religion in conserving morals among students, the study asked the students' opinions on the role religion had in overcoming the negative influence of social media on their behavior. Those who thought that religion had helped in maintaining their moral standing were 43%, against 33% who gave a contrary answer (Table 1 and Figure 1).

	Frequency	Percent %
Yes	129	43
No	99	33
Not Sure	72	24
Total	300	100.0

Table 1: Opinion on the Role of Religion in Students' Behavior Change

This indicated that the respondents appreciated the crucial role of the church in protecting morals and values from erosion due to the negative influence of social media.

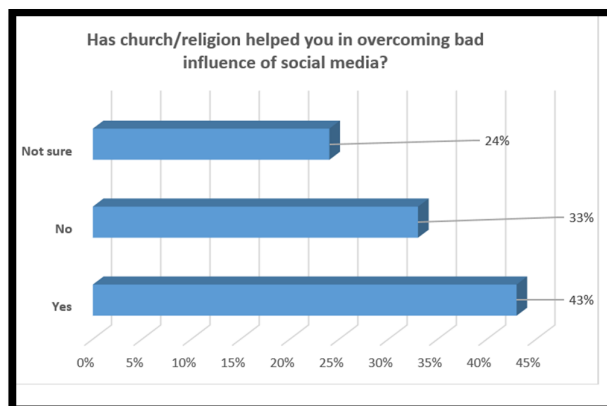


Figure 1: Role of Religion in Maintaining Behavior

The role of religion in shaping and maintaining behavior can be explained in the context of the Divine Command Theory, which postulates that specific behavior is either good or bad based on whether or not it adheres to God's commands. Othoo and Aseu (2022) found that students' moral development was greatly influenced by Christian religious education (CRE). Kay, Muola and Ondima's (2019) guidance and counseling aid in the management of discipline by instilling good moral ideals in students, Kagema (2022), Nduku, Onyancha and Ayiemba (2016), Kamau (2014), Pardini *et al.* (2000) & Wainaina (2007) reached the conclusion that there is a relationship between the role of the church, spirituality, and mental health outcomes and that it should be taught in schools.

The Key Informant's interview sought to invite the informant's opinion on the role of religion in shaping and maintaining behavior of learners.

Q: What is the role of the church in maintaining behavior of students?

A: "The church as a religion helps shape the spiritual awareness of individual students. The catholic church inculcates values and morals that help the students' growth spiritually and academically. The impact of this goal is seen in the high levels of discipline witnessed among Catholic-sponsored schools. Other religious denomination also plays an important role and therefore, one may conclude that religion helps in shaping behavior of learners positively."

The FDGs discussed the importance of religious groups in curbing the adverse effects of social media misuse among students. As included in table 2, the participants posited that the church and other religious groups play a great role in educating and preaching on social media usage. Religion teaches and preaches on how to use social media wisely and linking social media with biblical teachings.

Do you think religious groups are important in curbing the adverse effects of social media misuse?		
Group A	Group B	Group C
<p><i>"The church plays a great role in educating and preaching on social media usage."</i></p> <p><i>"Offering guidance and counseling to the affected students."</i></p> <p><i>"Offering psycho-spiritual counseling to the students."</i></p>	<p><i>"It teaches and preaches on how to use social media wisely."</i></p> <p><i>"It offers counseling to the students."</i></p>	<p><i>"By linking social media with biblical teachings, dangers, and benefits."</i></p> <p><i>"There should be lessons on good use of social media and its negative consequences."</i></p>

Table 2: FGD Discussion Question Five

4.2. The Role of the Church in Behavior Change Due to Social Media

The study explored the role of religion in behavior change among the students. The study concluded that religion helped maintain their moral standing by 43% against 33% who gave contrary answers .The FDGs found out that the church and other religious groups play a great role in educating and preaching on social media usage. Religion helps shape conduct and behavior by advising on how to use social media wisely and linking social media with biblical teachings. As a sponsor, the Catholic Church has a positive and constructive influence on students' lives by providing moral guidance, spiritual experiences, role models, community leadership skills, coping skills, cultural and social capital, and extra-community connections. This promotes developmental maturity while also improving social, moral, spiritual, and academic competencies and understanding, as deduced by Kagema (2021).

On the other hand, Nduku, Onyancha & Ayiemba (2016) found Catholic church-sponsored schools were among the best in academic and non-academic performances. Osman and Ali (2019) also established that religious sponsors participate in the appointment of principals' provision of instructional, financial and infrastructural resources to the schools they sponsor. The finding further had traction with a study by Kay, Muola and Ondima (2019), who concluded that guidance and counseling aid in the management of discipline by instilling good moral ideals in students. In addition, Othoo and Aseu (2022) found that students' moral development was greatly influenced by Christian religious education (CRE) and the methods used by teachers.

The study's result was further compared with Hausiku *et al.* (2020), who revealed that the church was involved in providing education in public secondary schools in the region through, among others, student discipline and providing spiritual and moral guidance to students and teachers. Nduku, Onyancha & Ayiemba (2016) noted that Catholic church-sponsored schools were among the best in academic and non-academic performances. According to Kay, Muola and Ondima (2019), guidance and counseling aid in the management of discipline by instilling good moral ideals in students.

Hunt Jodi (2021) similarly says Cyberbullying is an attack on the dignity of persons. As such, it is one of the most challenging issues of our digital age. However, religious educators can help those who have been bullied to renew their sense of themselves as persons with God-given dignity who are worthy of respect. The Catholic Church recognizes and responds to cyberbullying as a form of violence that hinders personal and spiritual development.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- Strengthen Digital Literacy Programs: Schools should prioritize the implementation of digital literacy programs to educate students about the responsible use of social media. This includes teaching students about online safety, critical thinking skills, and ethical behavior in the digital space.

- **Enhance School Policies:** Schools need to develop and enforce comprehensive policies that regulate social media usage among students. These policies should address issues such as access to inappropriate content, cyberbullying, and excessive use of social media. Clear guidelines and consequences should be established to promote responsible behavior online.
- **Collaborate with Religious Institutions:** Schools should foster partnerships with religious institutions to enhance the role of religion in shaping students' moral values and behavior. Religious organizations can provide guidance and support to students, reinforcing positive values and promoting responsible use of social media.
- **Parental Involvement:** Parents should be actively involved in monitoring their children's social media usage and providing guidance on responsible online behavior. Schools should engage parents through workshops and seminars to educate them about the potential risks and benefits of social media.
- **Continuous Research:** Further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of social media on adolescent behavior change and the effectiveness of interventions such as religious education programs. Continued research will provide valuable insights into emerging trends and inform the development of targeted strategies to address the challenges associated with social media use among students.
- **Policy Development:** The Ministry of Education should develop comprehensive policies and guidelines that address social media usage in schools. These policies should provide a framework for schools to regulate social media access, ensure student safety, and promote positive behavior.
- **Teacher Training:** Teachers should receive training on digital literacy and online safety to effectively guide students in responsible social media use. Professional development programs should be conducted to equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to address the challenges posed by social media.
- **Community Engagement:** Community stakeholders, including religious leaders, parents, and local authorities, should collaborate to create awareness and promote responsible social media use. Community outreach programs can be organized to educate students, parents, and the broader community about the potential risks and benefits of social media.

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the role of the Church in adolescent behavior change amidst social media. The findings highlight the need for comprehensive strategies that address the challenges posed by social media use among students. By promoting responsible social media use, enhancing religious education, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders, schools can effectively shape students' behavior and ensure their holistic development in the digital age.

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