



Contribution of Social-Media Usage in Shaping the Emotional Well-Being of Adolescents in Public Secondary Schools in Arusha City, Tanzania

Glory Mhina

Ngaramtoni Primary School

Email: mhinag359@gmail.com

Dr. Patrick Olemong'i

St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT), Arusha

Email: patrickngalaole@gmail.com

Abstract: *This study investigated the Contribution of Social-Media Usage in Shaping the Emotional Well-Being of Adolescents in Public Secondary Schools in Arusha City. Specifically, it assessed how social media interaction shapes the emotional well-being of adolescents and suggested the strategies for using social media among adolescents to shape their emotional well-being in public secondary schools. Social Media Impact Theory and convergent mixed methods research design guided the study. Target population comprised of 662 teachers, and 26 head of schools, 7738 form one student and 6922 form two students. Stratified random and purposive sampling techniques were used to select the sample size. Questionnaire and interview guide were used as data collection tools. Validity of the instruments was ensured by the research experts and reliability yielded $r=.856$ for students' questionnaire and $r=.905$ for teachers' questionnaire through Chronbach Alpha methods. Content and face validity of the qualitative instruments was established through peer debriefing and trustworthiness. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics in the SPSS for quantitative data while the qualitative data were thematically analysed then later converged to strength quantitative findings. This study revealed that social media offers connection, self-expression, and stress relief, it also poses emotional risks including anxiety, cyberbullying, addiction, and misinformation. This study concludes that adolescents require structured support through digital literacy, emotional well-being training, and responsible policies to mitigate these risks. It recommends collaborative efforts by MoEST, PORALG, schools, teachers, parents, and students to implement comprehensive strategies that transform social media into a constructive tool for adolescents' emotional well-being.*

Keywords: *Adolescents, Social-Media, Emotion, Schools, Tanzania*

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1. Introduction

Across the world, the social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tiktok, WhatsApp, You

Tube as well as gaming, have transformed the communication landscape among adolescents. According to Hamilton et al. (2022), emotional difficulties for adolescents are prevalent today and is among the common factors that have contributed to the usage of social media

which has caused adolescents' mental health impairments. Although, social media is used for connections, information, expression of oneself, and academics, adolescent students are at higher risk for a variety of school related difficulties like poor academic performance, poor social skills, and increased unacceptable behaviours when there are higher rates of time spent utilizing screens (Chau et al. 2022). This raises the concern that while social media can offer educational and social benefits, its excessive use may significantly compromise adolescents' emotional well-being and overall academic success. Therefore, this implies that, across different regions, social media usage has been affecting adolescents' well-being.

In US, Instagram was the most common application reported in violent crime accounting for 19 cases, self-harm accounted for 91 cases, while other cases included buying and selling drugs as well as pornography (Garcia Whitlock et al., 2023). Research by Dixon (2023) in United Kingdom found that 91 percent of 15 to 16-year-olds used social media while spending 22 hours weekly on social media and over 70% scored low in education due to negative effects in self-esteem, anxiety and depression. Moreover, in UK suicide-related online experience was reported in 24% of suicide deaths in young people between 2021 and 2023, equivalent to 43 deaths per year (Rodway et al. 2023). However, adolescents have different views on social media platforms as they felt that social media use improve their relationships and academic performance (Plackett et al. 2023). This presents the concern that social media use can both positively and negatively shape adolescent emotional well-being, necessitating deeper research into the balance between its benefits and risks in educational contexts. Therefore, it is crucial to assess how positively, or negatively social media shape the emotional well-being of adolescents in their educational journey.

Research in China by Hou et al. (2024) shows that, 18.5% of China's 1.092 billion internet users fell within the age range of 6 to 19 years old, with more than 95% of this group engaging in social media for instant communication and online entertainment activities. Data shows that, emotional frustration has been resulted to 730 self-harm and suicide cases of youths among urban populations (Lai et al. 2021). Although, social media has provided children and adolescents with unrestricted access to a diverse range of free learning resources, adolescents have utilise social media platforms to generate and publish digital content online, resulting to internet addiction (Luo et al., 2020).

An empirical date by TCRA (2023) proved that social media usage among teenagers in Tanzania has increased by 30% in 2023, with Facebook and Instagram being the most popular platforms. Also, Kessy & Pessa (2022) observed that social media usage among students has been negative making it necessary for students to be guided on how to use it appropriately. Further, 37% of adolescents have

experienced cyberbullying which results in emotional distress and hinders academic performance (Shapka & Onditi, 2021). Corresponding to that, Mvungi & Otieno (2024) observed that, Facebook and WhatsApp are used to a lower extent for accessing educational resources while actively used for social and personal entertainment. Consequently, students should be guided on responsible use of social media for exploring educational content. This provides direct evidence that in Arusha City, adolescents are increasingly engaging with social media in ways that may compromise their emotional well-being and academic performance, hence justifying the present study. Therefore, from the foregoing, there is a need to investigate the contribution of social-media in shaping the emotional well-being of adolescents in public secondary schools in Arusha city.

1.1 Research Questions

The study investigated the following research questions:

1. How does social media interaction shape the emotional well-being of adolescents in public secondary schools in Arusha city?
2. What are the strategies for using social media among adolescents in shaping their emotional well-being in public secondary schools in Arusha city?

2. Theoretical Review

The study on the contribution of social media in shaping the emotional well-being of adolescents in secondary schools was built on Social Media Impact Theory. The Social Media Impact Theory was developed by Yoesoep Edhie Rachmad in 2016 and published in his 2023 edition.

2.1 Social Media Impact Theory

Social Media Impact Theory emerges from the recognition that social media is not merely a set of digital platforms for social interaction, but a transformative cultural force that has redefined how information is created, shared, and consumed (Gazi et al. 2024). The Social Media Impact Theory proposes that the impact of social media can be understood through several key dimensions: psychological, sociological, and economic (Rachmad, 2023). Psychologically, social media affects self-esteem, attention spans, and stress levels among users. Sociologically, it influences social norms, political activism, and cultural trends. Economically, social media platforms have transformed marketing strategies, consumer behaviour, and business models.

2.1.1 Strengths of Adult Learning Theory

The Theory suggests that to harness the positive aspects of social media while mitigating the negative impact, it is essential to promote digital literacy, encourage ethical online behaviour, and foster a healthy digital culture. The theory also emphasizes the need for continuous research to track the evolving impacts of social media and adapt strategies accordingly. Overall, the Social Media Impact Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex effects of social media on modern life. It offers valuable insights for effectively navigating the social media landscape, highlighting the importance of proactive and informed approaches to managing its influence in various spheres of society.

2.1.2 Application of Adult Learning Theory

Social Media Impact Theory which allows for a psychological and social lens with which to explore adolescents' everyday life. Applying this theory provides an analysis of how adolescent use of social media and how it influences their self-esteem, stresses, and peer relationships within their environment, covering the contributions along with the challenges. Furthermore, the theory aids in suggesting the strategies that promote digital literacy and responsible use of social media in order to support emotional wellbeing among adolescents in secondary school contexts.

2.2 Empirical Review

This section presents the empirical studies related to this current study. These empirical studies help to identify the knowledge gap.

2.2.1 How social media interaction shapes adolescents' emotional well-being

In China, the study by Liu (2024) assesses the impact of social media usage on adolescent well-being in China. A qualitative research design was used to collect secondary data. The study suggests that, social media can enhance social connections, provide platforms for self-expression, and facilitate information-sharing. However, excessive use and exposure to unrealistic standards can lead to feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and depression among adolescents. Cyberbullying, sleep disturbances, and reduced physical activity are also associated with heavy social media usage. It's essential for parents, education stakeholders, and policymakers to promote healthy social media habits and provide support systems to mitigate potential adverse effects on adolescent well-being. The reviewed study shows both the positive and negative emotional outcomes of social media use, highlighting the importance of balancing healthy online engagement with the risks of

anxiety, depression, and cyberbullying. This present study builds on this by using a convergent mixed-methods design to capture Tanzanian adolescents direct lived experiences rather than relying purely on secondary data.

Dennen et al. (2020) conducted a scoping review in the USA to explore the disciplines studying social media in education and students of high school and college age. They analysed 580 peer-reviewed articles using quantitative surveys as the primary method, uncovering a significant increase in research since 2009. Findings revealed that social media usage was primarily studied in relation to its role as a teaching tool, digital literacy, and its effects on students. Gordon and Ohannessian (2023) investigated the impact of various social media platforms on early adolescents' academic achievement in the USA. They utilized a sample of 1,459 adolescents and found that increased use of social media platforms correlated with decreased academic achievement.

In Ethiopia, Mekonen et al. (2024) assessed social media use, effects, and parental mediation among school adolescents. The study employed concurrent triangulation cross-sectional study design. Simple random sampling and purposive sampling were used to select 227 participants, including adolescents and parents. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyse data. The study found that the majority (86.3%) of the respondents were widely using various social media platforms for different purposes. Both adolescents and parents reported that adolescents were experiencing both positive and negative effects from social media use, including academic, mental, social, and health related aspects.

In Tanzania, Ponera (2023) assessed the usage of social media for exchanging knowledge and information by postgraduate students at four higher learning institutions in Northern Tanzania. The study used a convergent research design. The online survey was used to obtain 171 responses from 239 postgraduate students. Data from interview sessions was obtained from eight (8) heads of academic staff purposefully selected to participate in the study. Quantitative data was analysed through descriptive statistics while qualitative data was subjected to content and thematic analyses. The study revealed that social media offered various benefits to postgraduate students, including timely access to knowledge and information, collaborative learning, strengthening their knowledge base and enhancing their academic performance. Therefore, this current study extends this understanding to public secondary school adolescents and places emphasis on emotional well-being.

2.2.2 The Strategies for using social media to shape adolescents' emotional well-being

The study conducted in Norway by Nordrum and Gracia (2023) explored the impacts of broadband internet on adolescents' academic outcomes: Heterogeneous effects among lower secondary school students in Norway. Quasi-experimental approach was used with adolescents aged 15–16. Findings show that, by contrast, for girls, broadband internet coverage worsened substantially the academic performance of those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, whereas girls of migrant background obtained higher grades with this expansion of internet. However, it does not explore strategies for using social media to improve emotional well-being. The present study builds on this by establishing targeted strategies for social media usage to shape emotional well-being among adolescents in Arusha City.

In China, Wang and Chen (2022) conducted a study focusing on parental intervention in teenagers' social media usage in the post-pandemic era. The study employed a mixed methods approach involving questionnaire surveys and in-depth interviews to propose a conceptual model and measurement dimensions of parental-mediated intervention. Findings indicated that parental-mediated intervention strategies were frequently used in families, with parents reporting higher intervention rates than perceived by their children. In Zambia, Thelma et al. (2023) examined the effects of social media on pupils' academic performance in secondary schools in the Lusaka district. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods and a descriptive survey design. Interviews and questionnaires were used to collect data. The study discovered that social media is a valuable source of information, providing pupils with access to educational content, news, and resources that can enhance their learning. However, social media on the other hand was seen to be a significant distraction for pupils, diverting their attention away from studying, assignments, and other academic responsibilities. There is a need to guide and support pupils in managing their time effectively and avoiding social media-related distractions.

In Tanzania, Gutmo (2020) assessed the effects of social media on secondary school students' academic performance in Kinondoni Municipality. The descriptive research design and mixed research approach were adopted to study 54 respondents. The findings revealed that, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat were common social network to the students. However, the study findings revealed that, Twitter is not common social network to the students. The study also indicated that, social media causes

Therefore:

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

$$n = \frac{15,348}{1 + 15,348(0.1)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{15,348}{1 + 15,348(0.01)}$$

too much off shortcut system when writing that can affect academic writing particularly in examinations. Social media also causes less concentration on learning activities, wastage of time, and failure to observe academic activities. It leaves a gap regarding emotional well-being, which the current study fills by exploring how adolescents in Arusha City use social media for emotional support and by suggesting strategies for optimising its positive psychological impacts.

3. Methodology

This study employed a convergent mixed methods design. A convergent mixed methods design is a research design that involves collecting and analysing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single phase and then comparing or integrating the results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this design, the two types of data were collected concurrently and analysed separately, and the results then compared or integrated to provide a more complete understanding of the research questions.

The target population consisted of 662 teachers, and 26 head of schools, 7738 form one student and 6922 form two students (MoEST, 2023). The total target population was 15,348 individuals. Teachers and head of schools were the target because they understood the positive and side effects of social media in psychological well-being of adolescents. Form one and form two students were the target population because these individuals were at the stage of adolescents (14-17 years) and they have different perceptions on the usage of social media in this digital era. These participants were essential to the credibility and reliability of the study's findings. Teachers were included because their perspectives on willingness to participate in in-service training programmes were considered vital to the study's objectives. The head teachers and the Council Education Officer were involved due to their roles in managing education policies and overseeing in-service training programmes within Arusha City Council. Their insights were instrumental in identifying both individual and systemic factors affecting participation in professional development initiatives.

The sample size was calculated using Yamane (1967) formula: where n= the required sample size, N= target population (15, 348) and e= margin error (0.1) (Yamen, 2017).

$$n = \frac{15,348}{1+153.48} = \frac{15,348}{154.48}$$

$$n=99$$

Table 1.: Sample Distribution

Respondents	Sample	Sampling Technique
Form I students	27	Simple & stratified random sampling
Form II students	27	Simple & stratified random sampling
Teachers	36	Stratified Random Sampling
Head of schools	9	Purposive Sampling
Total	99	

Source: Researchers' construct (2025)

The study utilized simple random sampling technique to select 3 form one students from each stratum to make 27 and 3 form two students from each stratum to reach 27 students also. For teachers, the researcher selected 4 teachers from each stratum to obtain 36 teachers. Therefore, stratified sampling was used to select a total of 54 students and 36 teachers. Stratified random sampling was used concurrently to improve the precision of the sample by reducing sampling error. Purposive sampling was used to select 9 heads of schools from public secondary schools. The technique was employed to select the head of schools who oversee the behaviours of both students and teachers.

Reliability for questionnaire was ensured through correlation coefficient. This method involves assessing if the items in the instrument are measuring the same construct or concept and one way to do this is using correlation coefficient (El Hajjar, 2018). Therefore, items in questionnaire were tested in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-Version-25) then the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to measure its internal consistency, and the data yield the reliability index value of $r=0.856$ for students' questionnaire and $r= 0.905$ for teachers' questionnaire. Furthermore, reliability for interview guide was ensured through peer debriefing, trustworthiness of the study by forming the unambiguous research questions, avoiding using complex language or jargon that may be difficult for participants to understand and using simple and clear language to ensure that participants can easily understand the questions being asked. According to Sirwan (2024). Since the results of the coefficient alpha (α) value were correlated at $r > 0.5$, the instrument was considered reliable for the study. Additionally, triangulation was applied to enhance the reliability of qualitative instruments by corroborating responses from multiple sources. The trustworthiness of the instruments for collecting qualitative data was done by

upholding research process and verifying the responses from respondents and checking uniformity to ensure its credibility. Quantitative data collected through questionnaires were coded and analyzed descriptively using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) programme version 25. This study used both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods. The qualitative method involved the interpretation of non-numerical data through content analysis using textual presentation and interpretation. This involved converging quantitative and qualitative data by transcribing interviews and participant perspectives. This strengthened the validity of findings, enabled a comprehensive understanding of the research problem and support evidence-based conclusions (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The study also ensured voluntary participation, avoided plagiarism by acknowledging sources of cited works, and maintained academic integrity such as confidentiality and anonymity in all stages of the research process.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings are discussed in accordance with the themes generated from the research questions that the study sought to answer.

4.1 Findings on how social media interaction shapes the emotional well-being of adolescents in public secondary schools in Arusha city

The study examined how social media interaction shapes the emotional well-being of adolescents in public secondary schools in Arusha city. To fulfil this objective, the study prepared items 11-20 in the questionnaire for

form one students, form two students and teachers. Similarly, the third question in the interview guide for heads of schools was used to obtain in-depth qualitative data on how social media interaction shapes the emotional well-being of adolescents in public secondary schools in Arusha city. During data collection, students and teachers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the

items in the questionnaire using a Likert Scale of 5=Very Positively, 4= Positively, 3=Neutral, 2= Negatively and 1= Very Negatively. The results on how social media interaction shapes the emotional well-being of adolescents in public secondary schools in Arusha city are shown in table 2.

Table 2: Data on the Social Media Interaction in Shaping Emotional Well-Being among Adolescents in Arusha City

Aspect	Form I Students (n=27)	Form II Students (n=27)	Teachers (n=36)	Total (n=90)
Social connection and belonging	26 (96.3%)	27 (100%)	34 (94.4%)	87 (96.7%)
Self esteem	23 (85.2%)	25 (92.6%)	30 (83.3%)	78 (86.7%)
Self-worth	25 (92.6%)	24 (88.9%)	29 (80.6%)	78 (86.7%)
Anxiety	19 (70.4%)	15 (55.6%)	32 (88.9%)	66 (73.3%)
Stress management	27 (100%)	26 (96.3%)	33 (91.7%)	86 (95.6%)
Addiction	20 (74.1%)	18 (66.7%)	34 (94.4%)	72 (80%)
Emotional expression	25 (92.6%)	27 (100%)	28 (77.8%)	80 (88.9%)
Loneliness	13 (48.1%)	14 (51.9%)	35 (97.2%)	62 (68.9%)
Emotional support	24 (88.9%)	23 (85.2%)	30 (83.3%)	77 (85.6%)
Happiness	27 (100%)	27 (100%)	35 (97.2%)	89 (98.9%)

f = frequency, % = percentages, values in brackets are percentage of respondents who agreed with the statement. Those with contrary opinion to the statement are implied.

Source: Field data (2025)

The data in table 2 show that, the majority (96.7%) of respondents comprising 96.3% of form I students, 100% of form II students, and 94.4% of teachers indicated high level of agreement that, social media enhances adolescents' sense of social connection and belonging. This indicates the role of digital platforms as key social areas where students maintain friendships, feel accepted by peers, and participate in group conversations and shared interests. The qualitative data from one among the school heads supported this, indicating that:

Students often turn to online communities when they feel isolated in the physical environment, helping them develop a strong sense of group identity. The ability to communicate instantly and broadly through social media enhances the

inclusion and connectivity, which is critical for adolescent emotional well-being during a developmental stage where peer relationships are highly influential (Personal Interview on 15th May, 2025).

These findings indicate how digital platforms have become modern "social hubs" where adolescents can stay connected, especially during adolescence years. Therefore, schools and parents can leverage this connectivity by guiding students toward positive, inclusive online communities, while also safeguarding against harmful online interactions such as cyberbullying. These findings on social connection and belonging are aligned with Liu (2024) who found that, social media enhances social

connections. Similarly, Schroeder (2023) confirmed that social media can increase adolescents' feelings of belonging and connectedness. These findings reinforce the role of digital platforms as modern social place, particularly during adolescence, when peer relationships are central to emotional development. However, Liu (2024) also warns of potential downsides, such as cyberbullying and social comparison. This requires support in balancing and guiding the proper usage of social media to maximise benefits and minimize side effects.

According to the data, a total of 86.7% of respondents reported that social media positively contributes to adolescents' self-esteem. Particularly, 85.2% of form I students, 92.6% of form II students, and 83.3% of teachers agreed with this aspect. These results indicated that through social media, adolescents often receive supporting feedback such as likes, compliments, and encouragement which can help strengthen their confidence and self-image. Moreover, during interview one among the heads of schools revealed that:

Adolescents often express a sense of pride and satisfaction when their posts or content are positively received online. However, it was also noted that this self-esteem can become weak if overly reliant on virtual validation. Thus, while social media has the potential to empower students emotionally, its impact must be balanced with offline reinforcement of personal value and achievements (Personal Interview on 16th May, 2025).

The data shows that social media boosts adolescents' confidence through positive feedback like likes and compliments, which can strengthen their self-image. However, the reliance on online validation can make self-esteem fragile. Therefore, there is a need for emotional support so that students' confidence is not solely dependent on social media approval. Similarly, Schroeder (2023) further reported that social media can enhance self-esteem by providing a platform for positive reinforcement and recognition among peers. In the same vein, a study by Mekonen et al. (2024) revealed that self-esteem as one of the psychosocial dimensions influenced by social media usage. This indicates that, although self-esteem has been reported, there is a need for developing self-worth beyond social media usage among secondary school adolescents.

The study found that 86.7% of participants recognized social media's role in promoting adolescents' self-worth, with 92.6% of form I students, 88.9% of form II students, and 80.6% of teachers supporting this view. These results show that, adolescents often use social media as a platform to express their identities, talents, and values, which contributes to a positive sense of self. Many adolescents view social media as a place where they are seen and appreciated, especially when they receive feedback for

their creativity, achievements, or thoughts. Besides, interview with one school heads further indicated that:

Students feel validated when they are part of online discussions or when their views are acknowledged by peers. This social recognition reinforces their belief in their own value and capabilities. However, it was emphasized the need to nurture intrinsic self-worth to prevent adolescents from becoming dependent on digital approval (Personal Interview on 18th May, 2025).

The excerpt indicates that adolescents use social media to express identity, talents, and values, which contributes to feeling valued and recognized. This kind of digital validation can help shape their self-image, but risks creating dependency on peer approval. Therefore, educators and parents should encourage intrinsic self-worth through offline achievements and personal growth opportunities, reducing overreliance on online praises. In discussing the findings on self-worth studies by Liu (2024) and Schroeder (2023), observed that, platforms allow young people to express their identities and values, contributing to a sense of personal validation and belonging. Also, Nassen et al. (2024), found that, where those who adopted entertainment and social networking apps reported higher levels of emotional engagement. Despite all these, it is important to cultivate intrinsic self-worth to avoid overdependence on online feedback which may results in overreliance on social media.

The data about anxiety indicates that, 73.3% of respondents indicated that social media interaction influences adolescent anxiety levels. Teachers reported the highest agreement (88.9%), followed by form I students (70.4%) and form II students (55.6%). These findings point to the emotional pressure adolescents may experience from constant social comparisons, cyberbullying, and fear of missing out. When interviewed, one among the head of school observed that:

Students sometimes show signs of emotional distress linked to what they see or fail to achieve on social media. This includes anxiety over appearance, and lifestyle comparisons. While social media may offer entertainment and interaction, its unregulated use can create unrealistic expectations and social insecurities among adolescents (Personal Interview on 16th May, 2025).

This response from interviews identified social media as a contributor to adolescent anxiety, particularly through social comparison, cyberbullying, and unrealistic show-off of life. Therefore, literacy programmes should be integrated into school activities to help students critically assess online content, manage emotional triggers, and build resilience against negative online experiences. Moreover, under anxiety, Liu (2024) confirmed that, excessive social media use can lead to emotional disturbances like anxiety

and depression, primarily through social comparison and unrealistic portrayals. Likewise, in this regard, Al-loughani and Al-Shammari (2022) found that cyberbullying and peer pressure via social media can elevate psychological distress among students. Therefore, there is a need for digital literacy programmes to help students especially adolescents critically engage with content and manage emotional responses, which is vital for their psychological resilience and understand the nature of social media content.

4.2 Findings on the strategies for using social media interaction among adolescents to shape their emotional well-being in public secondary schools in Arusha city

The last objective of this study was to investigate the strategies for using social media interaction among adolescents to shape their emotional well-being in public secondary schools in Arusha city. To fulfil this objective, the study prepared items 31-40 in the questionnaire for form one students, form two students and teachers in appendices I and II respectively. Similarly, the third question in the interview was used to ask the head of schools on the challenges of social media interaction in shaping the emotional well-being of adolescents in public secondary schools in Arusha city. All the respondents were asked the same questions to avoid data variability and improve validity and reliability. During data collection, students and teachers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the items in the questionnaire using a Likert Scale: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree and 1= Strong Disagree. Table 3 shows the results on the strategies for social media interaction among adolescents to shape their emotional well-being in public secondary schools in Arusha city.

Table 3: Strategies for using social media interaction for shaping emotional well-being of adolescents in public secondary schools in Arusha city

Strategies	Form I Students (n=27)	Form II Students (n=27)	Teachers (n=36)	Total (n=90)
Equip students with skills in social media platforms	27 (100%)	26 (96.3%)	35 (97.2%)	88 (97.8%)
Teach positive and negative effects of social media	26 (96.3%)	24 (88.9%)	36 (100%)	86 (95.6%)
Develop school policies on social media use	25 (92.6%)	22 (81.5%)	32 (88.9%)	79 (87.8%)
Integrate technology in education	27 (100%)	27 (100%)	34 (94.4%)	88 (97.8%)
Host online wellbeing workshops in schools	24 (88.9%)	25 (92.6%)	33 (91.7%)	82 (91.1%)
Limit exposure to harmful content	26 (96.3%)	24 (88.9%)	36 (100%)	86 (95.6%)
Set social media time limits	22 (81.5%)	23 (85.2%)	35 (97.2%)	80 (88.9%)
Collaborate with parents for online guidance	23 (85.2%)	20 (74.1%)	34 (94.4%)	77 (85.6%)
Block abusive websites	26 (96.3%)	22 (81.5%)	36 (100%)	84 (93.3%)
Encourage creative expression in social media	27 (100%)	27 (100%)	33 (91.7%)	87 (96.7%)

f = frequency, % = percentages, values in brackets are percentage of respondents who agreed with the statement. Those with contrary opinion to the statement are implied.

Source: Field data (2025)

The data in table 3 indicates that, 97.8% of respondents comprising 100% of Form I students, 96.3% of Form II students, and 97.2% of teachers agreed that equipping

students with skills in social media use is essential for positively shaping their emotional well-being. This indicates a strong agreement on the need to move beyond

the normal access to social media and focus on equipping adolescents with the skills to navigate digital platforms safely, responsibly, and constructively. In this line, when one among the head of school was interviewed, it was noted that:

Digital skills training empowers students to discern credible content, manage privacy settings, and avoid manipulative or harmful platforms. Developing digital literacy enhances self-efficacy and confidence in online interactions, helping students reduce emotional dependence and increase meaningful engagement (Personal Interview on 17th May, 2025).

These findings emphasized that digital skills training empowers students to critically evaluate content, manage privacy, and avoid harmful platforms, which builds their confidence and reduces emotional dependence. Therefore, schools need to provide targeted digital literacy training to help students navigate social media safely and confidently, which will strengthen their emotional well-being. The findings on equipping students with skills in social media correspond with the findings by Wang and Chen (2022), who stressed the value of parental intervention and digital skill development as key in helping youths navigate online platforms. In contrast, Nordrum and Gracia (2023) focused on academic disparities rather than digital skills for emotional health. Therefore, integrating digital competency into the school curriculum is a foundational strategy for improving emotionally healthy social media use among adolescents.

According to table 3 the results show that, 95.6% of respondents agreed on the importance of teaching both the positive and negative effects of social media. This includes 96.3% of Form I students, 88.9% of Form II students, and 100% of teachers. This strategy aims to cultivate awareness among adolescents about how their emotional state can be influenced by the content they consume or produce online. Moreover, one of the heads of schools reported that:

When students especially adolescents, understand the effects of social media, they may become more cautious about their behaviour and less likely to fall into emotional traps such as comparison, cyberbullying, or seeking validation (Personal Interview on 19th May, 2025).

This response agreed that when students understand how social media affects emotions, they become more cautious and avoid falling into emotional pitfalls like cyberbullying or validation seeking. Therefore, educating students on the emotional impacts of social media encourages responsible behaviour and emotional self-awareness, which can prevent negative emotional outcomes. In contrast to the findings on teaching both the positive and negative effects of social media, Schroeder (2023) and Mekonen et al. (2024), observed both benefits and harms of social media but lacked focused strategies on awareness-building.

Therefore, this current study, provides actionable insights missing from studies like Thelma et al. (2023), only revealed social media as a distraction without deepening into psychological well-being. Therefore, educating students about the psychological impact of social media enhances critical thinking and helps them make informed decisions, thereby reinforcing emotional self-regulation and online safety.

The study found that developing school policies on social media use was supported by 87.8% of respondents, including 92.6% of Form I students, 81.5% of Form II students, and 88.9% of teachers. These findings emphasize the importance of having structured and enforceable guidelines within schools to govern how students engage with social media even if they access social media while at home. Policies may include rules on device use, time to spend on social media and how to access educational contents in social platforms. Also, one among the heads of schools noted that:

Clear policies may help establish boundaries and accountability, protecting students from emotional harm while promoting responsible behaviour (Personal Interview on 18th May, 2025).

This response indicated that clear policies establish boundaries and accountability, protecting students from emotional harm and promoting responsible social media use. Therefore, implementing and enforcing clear school social media policies is crucial for creating a safe digital environment that supports adolescents' emotional health. These findings on developing school policies on social media usage contradicts that of Al-Loughani & Al-Shammari (2022) who noted that institutional frameworks can mitigate cyberbullying and emotional distress. The importance of boundary-setting was also supported by Liu (2024). Therefore, well-formed policies serve not only as disciplinary tools but also as frameworks that support a digital respect and emotional well-being among secondary school adolescents.

According to the data in table 3, a significant level of agreement from 97.8% of respondents, 100% of both Form I and II students, and 94.4% of teachers reported that integrating technology in education is a key strategy for positively utilizing social media to enhance adolescents' emotional well-being. This strategy involves blending digital platforms with classroom instruction in a constructive manner that engages students academically and emotionally. During the interviews, one head of schools observed that:

Students emotionally invested in learning when familiar social media tools or digital storytelling are incorporated into lessons (Personal Interview on 20th May, 2025).

These findings observed that, students engage emotionally and academically when familiar social media tools are incorporated into lessons, increasing their investment in learning. Hence, schools should integrate social media constructively in teaching to improve both academic success and positive emotional engagement. Additionally, in terms of integrating technology in education, Dennen et al. (2020), demonstrated digital media's role in teaching and engagement. However, while the previous research stressed academic effects of social media, this current study filled a critical gap by linking integration of social media with emotional experiences and classroom connection. Also, Nafisah et al. (2024) suggested a more emotionally centred approach to digital integration, thus providing a balanced between academic and emotional well-being through technology. This integration also leads to proper usage, turning social media from a distraction into a tool for collaboration, creativity, and support.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that social media has influence in shaping adolescents' emotional well-being serving as both a powerful tool for emotional support and self-expression, and a source of anxiety, addiction, and pressure. This highlights that, adolescents need structured support systems that maximize the benefits of social connectivity while mitigating emotional risks through proper guidance, regulation, and emotional intelligence training.

Lastly, this study concludes that, there is a need for diverse strategies in social media usage for managing emotional well-being among adolescents in secondary schools. These can be based on comprehensive approaches to digital education. Through equipping adolescents with practical digital skills, emotional awareness, and structured support, schools can transform social media from a potential threat into a constructive force that enhances students' mental and emotional well-being.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommended the following:

1. That head of schools should establish clear and enforceable social media policies within schools to address acceptable usage, time limits, privacy protection, and reporting mechanisms for abuse. They should organize regular digital well-being workshops in computer rooms and integrate emotional intelligence training to build students' resilience against online pressures.

Furthermore, school heads should foster positive digital engagement through extracurricular activities like digital storytelling, creative content clubs, or peer support groups, promoting social media as a constructive platform.

2. Teachers are encouraged to model and teach responsible social media use by incorporating platforms like YouTube for academic enrichment while reinforcing safe usage guidelines. They should remain observant of students' emotional and behavioural changes that may indicate digital stress and collaborate with school counsellors to offer support. Additionally, teachers must educate students on online safety, misinformation, privacy risks, and the emotional consequences of digital interactions to develop critical thinking and digital responsibility.
3. Students should be careful in using social media by balancing entertainment with learning and prioritizing their emotional well-being. They should avoid harmful trends, reduce overdependence on validation, and instead use platforms to express creativity and connect meaningfully with peers. When facing cyberbullying, negative feedback, or emotional distress, students should seek support from teachers, parents, or counsellors, and take part in school programmes aimed at digital safety and emotional regulation.
4. Parents should take an active role in supervising their children's social media use by setting time limits or sometimes prohibit the adolescents to access the social media regularly. They should collaborate with schools to provide educational support on the use of social media. Through modelling digital habits and offering consistent emotional support, parents can help adolescents develop balanced social media behaviours that safeguard their mental and emotional well-being.

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