



# Factors Affecting Social Media Usage in Students' Selection of Study Programs in Higher Learning Institutions: A Case of Moshi Cooperative University and Mwenge Catholic University

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**Abstract:** For the past decade social media usage has tremendously increased. Despite the growth, it is still unclear how the use of social media platforms affects the choice of students in Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania. Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which factors affecting social media usage in students' selection of study programs in Higher Learning Institutions. The study was conducted on two higher Learning Institutions namely Moshi Cooperative University (MOCU) and Mwenge Catholic University (MWECAU) located in Kilimanjaro region. The study employed cross-sectional research design. The data collection method employed method used was survey method. The study used the sample size of 357 out of 3333 first year undergraduate students. Furthermore, the study employed multiple linear regression to test for the relationship between variables. The results of the study indicate that facilitative conditions, costs, skills and competence, and social Influence are statistically significant in predicting social media usage in students' choice/selection of study programs. The study concluded that there is enough statistical evidence to explain the extent to which factor affecting social media usage in students' selection of study programs in Higher Learning Institutions. Furthermore, the study recommended that the university should strive to expand their operations to multiple social media applications.

**Keywords:** Social media, Social media platforms, Facilitating conditions, Costs, skills and competencies, Social influence marketing, Higher Learning Institutions, study programs.

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## 1. Introduction

Social media has transformed the landscape of communication, education, and social interaction globally. In the context of higher education, social media platforms have emerged as valuable tools for student engagement, information dissemination, and collaborative learning. This indicates that, social media has become a crucial tool

for branding and marketing Higher Learning Institutions around the globe (Gonzalez et al., 2020).

In Africa, the usage of social media in Higher Learning Institutions reflects not only the technological trends but also the socio-economic aspect of different economies. The continent for the past decade has witnessed a tremendous rise in mobile usage and internet penetration, which has

contributed to access to social media platforms (Mutsvungundandi et al., 2021).

In Tanzania, social media adoption in Higher Learning Institutions have been on the rise, driven by mobile technology and increasing in internet connection. It is evident that Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania utilize social media primarily for academic communication, marketing and community engagement (Mchombu et al, 2021). However, it is still unclear how the use of social media platforms affects the choice of students in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. Therefore, this study focused on assessing the extent to which factors affecting social media usage contribute to selection of study programs in higher learning institutions.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Growth in media innovations and technology has increasingly influenced individuals and organisations to use social networks such as blogs, facebook, twitter and linkedIn to connect, share information and knowledge, create contents, and to communicate with each other (Kumar and Nanda, 2019). Evidence shows that universities have been using one or more of some social media tools. However, a study by Kabugumila (2019) analysed social media usage in higher learning institutions; the study however focused on ascertaining how academic performance of undergraduate students is affected by time spent on social networks. Furthermore, Masele and Rweikiza (2021) investigated the application of social media in promoting higher learning institutions' activities. Despite the scholarly insights on social media usage in higher learning institutions, little is known about the extent the factors affecting social media usage contribute on study programs selection in these institutions.

### **1.2 Justification of the Study**

This study is important to the Higher Learning Institutions, admission officers, parents, prospective students, and the community at large. This study will aid institutions in gaining insights into students' behaviour, needs, and attitudes towards social media marketing. Furthermore, it will provide admission staff with guidance on how to use social media platforms as an effective tool to build awareness among students during the time of admission.

### **1.3 Research Question**

What extent do factors affecting social media usage contribute on students' selection of study program?

## **2. Literature Review**

According to the study by Patel (2021) social media has been defined as a digital interactive technology that allows users to create or share information, thoughts, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression through the building of virtual networks and communities. Students' lives are now greatly impacted by social media, especially when it comes to higher education. Social media's influence on students' choices/selection of study program is complex and depends on a number of variables, such as social influence, costs, skills and competency, and facilitating environments. This review of the study investigates how these variables appear in the context of social media use and influence students' academic decisions.

Facilitating conditions refer to the encouraging factors that improve students' use of social media for learning. Furthermore, social media platforms play an important role in facilitating networking and information exchange. According to a study by Hwang and Kim (2021), social media sites like Facebook, WhatsApp and LinkedIn are crucial resources for students to interact with classmates, instructors, and business leaders, which improves their comprehension of a range of academic subjects and career options. Students can learn more about other programs due to this connectivity, which may help them make a decision.

Students' decisions may also be influenced by the cost related to using social media. Even though the majority of social networking sites are free to access, spending time on them can have significant indirect costs. Students may choose programs with flexible criteria that permit social media activity because of this time-cost factor.

The students' skills and competencies to use social media sites effectively can have a big impact on the programs they choose. Digital literacy and critical thinking abilities are necessary to use social media for academic objectives, including networking, program research, and discussion participation. According to a study by Molla (2021), students who possess greater levels of digital competency are more likely to use social media to engage with pertinent stakeholders and obtain information about study programs. Social media can also be used as an avenue for skill development. Students who participate in online forums pertaining to their areas of interest can acquire knowledge and skills that improve their academic decisions, according to a study by Chen et al. (2022). Students' choices are influenced by these communities because they give them the chance to engage in dialogue, get feedback, and build skills that complement study plans.

Social influence, especially through social media platforms, has a significant impact on students' decisions about their study program. Students' opinions of different academic pathways can be greatly influenced by their contacts with and recommendations from family, friends, and other influential people. The research by Smith (2021) emphasizes how social media shapes students' goals and decisions since they frequently go to their social networks for information and approval regarding their educational options. Additionally, social media amplifies the issue of social proof, in which people seek to others for guidance on appropriate behavior. According to a Smith et al. (2021) study, students might be more likely to select programs that are well-liked by their peers or in their social circles. Students' confidence in their program selections might be influenced and a sense of belonging can be fostered by this social validation.

## 2.1 Theoretical Framework

Various theories are suggested by different scholars in the field of marketing and technology therefore relevant in expounding the theoretical basis of social media usage in relation to selection of study programs. The study adopted the Unified Theory of Acceptance.

### 2.1.1 Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)

UTAUT was developed by Venkatesh (2003) who blended and integrated knowledge derived from prior theories used in information systems to explain the motives behind adoption of technology. The model integrated various theories, including Technological Acceptance Model (TAM), Theory of Reasoned action (TRA), Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), and Innovations Diffusion Theory (IDT). The theory is used in the study to explain the various factors that may influence potential university students in using social media during selection of the course.

The theory is classified into two parts. The first part focuses on core factors responsible for adoption of social media use i.e., performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and facilitation conditions, social influence. The latter part focuses on control variables that may have an influence in social media usage such as gender, age, and experience.

## 3. Methodology

In this part various research methodologies have been discussed to describe how the research was conducted. Discussed issues include description of study area, research

design, and target population, sampling design, data collection methods, data analysis, reliability and validity.

### 3.1 Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional research design which allows collection of data from a population at a specific point in time. Cross-sectional research design was preferred because of the nature of the study which does not require the observation of changes on the dependent variable over time and allows a multifaceted approach to data collection and analysis (Wang, 2020).

### 3.2 Geographical Coverage

This study was conducted in the Kilimanjaro region which was selected as a case study. Kilimanjaro region was selected as a case study because it is among few regions in Tanzania with a number of higher learning institutions. Higher learning institutions located in Kilimanjaro include the Moshi Co-operative University (MoCU), Mwenge Catholic University (MWECAU).

### 3.3 Population

The population of 3333 first-year undergraduate students in higher learning institutions, namely MOCU and MWECAU located in Kilimanjaro region for the academic year 2019/2020.

### 3.4 Sample and Sampling Strategies

#### 3.4.1 Sampling size

The sample size for this study was 357 out of 3333 respondents. This sample size was determined using the formula developed by Yamane (1967). Yamane formula was adopted since the population of the study was assumed to be less than 10,000 (Fisher *et.al.*, 1991), while considering gender of the respondent, sample size was clustered into 18 groups based on the number of programs selected from the target institutions that is MoCU and MWECAU; thereby 357 students were selected from different programs in two Higher Learning Institutions. There was a program that contained 20 students who were purposely selected as indicated in Table 1, and there was a program that exceeded the number of students over all programs above the calculated range. In circumlocution of the margin of error the program that contained a larger number of students was given a top-up of students who exceeded.

### 3.4.2 Sampling techniques

A sample for this study was obtained through a multistage sampling. First, two universities, namely MoCU and MWECAU were purposely selected because they had the highest student population and diverse study programs. During this study MoCU had a total of 2035 students' first year bachelor's degree and ten bachelor degree programs.

On the other hand, MWECAU had a total of 1298 students in their first year bachelor's degree and eight bachelor degree programs. Proportionate stratified sampling technique was used to obtain the students' study sample. This technique was used because the population was heterogeneous in terms of study programs. Public relations and admission officers were purposively sampled from each institution.

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Programs**

MoCU programs			
No	Program	No. of students	Sample size
1	BABEC	89	20
2	BACED	198	20
3	BAAF	250	20
4	BACMA	146	20
5	BAHRM	332	23
6	BAME	249	20
7	BAMFED	200	20
8	BAED	268	20
9	BAPSM	163	20
10	LLB	250	20
MWECAU Programs			
	Programs	No. of Students	Sample size
1	BAGEN	150	20
2	BAPE	11	11
3	BAPPM	103	20
4	BASSW	133	20
5	BBAM	108	20
6	BEDS	496	23
7	BISc.BICT	158	20
8	BSMST	29	20
	Grand Total	3333	357

Source: MoCU and MWECAU Admission Offices

### 3.5 Data Collection Methods

The study used primary data sources which were collected from the target population. The study gathered data from the field on the factors associated with applicants' use of social media.

#### 3.5.1 Data collection Tools

Primary data was collected through administering copies of questionnaires to the university students. This method was preferred because it allows rapid data collection and allows the convenience of gathering data (Cleave, 2023).

### 3.6 Data Analysis

The study employed multiple linear regression to analyze the extent to which the factors affected the use of social media contribute to students' selection of Higher Learning Institutions study programs.

### 3.7 Ethical considerations

The study ensured that respondents understood the purpose of the study and obtained their free consent before participating. Furthermore, the study-maintained confidentiality, thus, information was confidential as well as the identity of participants was not exposed.

### 3.8 Reliability and Validity of Research Instruments

#### 3.8.1 Reliability of research instruments

Cronbach’s alpha was used to test reliability of scale variables whereby the proposed minimum threshold for the reliable measure was 0.7 for social science research as suggested by Gliem and Gliem (2003). According to the rules of thumb, the value of alpha > 0.7 is acceptable. Based on the reliability test, the value of Cronbach’s alpha was 0.857, which was above the suggested minimum threshold of 0.7 alpha coefficients. This implies that the instrument was reliable.

#### 3.9 Validity tests

Validity test assesses the extent to which the instrument measures what it is designed to measure (Etropik, 2023). It is the degree to which the results are truthful. In ensuring the validity of the instruments, the researcher consulted at least two experts. After peer-review of the experts, the researcher reviewed and improved the instruments. Thereafter, the pilot testing was conducted. According to Lancaster *et al.*, (2012), high precision of pilot studies should consist of 1% to 5% of the sample size, therefore the researcher used fifteen students for pilot study to clear some direct error before the actual data collection process begins.

### 4. Results and Discussion

This part presents the results and discussions of the findings. Inferential statistical tools were used in determining the extent to which factors affecting social media usage among university students contribute to study programs usage in Higher learning Institutions.

#### 4.2 Response Return Rate

The study involved 357 students. During data collection, 300 (84%) students filled in and returned the questionnaires while 57 (16%) did not either fill in the questionnaire or return questionnaires. According to Treece (1979), a response of 75% and above is usually considered as good. It can be said, therefore, that the return rate of 84% was representative satisfactory in making relevant analysis and interpretation.

#### 4.3 Factors Affecting Applicant’s Use of Social Media in Selection of Program

In analyzing this objective, the study employed multiple regression analysis to determine how each independent variable contributes to the variation of Social Media Use among university students. The independent variables used in the regression are facilitative conditions, costs, skills and competence, and social Influence factors while social media use in selecting study programs was the dependent variable accompanied by factors such as consistent usage, intention to use and frequencies. The regression equation that was used to guide the testing is presented below.

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + e$$

Where  $Y_i$  represents Social Media Usage, (consistent usage, intention to use, Frequencies)  
 $\beta_0$  represents the intercept, predicted value of  $Y_i$  if  $X=0$ .  
 $\beta_1 \beta_2 \beta_3$  represent regression coefficients.  
 $X_1$  stands for Facilitative conditions,  
 $X_2$  stands for cost,  
 $X_3$  stands for skills and competence,  
 $X_4$  stands for social influence  
and  $e$  is the error term.

##### 4.3.1 Model summary

The model summary provides model fitness of independent variables in predicting the variation in social media usage among university students. The main assumption of model summary is that R square value should be above 0.6 in order to confirm the sufficiency of the model in predicting the dependent variable (Gao,2023). The results are presented in Table 2;

**Table 2: Model summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.790 <sup>a</sup>	.624	.603	.4028

**Predictors:** (Constant), Facilitative conditions, Costs, Skills and competence, and Social Influence.

Source: Field Data (2021)

Table 2 provides the model summary results where Facilitative conditions, Costs, Skills and competence, and Social Influence are independent variables and social media usage is the dependent variable. The R square value of 0.624 signifies that 62% of variation in social media usage in the Selection of Study Program is attributed to the independent variables. More so, the remaining 38% is explained by other factors not used in the model.

### 4.3.2 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

The analysis of variance is conducted in the study to measure if the regression model results happened by chance or logic. Furthermore, the significance level of the regression model is determined and the basic assumption is that it should be below P value of 0.05. ANOVA results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: ANOVA a**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	23.409	4	5.852	14.343	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	120.522	295	.408		
	Total	143.931	299			

**a. Dependent Variable:** Social Media Usage in Selection of Study Program

**b. Predictors: (Constant),** Facilitative conditions, Costs, Skills and competence, and Social Influence.

Source: Field Data (2021)

The results in Table 3 provide analysis of variance; the significance level is below P value < 0.05 therefore the regression results were not obtained by luck but logic. Furthermore, the F statistic of 14.343 is greater than the F-critical of 2.46 (df 4,295, implies that the regression model is accurate in predicting the variance in social media usage.

### 4.3.3 Regression Results

The regression table provides the coefficients for each independent variable in the variation of social media usage in selection of study program. The model assumes that with each increase in the unit of independent variable there is a coinciding effect in the variation in social media usage in students' selection of study programs. The findings are presented in Table 4;

**Table 4: Coefficients a**

Model		B	Std. Error	Std Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.078	.322		.129	.000
	Facilitative Conditions	.118	.106	.042	.370	.000
	Costs	-.160	.132	-.020	.605	.003
	Skills and Competence	.135	.019	.038	.182	.000
	Social Influence	.142	.088	.045	.206	.001

**a. Dependent Variable:** Social Media Usage in Selection of Study Program

Where  $x_1$ = Facilitative conditions,  $x_2$ = Costs,  $x_3$ = Skills and Competence,  $x_3$ = Social Influence B=Beta coefficient, A=Constant and Y= Social Media Usage.

$$\text{Therefore; } Y = 0.078 + 0.118x_1 - 0.160x_2 + 0.135x_3 + 0.142x_3 + e$$

Findings from Table 4 present the regression coefficients for each independent variable in relation to the variation in social media usage in Selection of Study Program. The findings imply that all independent variables; Facilitative conditions, Costs, Skills and competence, and Social Influence are statistically significant to explain their influence on students' selection of study programs in

Higher Learning Institutions. Furthermore, Regression results reveal that there are other factors apart from facilitative conditions, costs, skills and competencies, social influence that affect students' selection of study programs in Higher Learning Institutions.

A unit increase in facilitative conditions will lead to an increase in social media usage in selection of study

programs by 0.118 coefficients. Facilitative conditions in terms of sufficient network coverage, availability of devices, and the university administration venturing into social media, creates an environment through which social media usage and other digital resources can be utilized. Barriers such as availability of technological gadgets, namely computers and smartphones, and inadequate coverage of communication networks has barred the potential applicant from utilizing the benefits of social media platforms. The findings coincide with Williams *et al.*, (2021) who established facilitative conditions such as Wireless Fidelity connection, network coverage, devices and other technological infrastructure in the university premises improve social media usage among university students.

Furthermore, a unit increase in costs will lead to a coinciding decrease in social media usage in selection of study programs by -0.160 coefficients. Findings imply that reduced affordability of devices used in accessing social media, increased data charges from internet service providers, and reduced affordability in opening social media accounts reduces social media usage among university students. Students deem the available internet bundles as expensive for prospective applicants to afford. More so, the purchase of internet-facilitating gadgets such as smartphones, modems, and laptops are expensive for potential applicants. Such setbacks demand potential applicants opt for alternatives such as direct contact with campus facilities to access information pertaining to programs offered. The findings coincide with a study by Shrestha (2023) that social media usage is influenced by various factors including costs which affect students' selection of study programs in universities.

A unit increase in skills and competence will lead to an increase in social media usage in selection of study programs by 0.135 coefficients. The results indicate that ease of using social media platforms; short durations in learning how to use the social media platforms, and low skills required in using social media platforms will eventually increase social media usage among university students. The findings are in line with Lazaro (2024) who connoted that adequate skills and experience are relevant for increased usage of social media among university students. Shrestha (2023) confirms the study findings by asserting that knowledge and skills on using digital devices is pivotal in student's decision to adopt social media usage.

A unit increase in social influence will lead to an increase in social media usage in selection of study programs by 0.142 coefficients. Social influence from interaction with friends, influence from most students using social media platforms, and recommendation from family have an influence on student's decision on social media usage. The findings are in contention with Williams *et al.*, (2021) who

established that students' decision to adopt social media usage was not influenced by fellow students, but rather the availability of digital resources in the university.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

### 5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that facilitative conditions in terms of sufficient network coverage and availability of devices; Social influence from students and family, and skills and competence influence increased social media usage among university students. Furthermore, cost related to data charges, devices, and opening social media accounts limits university students' use of social media platforms. Furthermore, the study concludes that there is enough statistical evidence to explain the relationship between factors affecting social media usage and selection of study programs in Higher Learning Institutions.

### 5.2 Recommendations

- i. Considering that potential applicants have varying interests in a variety of social media platforms, the universities should strive to expand their operations to multiple social media applications. This will cater for all segments in society and thus improve their sphere of influence which is important to improve information availability for potential applicants and brand awareness of the university.
- ii. Based on the dissatisfaction raised by the students, the universities need to frequently update their social media pages with up-to-date information. This will enable information to remain relevant and reliable for applicants. Furthermore, instant response and timely feedback should be compiled. Potential applicants are customers in a marketing sense therefore demand close attention to their queries pertaining to university programs and related information.

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