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Social Media Usage Patterns Among Families That Influence Family Cohesion in Uasin-Gishu County, Kenya

Lydia Korir Kemboi

Student, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
Catholic University of East Africa, Kenya

Dr. Mary Mutisia

Lecturer, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
Catholic University of East Africa, Kenya

Dr. Elijah Macharia

Lecturer, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
Catholic University of East Africa, Kenya

Abstract:

This study examined social media usage patterns among families in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya, and their influence on family cohesion. With internet penetration growing significantly in Africa, social media has become a pervasive element in daily life, facilitating communication, content sharing, and networking. This research explored how various social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and others were integrated into family dynamics and their impact on family relationships. The study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, collecting quantitative data through structured questionnaires from 400 respondents aged 15-64 and qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions with key informants. The analysis covered understanding of social media, sources of awareness, usage patterns, purposes of usage, and the impact of social media on family dynamics. Findings indicated that a significant majority (74.2%) of respondents had a complete understanding of social media, with media, personal experience, and school education being the primary sources of awareness. Social media usage was ubiquitous among family members, with platforms like Facebook (19.6%), WhatsApp (18.4%), and YouTube (16.6%) being the most popular. High frequency and duration of usage, particularly on WhatsApp and Facebook, highlighted their importance in maintaining daily interactions and family connections. The primary purposes for social media usage were entertainment (40.72%), socialization (39.90%), and information sharing (29.33%). The hypothesis tested was that there was no relationship between the usage of social media within the family set up by respondents and the patterns of social media adopted. Several statistical tests were conducted, including Chi-Square, Pearson Correlation, Spearman Correlation, and Independent Samples T-Tests. The Chi-Square Test showed a Pearson Chi-Square value of 48.783 with 48 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.441, indicating no significant association ($p > 0.05$). The Pearson correlation coefficient was 0.056 with a p-value of 0.213, the Spearman correlation coefficient was 0.062 with a p-value of 0.198, and the Independent Samples T-Test showed a mean score of 3.56 ($SD = 0.89$) for families that used social media and 3.49 ($SD = 0.92$) for those that did not, with a t-value of 0.84 and a p-value of 0.402. These tests all indicated no significant relationship between family social media usage and social media usage patterns. These findings suggested that individual social media habits were influenced more by personal or external factors rather than family practices. The theoretical implications of this study demonstrated the applicability of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and Social Exchange Theory (SET) in understanding social media usage patterns among families in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. UGT explained the diverse motivations behind social media use, highlighting the pursuit of entertainment, socialization, and information. SET provided a framework for understanding how families balanced the benefits and costs associated with social media usage to enhance family cohesion. Together, these theories offered a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics of social media use within family contexts, emphasizing the need for strategies to maximize benefits and manage conflicts effectively. The study concluded that while social media played a significant role in family life, its usage patterns did not significantly influence family cohesion. Recommendations included enhancing digital literacy, promoting balanced usage, addressing conflicts, supporting positive engagement, and conducting further research to explore the nuanced factors influencing social media usage and family dynamics. These findings provided a comprehensive understanding of social media usage patterns among families in Uasin Gishu County and offered valuable insights for promoting healthy and balanced digital engagement within familial contexts.

Keywords: Social media usage, family cohesion, digital literacy, uses and gratifications theory and social exchange theory

1. Introduction

Social media has been widely adopted in various regions of the world, including Africa, where internet penetration has grown significantly in recent years. Social media encompasses a diverse range of platforms that facilitate online interaction, content sharing, and networking. Among the prominent kinds of social media are social networking sites, microblogging platforms, multimedia-sharing platforms, and messaging applications. Social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, serve as virtual spaces where users can create profiles, connect with others, and share a variety of content. Scholars like Ellison and Boyd (2013) have extensively studied the impact of social networking sites on interpersonal relationships, emphasizing the role of these platforms in shaping identity and fostering social connections. Microblogging platforms, exemplified by Twitter, enable users to share short and concise messages with a wide audience. Research by Java et al. (2007) and Honeycutt and Herring (2009) have explored the dynamics of information dissemination and interaction on microblogging platforms, emphasizing the real-time nature of communication and its impact on social discourse. Multimedia-sharing platforms, including Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat, focus on the sharing of visual content, such as images and videos. Recent studies by Dhir et al. (2018) and Tossell et al. (2012) have delved into the influence of multimedia-sharing platforms on self-presentation, user engagement, and the formation of virtual communities. Messaging applications, like WhatsApp and Telegram, provide private and group communication channels. The work of DeSmet and Chandler (2016) and van Dijck and Poell (2016) explore the evolving nature of private messaging apps, emphasizing their role in shaping interpersonal communication and privacy concerns.

The impact of social media on family cohesion has been a focal point of contemporary research. Globally, social media use has grown rapidly over the past decade, with an estimated 4.2 billion social media users worldwide in 2021 (Statista, 2021). Social media platforms allow people to connect and share information. Numerous studies have explored this relationship on a global scale. Social media enhances communication, emotional support, and a sense of belongingness, thereby positively affecting family cohesion (Lee & Robbins, 2015; Lin & Utz, 2015). For instance, social media platforms can provide a space for family members to communicate and stay in touch. Social media enables families to share experiences and photos with each other, which fosters a sense of belongingness and strengthens the emotional bond between family members (Lin & Utz, 2015). Studies have recorded that social media can help family members stay in touch despite geographical distances, promote shared interests, and provide emotional support during times of stress or crisis (Pew Research Center, 2018).

From a European perspective, social media usage has been shown to enhance family communication and emotional support. For example, Chassiakos et al. (2011) proved that social media provides a space for family members and enhances their emotional connection and sense of belonging. Similarly, a study by Lee and Robbins (2015) found that social media platforms can also facilitate shared experiences and expressions of emotions among family members.

From North American perspectives, recent studies have explored social media usage and family cohesion. For instance, a study conducted by Chang and colleagues (2021) found that social media usage can enhance family communication. However, excessive use can lead to decreased face-to-face interaction, which can negatively impact family cohesion. Pantic (2020) showed that social media can provide a space for emotional support, but overuse can lead to addiction and mental health issues. A study by Huang and colleagues (2021) also found that social media can enhance family communication, but too much usage can lead to negative effects on mental health and family relationships. Moreover, a study by Enez Darcin and colleagues (2021) revealed that social media usage can positively impact family communication and cohesion. However, excessive usage can cause a lack of face-to-face communication. Similarly, a study by Hadiwijaya and colleagues (2021) showed that social media usage can promote family communication. However, it can also lead to negative consequences, such as addiction and reduced face-to-face interactions.

From the Asian perspective, some studies have shown that social media can enhance communication and provide a platform for family members to share their experiences and emotions, which can improve family cohesion (Kaur & Kaur, 2021; Sun & Wu, 2018). However, excessive social media usage can lead to reduced face-to-face communication, which is an obstacle to the development of close relationships, negatively impacting family cohesion (Jung & Lee, 2018; Liu & Zhang, 2020). Bae & Lee, 2020; Tan, Lee, & Lim, 2018, found that social media leads to addiction, which can result in reduced face-to-face interactions and negatively impact family cohesion. Additionally, social media can provide a space for family conflicts to be played out publicly, which can damage family relationships (Lam, 2018). In contrast, other studies found the effect of social media on family cohesion varies depending on cultural factors, for instance, in collectivistic cultures like those found in many parts of Asia (Sun & Wu, 2018).

In Africa, the rise of social media usage has been significant throughout the years. According to the African Development Bank (2021), internet penetration in Africa has grown from 2.1% in 2005 to 24.6% in 2020, and social media usage has increased in parallel. In Africa, social media use has also been on the rise, with an estimated 190 million social media users in 2021 (Statista, 2021). This growth in social media usage has the potential to impact family cohesion, which is of particular concern in Africa, where strong family ties are culturally valued. On the positive side, social media has been found to provide a means for family members to communicate and stay in touch, especially when they are geographically dispersed. Ademiluyi and Odigie (2020) conducted a study that specifically concentrated on examining how social media platforms impact family dynamics in Ghana, West Africa. The findings from their research indicated that social media significantly contributes to the cultivation of family connections, facilitating ongoing communication and sharing experiences among family members. Additionally, their study underscored the crucial role of social media in offering emotional support and fostering a sense of belonging within the family unit. This becomes particularly noteworthy during difficult periods, such as instances of stress or crisis. In a related vein, the research landscape on the impact of social media on family dynamics includes notable contributions from Okoli and Pawlowski (2014) and Owoeye and Adekunle (2019),

offering insights from diverse geographical contexts and research topics. Okoli and Pawlowski's study, conducted in Nigeria, delved into the multifaceted role of social media in family life. Their findings highlighted the positive effects of social media, elucidating its capacity to strengthen family bonds, provide emotional support, and enhance a sense of belongingness among family members. Similarly, Owoeye and Adekunle (2019) undertook a research initiative exploring the influence of social media on family cohesion, focusing specifically on the context of Nigeria. Their study emphasized the pivotal role of social media platforms in fostering familial connections, enabling shared experiences, and facilitating ongoing communication. The findings underscored the positive impact of social media in offering emotional support, especially during challenging periods like stress or crisis.

In the Kenyan context, social media platforms are a substantial element of communication in many Kenyan families. A study by Amollo (2018) found that social media could lead to the breakdown of traditional family roles, which could negatively affect family cohesion. Positive effects include increased communication and sharing of experiences, while negative effects include addiction and reduced face-to-face communication. A study by Kiprop and Khatibi (2019) found that cultural beliefs and values influenced how social media was used among families in Kenya. Moreover, as social media becomes increasingly integrated into daily life, family social workers need to understand its impact on family relationships and cohesion. This understanding can help them develop appropriate interventions and support systems to help families navigate the challenges posed by social media use. Kenya's Rift Valley county, Uasin Gishu, has 1.2 million residents (KNBS, 2019). The county has a high penetration rate of social media, with an estimated 1.7 million internet users as of 2021 (Kemp, 2021), despite the limited research on social media usage and family cohesion in Uasin Gishu County specifically. A study conducted in Nairobi (Mutuku & Ndambuki, 2021) found that social media usage could lead to addiction and a lack of face-to-face communication, which could negatively impact family cohesion. Owuor et al., 2020 recorded that social media provided a space for family members to communicate and stay in touch, promoting a sense of closeness and belongingness, which is essential for family cohesion.

Despite the wealth of research examining the global, regional, and even national implications of social media usage on family dynamics, a critical gap existed in understanding the localized impact within Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. While the literature indicated the positive and negative consequences of social media on family cohesion, there was a conspicuous absence of research investigating how these dynamics manifested in a specific Kenyan context. With Uasin Gishu County boasting a notable internet penetration rate and a growing population of social media users, there was an urgent need to bridge this gap and explore the nuanced ways in which social media has shaped family relationships in this particular region. This study aimed to address this void by scrutinizing the intricacies of social media use within Uasin Gishu County, shedding light on its unique challenges and opportunities for family cohesion in a Kenyan context.

1.1. Research Objective

- To examine the social media usage patterns among families that influence family cohesion in Uasin-Gishu County, Kenya.

1.2. Research Question

- What were the social media usage patterns among families that influenced family cohesion in Uasin-Gishu County, Kenya?

1.3. Research Hypothesis

- There was no relationship between the usage of social media within families and patterns of social media usage.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation for this study was based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and the Social Exchange Theory (SET). UGT posited that individuals actively sought media to satisfy specific needs and desires (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). In the context of social media usage, this theory suggested that family members used social media to fulfill various needs such as communication, entertainment, and information seeking. These gratifications influenced how social media impacted family cohesion.

Additionally, SET provided a useful lens for understanding the reciprocal nature of social media interactions within families. SET posited that social behavior was the result of an exchange process aiming to maximize benefits and minimize costs (Homans, 1958). Within families, social media use could be seen as a form of social exchange where members weigh the benefits of enhanced communication and connection against the costs of potential conflicts and reduced face-to-face interactions.

These theories helped frame the investigation of how different patterns of social media usage—such as frequency, content type, and interaction style—affected family cohesion. By examining these patterns through the lenses of UGT and SET, this study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between social media use and family dynamics in Uasin-Gishu County.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were collected through surveys targeting individuals aged 15-64 in Uasin-Gishu County,

focusing on social media usage patterns and their perceived impact on family cohesion. Qualitative data were gathered through interviews and focus group discussions with key informants, including family counselors and community leaders, to gain deeper insights into the nuances of social media's influence on family dynamics.

3.2. Study Area and Population

The study was conducted in Uasin-Gishu County, comprising six sub-counties: Ainabkoi, Kapseret, Kesses, Moiben, Soy, and Turbo. The target population included individuals aged 15-64 who owned a mobile phone and had regular internet access, estimated to be around 750,660 based on the 2019 census data (KNBS, 2019).

3.3. Sampling Procedure

A combination of purposive, cluster, and simple random sampling techniques was used to ensure a representative sample. The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula, resulting in a total of 400 respondents. Each sub-county's sample size was proportionate to its population within the target age group.

3.4. Data Collection Methods

Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires with a 5-point Likert scale to capture respondents' attitudes and opinions on social media usage and family cohesion. Qualitative data were collected through key informant interviews and focus group discussions, providing contextual depth and enriching the study findings.

3.4. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, employing chi-square tests and regression analysis to identify patterns and correlations. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically, using Nvivo to code and group responses into relevant themes.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and the protection of vulnerable populations. Ethical approval was obtained from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa and NACOSTI.

4. Findings and Interpretations

This section presents the findings from the study on social media usage patterns among families in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya, and their influence on family cohesion. The analysis covers various aspects, such as understanding social media, sources of awareness, usage patterns, purposes of usage, and the impact of social media on family dynamics. By examining these elements, we gain a comprehensive understanding of how social media shapes family interactions and relationships within this context. Additionally, comparisons with findings from other studies provide a broader perspective on the observed trends.

4.1. Understanding Social Media among Respondents

A significant majority (74.2%) of respondents reported a complete understanding of social media, indicating a high level of familiarity and comfort with the term. This suggests that social media is well-integrated into their daily lives and communication practices. However, 25.8% of respondents indicated only a partial understanding, highlighting the variability in digital literacy levels and the need for targeted educational initiatives to bridge these gaps. Similar findings were reported by the Pew Research Center (2018), which found high levels of social media comprehension among younger and middle-aged adults, reflecting its widespread integration into daily life.

4.2. Sources of Awareness and Knowledge Regarding Social Media

The primary sources of awareness and knowledge regarding social media within families were media and news (38.31%), followed by personal experience (34.10%) and school education (17.62%). Media and news play a crucial role in shaping public discourse and disseminating information about social media, influencing perceptions and behaviors. Personal experiences significantly contribute to shaping individuals' understanding of social media, reflecting their direct interactions with these platforms. School education emerged as an essential source, emphasizing the role of formal education in fostering digital literacy. Peer influence, parental guidance, and professional guidance were less prominent, suggesting areas for potential enhancement in digital literacy programs. These findings align with research by Livingstone and Helsper (2007), which highlighted the significant role of media exposure in influencing digital literacy and online behavior.

4.3. Social Media Usage by Family Members

The study found that social media usage is ubiquitous among family members, with all respondents indicating that at least one family member uses social media. This widespread adoption underscores the integral role of social media in modern family structures. The universal acceptance of social media highlights its significance in facilitating communication, information exchange, and social connections within households. This finding is consistent with Lenhart et al. (2015), which showed that social media usage is nearly ubiquitous among teens and adults in the U.S., emphasizing its role in maintaining familial connections and communication.

4.4. Platforms Utilized by Family Members

Among the social media platforms used by family members, Facebook (19.6%), WhatsApp (18.4%), and YouTube (16.6%) emerged as the most popular. These platforms are widely adopted for their capabilities in social networking, instant messaging, and content sharing. The findings reflect the diverse array of platforms embraced within familial settings, each catering to different communication needs and preferences. Other platforms like TikTok (15.4%), Instagram (9.6%), and Snapchat (7.2%) also showed notable usage, indicating varied engagement across different demographics within families. These findings are consistent with global trends reported by Statista (2020), which identified Facebook and WhatsApp as leading platforms for social interaction.

4.5. Frequency of Social Media Platform Usage

The frequency of social media platform usage varied among family members, with WhatsApp and Facebook being the most frequently used. For example, 49.3% of family members used Facebook very often, and 35.25% used WhatsApp very often. These platforms play a central role in maintaining daily interactions and staying connected within family networks. The high frequency of usage underscores their importance in facilitating continuous communication and engagement among family members. In contrast, platforms like Twitter, Telegram, and Snapchat showed lower engagement, highlighting different preferences and usage patterns. Duggan et al. (2015) similarly found that frequent use of social media platforms is common for maintaining family ties and social interactions.

4.6. Duration of Social Media Usage

Regarding the duration of social media usage, WhatsApp and Facebook were the platforms with the highest daily usage durations. For instance, 28.75% of respondents spent more than seven hours daily on WhatsApp, and 16.5% spent more than seven hours on Facebook. These findings indicate that these platforms are heavily relied upon for communication and interaction within families. The extensive usage durations suggest that social media is a cornerstone of daily routines and familial interactions. Conversely, platforms like YouTube and TikTok showed varied usage durations, reflecting diverse engagement levels. Kross et al. (2013) found that extended social media usage can have both positive and negative effects on well-being, highlighting the need for balanced engagement.

4.7. Purpose of Social Media Usage

The primary purposes for social media usage within families were entertainment (40.72%), socialization (39.90%), and information sharing (29.33%). These findings emphasize the multifaceted roles that social media plays in family life, from providing leisure and amusement to facilitating interpersonal connections and information exchange. Additionally, social media is used for academic support (15.71%) and business networking (13.99%), highlighting its practical functions within family dynamics. Vitak (2012) also identified entertainment and socialization as key drivers of social media use, underscoring its role in enhancing social connections and providing leisure activities.

4.8. Personal Social Media Usage Patterns

A significant majority (93.75%) of respondents reported engaging in personal social media usage within their family settings. This high level of engagement indicates that social media is deeply integrated into daily familial interactions. The findings suggest that social media serves as a primary conduit for maintaining personal connections and sharing information within families. However, a minority of respondents (6.25%) indicated not using social media personally, reflecting diverse preferences and potential concerns regarding digital connectivity and privacy. Chen and Lee (2013) highlighted that social media has become a critical component of personal and family communication, significantly enhancing connectivity and information exchange.

4.9. Frequency of Usage across Various Social Media Platforms

The study revealed diverse usage patterns across different social media platforms. While WhatsApp (39.25% very often) and Facebook (24.5% very often) emerged as the most frequently used platforms, other platforms like YouTube (4% very often), TikTok (14.75% very often), and Instagram (5.25% very often) showed varied engagement levels. These findings reflect the complex landscape of social media usage, with different platforms catering to specific interests and communication styles. Understanding these patterns is crucial for fostering meaningful digital interactions and promoting balanced social media usage within families. Smith and Anderson (2018) emphasized the commonality of frequent social media use among adults to sustain social connections.

4.10. Duration of Usage across Various Social Media Platforms

The analysis of the duration of social media usage across various platforms revealed significant engagement with WhatsApp and Facebook. WhatsApp had a mean duration of 4.31 hours daily, while Facebook had a mean duration of 3.51 hours. These platforms are integral to daily communication and information sharing within families. However, the duration of usage varied across other platforms, reflecting different levels of interest and engagement. For example, YouTube had a mean duration of 2.61 hours, and TikTok had a mean duration of 2.78 hours. These insights highlight the need for tailored approaches to understanding and managing digital behaviors within family contexts. Twenge et al. (2018) found similar patterns, with prolonged use of social media platforms common among adults for both personal and professional activities.

4.11. General Frequency of Usage of Social Media by Respondents

The general frequency of social media usage among respondents within their family settings was high, with 33.75% using social media very often and 37% using it often. This high frequency of use underscores the central role of social media in daily family life, facilitating continuous interaction and connectivity. The findings highlight the importance of promoting healthy digital habits to balance online and offline interactions within families. Madden et al. (2013) also found that social media is a central component of daily life for many families, facilitating continuous interaction and connectivity.

4.12. General Daily Duration of Social Media Usage among Respondents

A significant portion (47.5%) of respondents reported using social media for more than three hours daily within their families. This extensive usage suggests that social media is deeply embedded in daily routines and familial interactions. These findings underscore the need for strategies to promote responsible social media usage and mitigate potential negative impacts associated with excessive usage. Valkenburg et al. (2017) highlighted the extensive use of social media among families for communication and entertainment purposes.

4.13. Purpose of Social Media Usage among Respondents

Entertainment (26.83%) and socialization (23.44%) were identified as the primary purposes for social media usage among respondents within their families. These findings are consistent with previous research, highlighting the role of social media in enhancing social connections and providing leisure activities. Additionally, social media is used for information sharing (22.56%), academic support (14.24%), and business networking (12.92%), reflecting its diverse functionalities within family dynamics. Vitak (2012) also identified these factors as key drivers of social media use.

4.14. Experienced Conflict with Family Members Due to Social Media Usage

A significant majority (93.75%) of respondents reported experiencing conflict with family members due to social media usage. These conflicts often arise from differences in usage habits, privacy concerns, and disagreements over content shared on social media platforms. Understanding these conflicts is crucial for promoting healthy communication practices and fostering positive relationships within families. Esposito and Talamo (2019) linked excessive social media usage to higher levels of family conflict, highlighting the need for balanced digital engagement.

5. Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis tested in this study was that there is no relationship between the usage of social media within the family set up by respondents and the patterns of social media adopted. To examine this hypothesis, several statistical tests were conducted, including Chi-Square tests, Pearson Correlation, Spearman Correlation, and Independent Sample T-tests. The Chi-Square Test was employed to examine the relationship between the usage of social media within families and the patterns of social media usage. The test results indicated a Pearson Chi-Square value of 48.783 with 48 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.441. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the association between the variables is not statistically significant. This suggests that the observed patterns of social media usage do not differ significantly between families that use social media and those that do not. The lack of a significant relationship implies that factors other than the family environment may more strongly influence social media usage patterns. This finding aligns with Smith et al. (2016), who reported minimal impact of family environment on social media usage patterns among adolescents. However, this contrasts with Brown & Lee (2018), who found a stronger influence of family practices on social media habits.

Pearson correlation was used to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between the usage of social media within families and the different patterns of social media usage. The correlation coefficient (r) was found to be 0.056 with a significance level (p-value) of 0.213, which is not statistically significant. This indicates a weak and non-significant relationship between family social media usage and social media usage patterns, suggesting that the variability in social media usage patterns cannot be explained by whether families use social media together or not. This finding is consistent with Davis and McCrae (2017), who also reported weak correlations between family media practices and individual social media usage patterns, highlighting the limited influence of family social media practices on individual behavior.

Spearman correlation, a non-parametric test, was used to examine the relationship between the ordinal variables of social media usage within families and patterns of usage. The Spearman correlation coefficient (ρ) was 0.062 with a p-value of 0.198, which is not statistically significant. Similar to the Pearson correlation, the Spearman correlation indicates a weak and non-significant relationship between the variables, reinforcing the conclusion that family usage of social media does not strongly predict social media usage patterns. These results align with Roberts and Morrison (2019), who found no significant correlation between family media use and individual usage patterns, emphasizing that individual factors might play a more substantial role in determining social media usage patterns.

An Independent Samples T-Test was conducted to compare the mean patterns of social media usage between families that use social media and those that do not. The mean score for families using social media was 3.56 (SD = 0.89), while the mean score for families not using social media was 3.49 (SD = 0.92). The t-value was 0.84 with a p-value of 0.402, indicating no significant difference between the groups. The T-Test results suggest that the patterns of social media usage are similar regardless of whether families use social media together. This supports the conclusion that family social media practices do not significantly impact individual usage patterns. This finding is in line with Greenfield and Yan (2015), who reported no significant differences in social media usage patterns based on family media practices.

Based on the inferential analyses conducted, including the Chi-Square Test, Pearson and Spearman correlations, and Independent Samples T-Test, it is clear that there is no significant relationship between the usage of social media within families and patterns of social media usage. These findings suggest that individual social media habits are influenced more by personal or external factors rather than family practices. This conclusion is supported by similar results from previous studies, such as those by Smith et al. (2016), Davis and McCrae (2017), Roberts and Morrison (2019), and Greenfield and Yan (2015), reinforcing the notion that the family environment may have a limited impact on how social media is used by its members.

6. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1. Summary

This study explored social media usage patterns among families in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya, and their influence on family cohesion. The analysis focused on various aspects, such as understanding social media, sources of awareness, usage patterns, purposes of usage, and the impact of social media on family dynamics.

The findings indicate that a significant majority of respondents (74.2%) have a complete understanding of social media, reflecting its integration into their daily lives. Media and news (38.31%), personal experience (34.10%), and school education (17.62%) emerged as the primary sources of social media awareness within families. Social media usage is ubiquitous among family members, with platforms like Facebook (19.6%), WhatsApp (18.4%), and YouTube (16.6%) being the most popular.

The frequency of usage revealed that WhatsApp and Facebook are the most frequently used platforms within families, with 49.3% of family members using Facebook very often and 35.25% using WhatsApp very often. The duration of usage showed that 28.75% of respondents spent more than seven hours daily on WhatsApp, and 16.5% spent more than seven hours on Facebook.

The primary purposes of social media usage within families were entertainment (40.72%), socialization (39.90%), and information sharing (29.33%). A significant majority (93.75%) of respondents reported engaging in personal social media usage within their family settings. The general frequency of social media usage among respondents within their family settings was high, with 33.75% using social media very often and 37% using it often. Additionally, 47.5% of respondents reported using social media for more than three hours daily within their families.

Despite the widespread usage, 93.75% of respondents reported experiencing conflict with family members due to social media usage, often stemming from differences in usage habits, privacy concerns, and disagreements over content shared on social media platforms.

The hypothesis tested in the study was that there is no relationship between the usage of social media within the family set up by respondents and the patterns of social media adopted. Various statistical tests, including Chi-Square, Pearson Correlation, Spearman Correlation, and Independent Samples T-Test, indicated no significant relationship between the variables.

6.2. Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that social media usage is deeply integrated into family life in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. While the understanding and use of social media are widespread, the patterns of social media usage are not significantly influenced by whether families use social media together or not. Individual social media habits are more strongly influenced by personal or external factors rather than family practices.

The study highlights the diverse roles that social media plays in family life, from providing entertainment and facilitating socialization to supporting academic and business activities. However, the high incidence of conflicts related to social media usage underscores the need for families to navigate digital boundaries and promote healthy communication practices.

6.3. Recommendations

- **Enhance Digital Literacy:** Given the variability in understanding social media, targeted educational initiatives should be implemented to bridge digital literacy gaps. Schools and community programs can play a crucial role in fostering comprehensive digital literacy.
- **Promote Balanced Usage:** Families should be encouraged to balance online and offline interactions to mitigate potential negative impacts associated with excessive social media usage. This could involve setting clear boundaries for screen time and promoting offline family activities.
- **Address Conflicts:** Strategies should be developed to manage and resolve conflicts arising from social media usage within families. Open communication and setting mutual expectations regarding social media use can help in reducing tensions.
- **Support Positive Engagement:** Encourage the use of social media for constructive purposes such as academic support and business networking. Educational programs can provide guidance on leveraging social media for personal and professional growth.
- **Further Research:** Additional research is needed to explore the nuanced factors influencing social media usage patterns and their impact on family dynamics. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into the evolving nature of digital interactions within families.

Overall, the findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of social media usage patterns among families in Uasin Gishu County and offer valuable insights for promoting healthy and balanced digital engagement within familial contexts.

7. Theoretical Implications

The study on social media usage patterns among families in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya, and their influence on family cohesion have significant theoretical implications, particularly in relation to the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and Social Exchange Theory (SET). The findings provide valuable insights into how these theories apply within the context of digital communication and family dynamics in this region.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) suggests that individuals actively select media to fulfill specific needs and achieve desired gratifications. The study's findings support the applicability of UGT in understanding social media usage among families in Uasin Gishu County. The primary purpose for social media usage among family members was entertainment, with 40.72% of respondents highlighting this as a key reason. This aligns with UGT's assertion that media use is driven by the need for entertainment and relaxation. Platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube are popular for accessing videos, memes, and other entertaining content, demonstrating that families use social media for enjoyment and leisure.

Additionally, social media is used for socialization, as reported by 39.90% of respondents. This supports UGT's perspective that media serves as a tool for social interaction and relationship maintenance. Social media platforms facilitate communication with friends and families, allowing users to stay connected and engage in meaningful interactions, which is crucial for maintaining family cohesion by bridging physical distances and busy schedules.

Social media is also used for information sharing (29.33%) and academic support (15.71%), further underscoring UGT's relevance. Families utilize social media to exchange news, updates, and educational resources, satisfying their informational needs. This reflects the active role users play in seeking out content that fulfills their intellectual and practical requirements. The findings indicate that social media usage within families in Uasin Gishu County is driven by a variety of gratifications, including entertainment, socialization, and information, aligning well with the core principles of UGT.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) posits that social behavior is the result of an exchange process aimed at maximizing benefits and minimizing costs. The findings from this study also support the application of SET in understanding social media usage patterns and their impact on family cohesion. Families in Uasin Gishu County experience several benefits from social media usage, including enhanced communication, emotional support, and a sense of belonging. The high frequency and duration of social media use, particularly on platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook, highlight the perceived rewards of staying connected and engaged with family members. These benefits contribute to stronger family bonds and improved cohesion, aligning with SET's notion of maximizing positive outcomes.

Despite the benefits, social media usage also incurs certain costs, such as conflicts and privacy concerns. The study found that 93.75% of respondents experienced conflicts due to social media usage within the family. These conflicts often arise from differences in usage habits, disagreements over content, and issues related to digital privacy. According to SET, individuals weigh these costs against the benefits when deciding how to engage with social media. The presence of conflicts indicates that while social media offers significant advantages, it also poses challenges that need to be managed to maintain family cohesion.

The findings suggest that families engage in a continuous process of balancing the costs and benefits of social media usage. For many, the benefits of enhanced communication and social support outweigh the potential drawbacks, leading to sustained and frequent use of social media platforms. This balance is critical in determining the overall impact of social media on family cohesion, as families strive to maximize the positive aspects while mitigating the negative ones.

The theoretical implications of this study demonstrate the applicability of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and Social Exchange Theory (SET) in understanding social media usage patterns among families in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. UGT explains the diverse motivations behind social media use, highlighting the pursuit of entertainment, socialization, and information. SET provides a framework for understanding how families balance the benefits and costs associated with social media usage to enhance family cohesion. Together, these theories offer a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics of social media use within family contexts, emphasizing the need for strategies to maximize benefits and manage conflicts effectively.

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