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Social Networking Sites and Their Influence on the Self Esteem of Adolescents in Embu County, Kenya

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Abstract
As technology improves and advances, social networking sites have an even bigger impact on society and human relationships, both positive and negative. Social networking sites have influence on teenagers in the way they develop socially. The way teenagers are connected to these global SNSs is both a frightening prospect for parents and educators and an intriguing area for social science research. Further there is no comprehensive knowledge of the activities adolescents do on these sites as well as how they impact their social life. This study therefore sought to specifically investigate the influence of social networking sites on the self-esteem of adolescents in secondary schools in Embu County Kenya. The researcher adopted a descriptive survey design. The target population of the respondents for this research was secondary school students and teachers in Embu County. Random sampling technique was used to select five boarding schools for the study sample. From each school, fifteen students and three teachers was selected for each unit of analysis to make a total sample of one fifty students and 15 teachers selected from the target population. The data collection instruments designed for the researches were questionnaires, Rosenberg self-esteem scale, and interview schedules. The questionnaires and Rosenberg self-esteem scale was designed for the students while interview guides were for teachers. Data collected was analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). The study concluded that almost all the students use social network sites, therefore that social networking is very common among students who are in secondary schools. Facebook topped the list of the most common social site used by secondary schools students. The study further concludes that various students have different motivation for visiting the social networking sites. The study further concluded that social networking influence the self-esteem and psychological wellbeing of secondary school student. The study recommends that secondary schools students should be given guidance and counseling on how to positively utilize the social networking sites to their advantage and not to have a negative impact on their self-esteem.

Keywords: Social Networking Sites, Self-esteem, Psychological well-being.

Introduction

The increased use of Social Networking sites has become an international phenomenon in the past several years. What started out as a hobby for some computer literate people has become a social norm and way of life for people from all over the world (Boyd, 2007). Further Boyd points out that teenagers and young adults have especially embraced these sites as a way to connect with their peers, share information, reinvent their personalities, and showcase their social lives.

Boyd (2007) defines Social Networking Site as a web-based service that allows individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. Such SNSs are websites such as MySpace, Facebook, whatsApp, Skype, and Twitter among others. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site (Dothan & Boyd, 2009).

Emerging studies have found that teenagers spend a considerable portion of their daily life interacting through social media. Subsequently, questions and controversies have emerged about the influence these SNSs have on adolescents' social development. According to Pew Reports in 2007, 87% of American teens aged 12-17 are using the Internet (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). An average U.S. teenager, aged 12-17, use the Internet and applications about 24 hours and 54 minutes per month (Nielsen Company, 2009). More specifically, online social networks and blogs represent the sites most frequented by adolescents. The Nielson Company further reported that in May 2009 nearly half of U.S. adolescents visited MySpace and Facebook (45% and 44%, respectively). According to the same study, 67% of teen social networkers reported updating their online profiles at least once a week and 57% of adolescents use their online communities as a means of acquiring advice on important issues in their lives and as a forum for expression of thoughts and feelings, a practice that distinguishes them from other social networkers.

Kenya is one of Africa's fastest growing internet markets with internet penetration increasing from 7.5 % in 2006 to 28 % in 2011. There were 14.032 million internet users at the end of the June 2012 quarter. Much of this growth can be attributed to increases in mobile internet connections, and intensified promotions on social media applications by mobile operators (Nielsen Company, 2009).

Social networking Sites in Kenya is one that has achieved a rising popularity in the whole of Kenya with children from the ages as young as six and above accessing the internet (Boyd & Ellison, 2011). Despite the outcry that is intending to stop children from accessing the social networking sites an increase of the same is being recorded. Kenyans have unrestricted access to the social-networking sites such as Facebook, twitter, Skype, whatsApp, the video-sharing site YouTube, and the blog-hosting site Blogger. According to social media metrics tracker Social Baker, Kenya has 2,018,560 Facebook users, representing 5.04 % of the total population, and 19.24 %of the online population. The largest age group on Facebook in Kenya is the 18-24 year-old group and there are more male users than female users.

In 2011, a nationally representative survey conducted by InterMedia in Kenya found that while very few children and young people between the ages of 15 to 17 had internet access in their households or a personal computer, three quarters reported having a mobile phone in their household and close to half had a personal mobile phone a factor which has made most Kenyans access the service. Because of this, social networking numbers continue to grow with user participation influencing future trends in communications (Boyd & Ellison, 2011). Therefore, if each subsequent generation of adolescents were to devote more and more time to online activities on these social networking sites, it would appear to weaken the ability of adolescents to engage in meaningful, face-to-face interaction.

Purpose of the research study

The research project focus was to investigate the adolescents' activities in social networking sites and how they influence their social development in terms of self-esteem and psychological well-being in Embu County secondary schools. The view was to draw conclusions and policy implications for mitigation in helping adolescents on how to develop positively socially.

Research question

Do adolescents' activities in social networking sites influence their social development in terms of self-esteem and psychological well-being?

Methodology

Research design

A research design is the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure (Kothari, 2004). This research adopted a descriptive survey design whereby data was collected at one point in time by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals in the study (Orodho, 2004). He further defines this type of research design as that method which involves collecting information about people's opinions, habits and attitudes about particular social or education issue in order to determine the current status of that population with respect to one or more variables. Information is obtained from a sample rather than the entire population at one point in time which may range from a few days to a few weeks.

Descriptive survey design was chosen for this research because it is investigative and focuses on people's opinions, habits and attitudes on a particular variable factor. It is also analytical and often singles out a variable factor or individual subject and goes into details and describing them.Finally, since research involved lot of cost implications, this research design was therefore deliberately being selected for the research design because it allowed for quick data collection at a comparatively cheap cost.

Location of the study

The location of the study was Embu County in Kenya. Embu County has five sub counties: Embu west with 28 schools, Embu North with 24 schools, Embu East with 38 schools, Mbeere North with 40 schools and Mbeere South with 50 schools. The selection criterion for the study location was because most schools within the county are boarding schools having students coming from different backgrounds and therefore ideal for the study topic. Embu County is located about 190 km from Nairobi city, Kenya on the lower eastern part of the country. It is bordered by Kirinyaga County and Tharaka Nithi County.

Target population

Target population refers to the entire group that is of interest to the researcher with purpose to undertake study (Orodho, 2004). The target population of the respondents for this research was secondary school students and teachers in Embu County. This research focused on five boarding secondary schools in Embu County. The five schools were selected from the five sub counties within the county where one schools was taken from each sub county to make five schools. The five schools have an approximate student population of 2000 and 90 teachers. These schools were chosen because they have students coming from different backgrounds and may provide wide information necessary for this study. The students to be sampled were from all classes in each school.

Sampling techniques and sample size

Sampling is the process or technique of selecting a number of individuals for a study in such a way that the individuals selected represent the large group from which they were selected (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).The purpose of sampling is to secure a representative group which will enable the researcher to gain the information about a population. In this study, the researcher understood that the population from which samples are to be drawn does not constitute a homogeneous group. This is because different schools have students from different backgrounds.
Probability sampling design was selected for this study. This is sampling where people, things or places are randomly selected and each unit in population has an equal chance to be selected (Orodho, 2004). This sampling was chosen because it gives every member of the population equal chances to be included in the study.

Under probability sampling, simple random sampling was employed. This is because the random samples selected yield research data that was generalized to a larger population within margins of error that will be determined statistically (Orodho, 2004). Under random assignment technique, the

researcher selected a random sample of five schools from the target population. Simple random sampling was used to select students from the five schools. Out of the five schools selected two were boys' schools, two were girl's school while the other one was a mixed school. Simple random sampling was used to select three teachers from each school to participate in the study through interview. Each member of the sampled schools becomes a unit of observation or analysis. The goal of the researcher was to achieve desired representation from various subgroups in the target population while at the same time giving each subject in the population equal chances of being included in the final sample of the study.

Sample size

Among the target category, students, from ten units of analysis, random sampling was used to select fifteen students from each school, yielding 150 students. Out of 150 students, 75 were boys and the other half will be girls. Three teachers were sampled from each of the five schools to yield 15 teachers. The entire sampling matrix yielded a total size of 90 samples for the proposed study. This sample size was used for this study because according to Mugendi &Mugenda (2003) in descriptive studies, 10% of the accessible is enough to generalize the results of a study and represent the entire population.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Influence of Social Networking on Self Esteem and Psychological Wellbeing

The study sought to establish the extent to which social networking influenced adolescent's self-esteem and psychological wellbeing. The response was rated on a Likert scale of 1 to 5 where I represented strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3 neutral, 4= Agree and 5= strongly agree. The result is illustrated in table 1 below.

Table 1: General feelings about yourself when using social networking sites

General feelings about yourself when using social networking sites	Mean	Std. Deviation
Using social networking sites helps me connect with my friends	4.67	.672
Social networking sites helps me feel closer to my friends	4.03	1.047
Using social networking sites influences how I feel about myself	3.02	1.709
Having my own profile on social networking site gives me a sense of freedom	3.84	1.273
I feel that my social networking site friends like to do the same things I do	3.25	1.391
I feel the number of friends I have on social networking site influences how much my friends offline like me	2.75	1.524
I feel using social network site show my friends that people like me	2.54	1.446
I have changed information about myself so my social networking site friends would like me more	2.44	1.412
I feel good/bad when others post photos in social networking site I am not in	2.70	1.488
I feel I have many close friends in my life offline (from school, church, my neighborhood or other activities separate from school)	3.40	1.602
I believe I am important to my friends offline	3.84	1.322
Most of the time I feel about the friendships I have offline	3.43	1.456
I feel I am important to my social networking site friends	3.67	1.047
Most of the time I feel about my social networking sites friendships	3.08	1.495
I feel good/bad about photo tagging, friend requests, status updates, wall posting and private messages	3.60	1.374

Source: Author, 2014

The respondents were required to give the extent in which they agreed with the above statements on the influence they had on social networking sites and on their self-esteem and psychological well-being. The mean (average) and standard deviation (square root of the variance) of the responses were computed. Standard deviation measures the spread of a set of observations. From the findings presented in the above table Majority of the respondents strongly agreed that using social sites helped them connect with their friends (4.67). Majority agreed that social networking sites helped them feel closer to their friends (4.03), having their own profile on social networking sites gave them a sense of freedom (3.84), they believed that they were important to their friends offline (3.84), felt that they were important to their social networking friends (3.67) and felt good/bad about photo tagging, friend requests, status updates, wall posting and private messages (3.60).

Majority were however undecided that most of the time they felt about the friendship they had offline with a mean of (3.43). They also felt they had many close friends in their offline life with a mean of (3.40) as well as their social networking site friends liked to do the same things they did as depicted by the mean of (3.25). They were also undecided on the opinion that most of the time they felt about their social networking sites friendships as shown by the mean of (3.08) and using social networking sites influenced how they felt about themselves with a mean of (3.02). They also felt the number of friends they had on social networking sites influenced how much friends they had offline as depicted by the mean of (2.75) and they felt good/bad when others post photos in social networking site that they were not in as depicted by the mean of (2.70). Similarly they were undecided on the opinion that they felt using social networking sites showed their friends that people liked them with a mean of (2.54). Majority of the respondents disagreed that they had changed information about themselves so that their social networking site friends would like them more (2.44). The study concurs with Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten (2006) who contends that adolescent well-being and internet use has produced mixed results, state that social self-esteem and well-being are more likely to be affected if adolescents are using the internet. Activities adolescents engage in social networking sites plays a vital role in adolescent psychological well-being in terms of their social connectedness and closeness to friends. Furthermore the study concurs with Mitchell (2002) who indicated that adolescents use SNS for casual online friendships, close online friendships, romantic relationships online, and meeting someone online then meeting them in person.

Conclusion

Majority of the respondents strongly agreed that using social sites helped them connect with their friends. They agreed that social networking sites helped them feel closer to their friends, having their own profile on social networking sites gave them a sense of freedom, they believed that they were important to their friends offline, felt that they were important to their social networking friends and felt good about photo tagging, friend requests, status updates, wall posting and private messages. Use of social networking sites gave one a sense of identity and freedom, it made them feel confident about themselves especially when others commented or liked their photos and status updates. They used social networking as a source of lifting up their spirits since their online friend cheered them up. They also commended social networking sites for they made them feel confident and especially so to the shy type who do not have the courage to face people and give their opinions.

Recommendations

The study recommends that secondary schools students should be given guidance and counseling on how to positively utilize the social networking sites to their advantage and not to have a negative impact on their social development. The study further recommends that the secondary schools students using social networking sites should be educated possible harms of misusing social networks on their privacy, social relationship, lifestyle, self-esteem and psychological well-being.

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