

**TRANSMEDIA COMMUNICATION ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AS
STRATEGY IN SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION AMONG LAIKIPIA
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, KENYA**

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Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Conferment of the Doctor of
Philosophy Degree in Communication and Media of Laikipia University**

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DECLARATION AND RECOMMENDATION

Declaration

I declare that this is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any university.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family for their patience, support and understanding during the course of the study.

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ABSTRACT

Empirical data indicate that college and university undergraduate students are among the population most affected by Substance Abuse (SA) globally and regionally. Despite policies and strategic communication efforts, insufficient communication has been linked to the high prevalence of SA in different public universities in Kenya. Communication experts emphasise the importance of using audience-preferred communication platforms for desired outcomes. Accordingly, Kenyan university students increasingly prefer accessing information online through Social Networking Sites (SNSs), prompting public universities to adopt SNSs for student communication. Using Laikipia university as a representative of public universities in Kenya, this study examined the effectiveness of institution's communication on the SNSs in promoting SA knowledge, attitude, and ideal practices. The specific objectives of the study were to: examine the students' ease of accessing the SA content on the various SNSs; explore how the students engage with the SA content on various SNSs; assess the students' perceptions of the communication platforms, message presentation formats, and the engagement process; and evaluate the extent to which the information presented influences the students' knowledge, attitude and practices relating to substance abuse. Guided by the tenets of the Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Prototype Willingness Model, an institutional based cross-sectional convergent mixed methods design was adopted, where both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods were used. The study area was Laikipia University, with the 1st and 2nd year undergraduate students considered as the study population. Stratified sampling technique was adopted to sample the students, with the four (4) academic schools in the University used as the strata, yielding a sample size of 132 students. Quantitative data collected using online self-administered questionnaire were analysed using Microsoft Excel application, while social media analytics tools applicable to each SNS were used in recording frequencies of accessibility and engagement. Qualitative data collected through key informant interviews and online focus group discussions were analysed using inductive content analysis methods. The results revealed that the students residing within campus are able to access the SNSs because of the free Wi-Fi internet available within campus. They however cannot access content across multiple SNSs due to lack of hyperlinks on the content posted by the University. It emerged that the students' engagement practices were influenced by their desire to fit in with peers, the ease of using specific SNSs, affordances of the SNSs, the relevance, accessibility and trust in the content. Although the University prefers noticeboards for communication, students find them inaccessible and prefer online and alternative channels like lecturers and student leaders. They also suggest tailoring the content to the affordances of each SNS and gratifications they seek from the SNSs. Their perception of the engagement process was shaped by their peers' engagement practices, potential consequences involved, and whether the content met their communication needs. Interacting with the selected content increased their awareness of reliable sources of information on SA, fostering their confidence in sharing this knowledge and guiding their peers towards seeking help from the guidance and counselling office and peer educators. The study's findings are expected to be beneficial to Vision 2030 policy makers in Kenya, in developing communication policies to mitigate SA across wider demographics. The results also highlight the benefits of digital communication channels for engaging with students when physical interaction is not feasible. Furthermore, the findings can contribute to the development of policies and curricula related to digital education, digital and social media literacies.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CDC	Centre for Disease Control
CUE	Commission for University Education
KAP	Knowledge Attitude and Practices
KUCCPS	Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service
NACADA Abuse	National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug
NPTSUD	National Protocol for Treatment of Substance Use Disorder
OFGD	Online Focus Group Discussion
PWM	Prototype Willingness Model
PWSUD	People With Substance Use Disorder
SAMHSA	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
SBCC	Social and Behaviour Change Communication
SA	Substance Abuse
SNS	Social Networking Sites
UGT	Uses and Gratification Theory
WDR	World Drugs Report
WHO	World Health Organization

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

Adequate Communication: This term is used in reference to when communication is able to fulfil a need or requirement and is acceptable in quantity and quality (www.dictionary.reverso).

Affordance: This study used the term in references to the various specific functions applicable to each social networking site that entice users to take engagement actions, such as commenting, uploading contents, sharing and tagging friends (Trepete, 2015).

Perception: This term is used in this study in reference to an individual's subjective evaluation and interpretation (or judgement) of the ease of use and usefulness of digital technologies, such as SNSs, which in turn influences their attitudes, motivations and behavioural intentions towards using these platforms (Camilleri & Falzon, 2020; An & Kerdpitak, 2023).

Prototype Image: The term, as used in this study, refers to a mental image that one has regarding the type of person they are interested in, the guidelines or yardstick that an individual uses to define ideal behaviour, on which to base a definition of something (Ohtomo & Hirose, 2007).

Social Media: In this study, the term is used in reference to internet-based platforms that allow individuals to create and share user-generated content, usually using either mobile or web-based technologies (Margetts et al., 2015).

Social Networking Sites: This study used McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase's (2017) conceptualisation of 'Social Networking Sites' as web-based services designed to allow user, such as individuals, groups and institutions, to connect, interact, collaborate and build communities by allowing them to create, co-create, modify, share and engage with accessible user-generated content.

Subjective Norms: This study adopted Gerrard et al.'s (2008) interpretation of subjective norms as the perceived social pressures individuals feel from their significant others to engage in or abstain from certain behaviours, often based on their belief about how these significant others would approve or disapprove of their actions.

Substance: The term is used in this study in reference to the various natural or synthetic compounds that, when taken in or administered into one's system, act on the nervous system causing alterations in the functions that regulate perception, consciousness, cognition, mood, emotions and behaviour (World Health Organisation (WHO), n.d.)

Substance Abuse: This study adopted this term as recommended by American Psychological Association (APA, 2022; 2013), in reference to varying degrees of excessive use of substances such as alcohol; tobacco; opioids; caffeine; cannabis; hallucinogens; inhalants; sedative, hypnotics, or anxiolytics; stimulants and more. It also refers to a problematic pattern of using alcohol or another substance that results in impairment in daily life or noticeable distress.

Transmedia: Following Jenkins's (2016;2010) definition, this study uses the term 'transmedia' to refer to a process where communication content gets distributed systematically across multiple media platforms, with each medium making its own unique contribution by enabling the target audiences interact and participate in the unfolding discussions.

Youth: This research applied the term 'Youth', as advanced by WHO (n.d.), in reference to individuals in the age range of 15 to 24 years.

Young People: The term 'Young People' as used in this study aligns with WHO's (n.d.) definition of individuals aged between 10 to 24 years.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

In this section, a description of the existing situation relating to substance use among the youth and university students and deficiencies with current communication strategies is presented. Also discussed are the contexts linking strategic social and behaviour change communication and transmedia as communication approaches that can be used to effectively communicate with university students regarding substances and substance use.

1.1.1 Substance Use Among the Youth and University Students

Globally, Substance Abuse (SA) among the youth remains a social and public health concern affecting their education, health, social and economic development (Pere, 2018; Oino & Obare, 2022). Its escalating prevalence, particularly in developing nations (USA Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 2019; Kamenderi et al., 2019), is evident among African universities undergraduate students, with reported rates ranging from 28 percent to 62 percent within this population (Nyaga et al., 2021; World Drugs Report (WDR), 2018; Oino & Obare, 2022). A common postulation is that universities cultivate environments that foster the initiation of substance use and abuse among students (Blows & Isaacs, 2022). First and second year undergraduates are particularly vulnerable to SA due to independence from parental control, independence in making behavioural health decisions and peer influence during their transition to adulthood (Musyoka et al., 2019; Jelagat et al., 2023).

The term ‘substance abuse’ has been used in reference to harmful and excessive use of psychoactive substances such as alcohol and illicit drugs (Kiriru, 2018). The abuse of these substances can lead to numerous substance-use disorders affecting the behavioural, cognitive and psychological well-being of the users (WDR, 2023; Sampaio et al., 2024). For a student, this can lead to declining grades, increased involvement in criminal activities, violent behaviour and other risk-taking behaviours (Ngure et al., 2019).

High rates of substance use among African universities are documented (Blows & Isaacs, 2022; Gebresilassie et al., 2020; Sampaio et al., 2024; Rhoba et al., 2021) in South Africa (62.7%), Nigeria (45.7%) and Ethiopia (37.63%). In Kenya, studies (Ndegwa et al., 2017; Musyoka et al., 2020; 2019; Mbuthia et al., 2020; Oino & Obare, 2022) and national data (National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA), 2024) estimate that 45.6 percent of undergraduate students have used at least one substance of abuse in their lifetime, while 25 percent of them currently use at least one substance of abuse (NACADA, 2024).

The availability and accessibility of illicit substances within and around universities significantly influence student substance use (Ngure et al., 2019; NACADA, 2024), with variation in substance use patterns across universities (NACADA, 2024). For example, South African students commonly abuse alcohol, cannabis, Ecstasy, Ritalin, Poppers, and Ketamine (Blows & Isaacs, 2022), while khat, alcohol, and cigarettes are prevalent among Ethiopian students (Gebresilassie et al., 2020; Rhoba et al., 2021), and alcohol, tobacco, codeine-containing syrup, and khat in Nigerian universities (Sampaio et al., 2024). In Kenya, undergraduate students report using alcohol, cigarettes, shisha, vape/e-cigarettes, nicotine pouches, Kuber, snuff/chewed tobacco, cannabis, cocaine, and heroin (NACADA, 2024). Despite these regional variations, alcohol, tobacco products, and cannabis emerge as common substances used by this demographic across the continent. This suggests shared risk factors or cultural influences that transcend geographical boundaries. Emerging trends in the Kenyan universities also indicate an increasing use of new substances like vape/e-cigarettes and nicotine. These reports highlight the significant prevalence of substance abuse among university students in the country, indicating a concerning trend warranting attention and intervention.

Consequently, a majority of Kenyan universities have adopted alcohol and drug abuse policies (Larimer et al., 2010; Otingi, 2012; Ronoh, 2014). However, policy enactment and counselling alone are insufficient for comprehensive SA prevention (Pere, 2018). Effective SA prevention requires tailored communication strategies to enhance awareness, knowledge, and promote ideal practices related to substances and their use (Pere, 2018, Mbuthia et al., 2020), aligning with NACADA (2021) guidelines for age-appropriate and targeted communication programmes. Such tailored approaches can resonate with university students' unique contexts, ultimately equipping them with the

necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to make informed choices regarding substance use and abuse (Kiriru, 2018, Mbuthia et al., 2020).

Despite the implementation of various communication strategies by a majority of Kenyan universities to address substance abuse, insufficient communication remains a factor in student substance abuse, partly due to their reliance on unreliable peer and social media sources (Masese, 2020). Existing literature highlight a gap in documented evidence regarding the effectiveness of current communication approaches in shaping students' knowledge, attitudes, and substance use practices (Asante & Oti-Boadi, 2013; Atwoli et al., 2011).

1.1.2 A Case for Strategic Social and Behaviour Change Communication

The Social and Behaviour Change Communication strategy (SBCC) is a research-based, and interactive approach for communication programmes targeting the youth, which aim to promote desired knowledge, attitude, and practices (Abamecha et al., 2021; Ngigi & Busolo, 2018). Proponents suggest SBCC facilitates the development of tailored messages, while using a variety of population appropriate communication channels, to motivate sustained individual and community level changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours (Clark et. al., 2017).

Thus, with the focus being on using appropriate channels of communication, the internet may be a suitable platform for the delivery of SBCC promotional messages to young people. This is because this age group habitually uses the technology for majority of their communication needs. For instance, a survey by Wamuyu (2020) on Kenyan youth's internet usage established that social media dominates internet use among 7 years to 25-year-olds, with 90 percent of the users accessing the internet via mobile devices and 2 out of 3 youths in Kenya either owning a mobile device or having access to one. This is in line with statistics posted by online web traffic analysis platforms (Statcounter, n.d) indicating the most popular Social Networking Sites (SNSs) in Kenya as being Facebook, Twitter / (now X), YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Tumblr, Tagged, Snapchat, Google+ and yahoo. Heinrichs et al. (2011) attribute the popularity of these sites to their affordances such as enabling users to access information, create content, distribute/share content and express their opinions. These statistics support the hypothesis that to reach this population effectively, a

communication strategy would have to incorporate the SNSs as key channels of communication (Pew Research Centre, 2018).

The exponential growth in digital media platforms such as social networking sites, coupled with the development of smart mobile devices has also led to a convergence culture. Audiences are now constantly sourcing for information across multiple media platforms and connecting socially on SNSs that fulfil their various gratifications such as for commercial use, networking, information sourcing, news, and entertainment (Jenkins, 2010; 2016; Wang, 2014; Gambarato, 2013). This has resulted in communication approaches which focus on an active digital audience. The emphasis is not only on content creation and distribution but also on audience engagement. Thus, communicators are constantly exploring ways to engage with their target audiences, seeking feedback and creating relevant content (Weinreich, 2013). Lessons from precedents set by other organisations in using mobile technology and social media to educate the youth and college students about sexual health, demonstrated that communication approaches carried out on SNSs produced excellent results when targeting these populations (Steinberg et al., 2018; Feroz et al., 2021). Eke et al. (2014) also established that communication campaigns that were strategically designed to incorporate the target audience in message development played a significant role in raising the public's acceptance of the message and thus their knowledge and awareness about health issues. This is an affordance provided by the SNSs, where users who are the audiences can be part of message development when allowed to upload and share content on the SNSs (Kili et al., 2022).

Despite these propositions for the inclusion of social media in social and behaviour change interventions, and even though majority of universities have adopted SNSs as platforms for communicating with their students, it has been established that they have not comprehensively utilised these platforms in their substance use prevention strategies (Ronoh, 2014). In cases where substance use awareness campaigns have been taken to online media sites, the messages were not designed specifically for the various sites. Instead, the messages found online are those transmitted uniformly across all platforms (cross-media) without taking into consideration the various affordances of the platforms and channels that users find gratifying. In this regard, users have been shown to use specific SNSs for specific gratifications. These gratifications are based on

the type of content that appeal to the users, as afforded by the specific SNS. For instance, audiences prefer Facebook for information sourcing, information sharing and entertainment through photos; Instagram for sharing photographs, YouTube for uploading and downloading videos; Twitter/X for information sourcing, information sharing and entertainment; WhatsApp for sharing videos, memes, documents, and socialisation (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Kili et al., 2022).

Cross-posting limits audience involvement in message development and interaction with content developers (Ronoh, 2014; Mureithi et al., 2019), potentially hindering message ownership and adoption by the audience (Pirio, n.d). Transmedia communication addresses this by fostering audience participation in content access, development, redistribution and interactions (Jenkins, 2010; Wang, 2014; Gambarato, 2013). Consequently, SBCC strategies are increasingly adopting transmedia communication approaches to leverage on their immersive engagement, actively involving audiences as collaborators and content creators.

1.1.3 Transmedia as an Ideal Communication Approach

Transmedia communication is a genre of communication in which multiple media platforms are used to deliver messages to an audience. It has been advanced as a process where the integral elements of communication content are distributed systematically across multiple media platforms for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated communication experience. The aim is also to reach as many audiences as possible through their medium of choice (Jenkins, 2010; 2016; Jenkins et al., 2013). The communication content may be spread from mainstream mass media to social media, in the process picking up new audiences and allowing the audience to engage deeper with the content (Wang & Singhal, 2016). A transmedia communication strategy can therefore consist of content disseminated through television, print media and websites, complemented by SMS messages and group discussion carried out on SNSs such as WhatsApp, Twitter/X, Facebook. Each of the medium used enhances the communication process through their unique affordances. These affordances endear the medium to the target audiences, and this may in turn influence them to access and engage with the content. Equally, communicators consider these affordances and limitations of the media when creating content for dissemination, in line with the gratifications of their target audiences (Jakus & Zubcić, 2016).

Being an evolving concept, transmedia communication has the potential of mutating to fit specific needs and situations (Byun & Kwon, 2016). It is therefore an approach that can be used in encouraging the participation of young people in a communication process where they are given the opportunity to engage with the content, as allowed by the specific SNSs, thereby making them feel connected to the message (Weinreich, 2013). Hinyard and Kreuter (2007) posit that when such a method is incorporated in communication, for example in the form of narratives, it has the potential of improving the targeted audience's Knowledge, Attitude, Beliefs and Behavioural Intention (KABI) levels. Transmedia communication has thus been successfully used to promote public safety and health messages such as HIV prevention, among adolescents on SNSs. (Young et al., 2020).

Various case studies have also tested the effectiveness of transmedia communication approaches carried out on digital platforms. Of significance to this study are two studies where the target audiences were of similar age demographic to those of the current study. Wang and Singhal (2016) designed and tested a transmedia edutainment programme dubbed the *East Los High* to promote sexual and reproductive health of young Latino Americans (Wang & Singhal, 2016). Similarly, Gilliam et al. (2012) in their quest to identify innovative insights into sexual and reproductive health education of disadvantaged youth population in Chicago and Nigeria, also tested out a transmedia initiative dubbed '*The Game Changer Chicago*' aimed at influencing participants' attitude and behaviour. Given the recorded successes of the two programmes, transmedia communication strategy has been recommended as a possibly effective method of reaching young people with social and behaviour change messages (Gilliam et al., 2012; Wang & Singhal, 2016). Accordingly, majority of public universities in Kenya already operate active accounts on various online communication platforms, including SNSs, where they communicate with their students on various issues including on Substance Abuse (SA) (Ronoh, 2014). However, considering the assertion that insufficient communication may be a contributing factor to the increase in substance use among the students (Masese, 2020), there is need to assess how they use these platforms to communicate and engage with the students. This includes examining the students' awareness of the existence of these accounts; the extent to which the students have been enabled to interact with the content and be part of content creation;

and whether the information presented on the SNSs meets the students' information needs regarding SA.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although communication on substance use prevention has been extensively carried out on various communication platforms, statistics show a significant rise in the number of university students abusing substances. Various studies have attributed this continued prevalence to insufficient communication about substances and substances abuse. Thus, while public universities in Kenya, such as Laikipia University, have adopted alcohol and drug abuse policies and manage active communication strategies on online and SNSs, it is not known whether the communication is sufficient in meeting the ideal substance-related knowledge, attitudinal and behavioural needs of the students. Also, while transmedia has been proposed as an ideal communication approach to use when communicating with young people on SNSs, few empirical studies have been conducted to determine the effectiveness of transmedia communication in terms of accessibility, engagement affordances, participants' perception of the mode and the overall impact of the content on the audiences' substance-related knowledge, attitude and behaviour. This study addressed these gaps by using Laikipia University as a case study for Kenyan public universities, to assess the effectiveness of its communication on SNSs in enhancing undergraduate students' substance-related knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. The findings underscore the importance of digital communication for student engagement when physical interaction is limited and offer insights for digital education policies and curricula.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The general aim of the study was to establish to what extent the information provided by Laikipia university on their various SNS accounts have been successful in promoting knowledge, attitude, and ideal substance use practices among the students.

The specific objectives were to:

1. Examine the students' ease of accessing the SA content on the various Social Networking Sites (SNSs).
2. Explore how the students engage with the SA content on various SNSs.
3. Assess the students' perceptions of the communication platforms, message presentation formats, and the engagement process.
4. Evaluate the extent to which the information presented influences the students' knowledge, attitude and practices relating to substance abuse.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How accessible are the SA content on the various Social Networking Sites (SNSs) to the students?
2. How do the students engage with the SA content on the various SNSs?
3. What are the students' perceptions of the communication platforms, the message presentation formats and the engagement process?
4. To what extent does the information presented influence the students' knowledge, attitude and practices relating to substance abuse?

1.5 Significance of the Study

According to NACADA (2017), alcohol and drug abuse pose a danger to public health system and consequently affects the life of the citizenry. Policymakers in Kenya, particularly those involved with Vision 2030, such as the State Department for Economic Planning and the Big 4 Agenda related to healthcare, may find the results of this study beneficial for developing policies to mitigate the prevalence substance abuse across wider demographics in the country.

Various studies have linked the abuse of drugs and substances to the increase in the spread of HIV/AIDS amongst People With Substance Use Disorder (PWSUD). Considering that controlling HIV infections has become a responsibility of each institution of higher learning, the finding of this study sheds light on some of the appropriate communication channels to use in disseminating the necessary information within this population.

The findings of this study also contribute to scholarship on social and behaviour change communication by presenting an alternative communication approach to mitigating substance use among university students. Furthermore, the results of the study draw attention to the benefits of computer-mediated communication platforms as channels for engaging with students in academic discussions, especially when opportunities for face-to-face interactions are impossible.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This section looks at the scope and limitations of the study.

1.6.1 Scope of the Study

There are 35 public chartered universities in Kenya and 7 public universities constituent colleges (Commission for University Education (CUE), 2024). However, this study was undertaken within Laikipia University, which is a public university in Kenya. Given that public universities in Kenya rely on a central placement system (Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service, KUCCPS) where the students are picked from the same pool for placement to any of the public universities, the students who formed part of the study at Laikipia University can therefore be a representation of other university students with the same characteristics.

Within the institution, this study focused on the first year and second year students only. The first-year students were chosen because research findings show that they face social challenges upon joining institutions of higher learning (Musyoka et al., 2020; 2019). Thus, a tailored communication approach would help them from being introduced to substance use by their peers. The second-year students were included because tailored communication can provide mitigation strategies in case they have already been introduced to substance use or battling substance use disorders.

1.6.2 Limitations of the Study

Although there exists a myriad of substances that have been noted to be addictive (World Drug Report, 2018), this study focused on the most prevalent drugs and substances abused in Kenya, especially by the young people, like the students being considered for the study (NACADA, 2016; National Protocol for Treatment of

Substance Use Disorder (NPTSUD), 2017; Musyoka et al. 2020). These include alcohol, tobacco, Khat (Miraa), Bhang (Marijuana), Heroin, Cocaine, prescription drugs and inhalants. This study was anchored on the Kenya Youth Development Policy (2019) that prioritises the eradication of drugs and substance abuse among the youth.

Also, within the identified study area, the participants were limited to students between the ages of 18-24 years, the ages that are most vulnerable due to peer pressure that leads to risky behaviours (World Drug Report (WDR), 2018; Mbuthia et al., 2020). Only those students who possess a computer or smart phone that can access internet and who have an active social media account were considered. This meant that students without these gadgets were excluded, even when they were willing to participate in the study.

Another limitation relates to the SNSs considered for the study, which aimed to establish the students' preferences. These were drawn from data indicating the most popular SNSs in the country (Kenya) among users aged 7 to 25 years (Statcounter, n.d; Datareportal, n.d; Poushter, 2023). However, these statistics constantly change due to shifts in audience preferences, internet penetration levels, ownership of gadgets like smartphones, and the development and restructuring of the platforms (Wamuyu, 2020). A case in point is the SNS that, at the onset of the study and during data collection, was called 'Twitter'. However, at the time of data analysis, this site had been renamed as 'X'. In this regard, the researcher had to rename the SNS throughout the document.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature guided by the objectives of the study. The literature reviewed focuses on: the importance of accessibility of message content in communication strategies; implications of audience engagement with communication content in SNS communication strategies; significance of audience perceptions in transmedia communication process; and the impact of tailored information on audiences' knowledge, attitude and practices relating to substance use. The theoretical framework is also presented and discussed.

2.2 Importance of Accessibility of Message Content in Communication Strategies

The term 'accessibility' in the context of social media and SNSs has been used in reference to the ability of audiences, to access and engage with content on various platforms used in the dissemination of information (Pereira et al., 2021; Barton et al., 2015). The increasing prominence of social media and Social Networking Sites (SNSs) as important channels and platforms of communication has necessitated this classification. Communicators are earnestly integrating these platforms into their strategies, supported by research indicating widespread adoption, particularly among young populations, for majority of their communication needs (Wamuyu, 2020; Bozkurt et al., 2017). There is, therefore, need to explore the correlation between accessibility and effective communication when using these platforms to communicate with these demographics.

Given the exponential growth and usage of SNSs for communication purposes by organisations and their publics, a growing number of research studies have focused on the significance of accessibility to and on these platforms, and on intended outcomes. These studies have widely been in relation to consumer brands and goods (Kim et al., 2017), and impact on attitudes toward other users and related behaviour (Appel & Mara, 2013; Jones et al., 2014). Although these studies underscore the significance of accessibility when employed to communication strategies targeting consumers, their focus has been on mainstream media platforms such as radio, television, and print,

rather than social media and SNSs. On the other hand, the majority of research on this topic in the global south, specifically sub-Saharan Africa, have predominantly occurred within the health sciences under the banner of M-health (Istepanian, 2022). This study sought to address these gaps by examining undergraduate students' ease of accessing SA content on the SNSs used by their university to communicate with them, thereby expanding the scholarship on accessibility to include the social sciences.

Published research (Steinberg et al., 2018; Feroz et. al., 2021; Martin et al., 2020) indicate a budding interest in this topic, due to the plethora of social media platforms available to audiences, combined with the expansive adoption and usage of these platforms. Nevertheless, few systematic investigations have explored how access to social media platforms facilitates the promotion of desired knowledge, attitude, and ideal practices particularly among young people who are the main users of these media (Steinberg et al., 2018; Feroz et. al., 2021). Similarly, Martin et al.'s (2020) review of studies on online participatory interventions for adolescents and young adults' sexual health, revealed that the impact of accessibility on the effectiveness of online interventions has not been sufficiently evaluated. Instead, majority of studies have concentrated on the supply side of the communicative process (content characteristics and presentation). While these factors are important because they indicate potential performance, they are not sufficient for a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of media and communication. To fully assess the actual performance of communication strategies, it is essential to also examine the audience reached, how the strategies align with their communication needs, interest and their ability to access information on the communication platforms. This study addressed this gap by examining how the students' access to relevant information on SNSs influences their knowledge, attitude, and practices relating to SA.

As internet use, specifically social media and SNSs, continue to gain popularity among young people the world over, regionally and in Kenya, research on the platforms have equally gained traction with the focus being on how these platforms can be incorporated in non-profit organisations, such as institutions of higher learning, who aim at serving public interests (Hou & Lampe, 2015). Although, academic institutions have increasingly adopted social media and SNSs for academic purposes (Kutu & Kutu, 2022; Anderson, 2019), there is limited systematic research on how these platforms are

strategically used for student communication, particularly on topical issues and behavioural change, or how students access and engage with content on the platforms (Hou, 2016; Kutu & Kutu, 2022). Instead, a prevalent theme in the literature (Kimani & Obwatho, 2020; Masele & Rwehikiza, 2021; Anderson, 2019) is how academic institutions use social media and SNSs as marketing tools for publicity, promoting university offers and disseminating one-way information to students, rather than fostering two-way engagement.

In an ideal organisational communication setup, managers of online communication have a duty to ensure accessibility of the information they generate and distribute. However, research findings indicate that access to social networking services remains inadequate and inconsistent in many cases, and across platforms. These inadequacies are both on the communicator as well as the audience as noted by Pereira et al. (2021). They (Pereira et al., 2021) point out that despite advancements in technology and a growing awareness of the importance of inclusivity, those who design and use social media to communicate with diverse audiences, especially in organisations, are not aware of the importance and benefits of creating accessible content. This lack of awareness leads to a significant portion of the user-generated content remaining inaccessible. Additionally, Anderson (2019) opines that lack of knowledge and understanding on the part of the audience hinders their active engagement in content sharing practices.

Nonetheless, the success of a communication strategy incorporating SNSs is largely dependent on how and why the targeted audiences access these SNSs in the first place (Bozkurt et al., 2017). This can be influenced by various factors including: availability and popularity of the SNSs among the audiences that may influence which ones they access, compatibility of the devices used by the audiences in accessing the SNSs which may promote or hinder accessibility to content in various formats, the availability of (or lack of) internet to access the online SNSs or download content that may promote or hinder access to the content, and the audiences' content preference that may increase their inclination towards certain content and avoidance of others (Sharov et. al., 2021; Bozkurt et al., 2017; Apuke & Tunca, 2022). In agreement with this, Martin et al. (2020) assert that factors that affect accessibility can also be considered in terms of practicality (availability of devices such as mobile phones, and technology such as internet), attractiveness (in reference to appealing content and platforms that meet their

gratifications), and peer interactions (they will be inclined to access platforms where majority of their peers are and there is opportunity to connect with their peers). Thus, by understanding how the audience accesses and interacts with social media platforms, a communicator can tailor their communication strategy for optimal reach, engagement, and impact, thereby ensuring the message resonates and achieves desired outcomes.

How and why audiences choose specific media may be an entry point to understanding how accessibility is a factor in achieving effective communication targeting specific audiences. In line with this, Jenkins et al. (2013) conceptualised and advanced transmedia communication as a process involving the integration of several delivery channels through which audiences could access content. Nevertheless, scholars such as Byun and Kwon (2016) problematise this conceptualisation and argue that the existence of many access points may also result in the same points serving as exit points if the audience are not interested in the content or the medium. To control this scenario, it is therefore important to consider the audiences' preferences and interests in various media at the point of conceptualisation of any communication strategy. The tenets of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) can guide in understanding how audiences engage with different social networking platforms and the motivations behind their media choices. Thus, based on the postulations of these studies (Jenkins et al., 2013; Byun & Kwon, 2016), this study operated on the premise that to effectively communicate with their students, the University should first determine their preferred media platforms before selecting the ones to use.

Various studies have established that students use SNSs for various gratifications including commercial purposes, networking, information sourcing, entertainment, social interaction, self-expression, peer engagement, maintaining connections, and academic purposes (Kili et al., 2022; Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Bozkurt et al., 2017; Apuke & Tunca, 2022). Mese and Aydin (2019) further found that students' experiences with specific SNSs influenced their choice of platform, while Sharov et al.'s study (2021) identified availability, accessibility, ease of use, affordance and peer popularity as key factors influencing students' SNS preferences.

Despite employing different methodologies on similar demographics, Mese and Aydin (2019) and Sharov et al.'s (2021) findings highlight diverse approaches to studying online accessibility, including on SNSs. In agreement with this, Hasebrink and Hölzig

(2020) while using the tenets of audience and receptions studies, suggest that theoretical frameworks can be used to guide in developing methodologies for audience focused studies. Although their (Hasebrink & Hölig, 2020) proposed framework was for media performance assessment, it can also serve as a multi-dimensional benchmark for evaluating broader public communication contexts, such as in the case of the institution under investigation, moving beyond focusing on media reach and content analysis.

Similarly, the increasing adoption of social media in health education has been attributed to its ability to overcome physical barriers that traditionally impeded access to healthcare support and resources (Stellefson et. al., 2020). The prevalence of SNSs accessible on mobile devices has made health information readily available, enabling users to conveniently access and consume relevant health-related content whenever the need arises. In accordance with this, the Strategic Communication Framework for Effective Communication by WHO (2017) advises that audiences tend to rely on their ability to access the information they need to protect and improve their health. Hence, communicators need to identify the right mix of available communication channels (including those preferred by their target audiences) and map their capacities to reach their target audiences.

Statistics by Statcounter (n.d) show that the most popular SNSs in Kenya are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter/X, Pinterest, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Similarly, Statista (n.d) reported that the most used social media platform in Kenya as of the first quarter of 2023 were WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter/X. Furthermore, report by online sites' (Datareportal, n.d) on the state of digital use in Kenya as of 2023 indicate that among the 17.86 million population that accessed the internet, 10.55 million accessed social media platforms including SNSs. In the same report (Datareportal, n.d), 44.3 percent of Kenyan's social media users were female, while 55.7 percent were male. The leading SNS, Facebook had 9.25 million users of which 43.7 percent were female and 56.3 percent were male. YouTube, which was the second most accessed SNS in Kenya, had 9.44 million users, of which 42.9 percent were female and 57.1 percent were male. Instagram had 2.20 million users in Kenya in early 2023, with 47.4 percent of this population comprising female and 52.6 percent male. These statistics support previous research findings showing how gender disparity impacts on

accessibility to online communication (Sharov et al., 2021; Knight-McCord et al., 2016).

The study by Knight-McCord et al. (2016) highlighted the differences between how female and male users access information through mobile technology, although in their findings more female students used Twitter/X and Instagram as opposed to male students who used Facebook. Sharov et al. (2021) also confirmed the existing differences between how female and male youth access information through mobile technology, with the male youth having higher social media use compared to their female counterparts. Building on these findings (Sharov et al., 2021; Knight-McCord et al., 2016), this study argues that examining how such disparities affect information access on SNSs among public university students, such as those in this study, can clarify the impact of gendered patterns on digital literacy and information accessibility. Ultimately, these insights may inform the development and implementation of targeted communication aimed at bridging the digital gender gap.

In the African context, this disparity has been attributed to several factors including: lack of funds to buy smartphones and data for internet; cultural upbringing where females are cultured to shy from technology, leading to technophobia; and lack of safe public spaces where women can safely use ICT (Davaki, 2018). Davaki's report (2018) also revealed that the existing difference in digital competence between students (the capacity to acquire, process and communicate digital information) is influenced by socio-cultural background, cultural capital, and academic orientation. These findings imply that communicators need to establish how these disparities manifest among their target audiences and thereafter plan on how to correct them. Given the difference in the usage and accessibility of the social media and SNSs, a transmedia communication strategy can therefore, increase the chances of the audiences accessing the information by choosing from the multiple platforms the sites that appeal to them.

How audiences access their preferred SNS is also affected by the gadgets they use which may or may not enable them. In this regard, university students have equally been shown to prefer using mobile devices such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops to connect to and access SNS (Bozkurt et al., 2017; Apuke & Tunca, 2022). Kharono et al. (2022) further established that 48 percent of Kenyan youth under the age of 25 have access to smartphones, with 90 percent of those with smartphones using them to access

social media. This finding denotes the need for further research on how these habits can be harnessed for effective communication with this population. These findings are comparable to those reported by Sharov et al. (2021) which also confirmed that 96 percent of the studied students used their smartphones to access various SNSs. Some of the factors they cited as enabling accessibility to SNSs included the fact that the students used smartphones, availability of internet via Wi-fi or cell phone operators and the reduction in time spent on other activities that allowed them extra time to go online. Their study focused on university students, a demographic similar to the one in the current study. They advocate for the need to address socio-economic factors to ensure equitable access to information and technology-based intervention. For example, in the case of the University, this would entail providing access to good Wi-Fi coverage within campus and sharing information in formats that can be accessed offline.

Of significance to this study is Apuke and Tunca's (2022) findings which proved that some of the challenges faced by university students in accessing SNS range from lack of interest in joining the SNSs, privacy issues, lack of time, inaccessibility to the internet, inability to distinguish between official and pseudo accounts, and lack of efficient internet facilities on their campus. The latter leads to reliance on mobile data, often requiring costly plans, further creating financial strain on the students. To mitigate these issues and promote equitable access, Apuke and Tunca's (2022) recommend user education on importance of digital engagement and providing resources to access online content.

Apuke and Tunca's findings (2022) also suggest that when organisations decide to incorporate SNSs in their communication strategies, they need to ensure they create awareness of the platforms they intend to incorporate in their communication. This may help tackle misinformation that audiences may be exposed to from 'pseudo' accounts (Kim & Gil de Zúñiga, 2021). In a university setup like the one being studied, this is an important area to consider because if the students access information on unofficial sites, they may be prone to misleading information from the pseudo accounts. Misinformation also has the potential of amplifying a society's knowledge gap when they cannot access credible information. As a solution, Peenycok et al. (2020) advise that constantly reminding audiences to evaluate the accuracy of the content they access online can help improve their discernment and choices about what they access from

online platforms. Although their study (Peenycook et al., 2020) focused on misinformation during the covid-19 pandemic, the results shade light on the dangers of misinformation on SNSs and how these can be countered, given that misinformation is an ongoing problem on SNSs and as such, any official communicator needs to factor this as a challenge when planning on how to successfully incorporate SNSs in their communication strategies.

Evidence from other scholars (Pasioka et al., 2021) also suggest that online audiences may be prompted to search for, believe and share information from SNSs that they consider to be official, without verifying the accuracy of the information. The young populations have been found to have a lacklustre tendency of opting to post content so as to get as many likes or comments as possible, instead of crosschecking on the accuracy of the information they access online (Hinsley, 2021). Thus, another way of ensuring the credibility of SNSs is through verification of the official accounts by the respective platform's management, as is the case with leading SNSs like Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Pinterest and Snapchat. Digital competence should be enhanced by the institution through training on how to access the credible sites and providing enabling infrastructure such as free Wi-Fi throughout campus.

Pereira et al. (2021) in their study also underscore the importance of continuous valuations to confirm that content and platforms are easily accessible and user-friendly for the intended audience. This can be done through a combination of user feedback, functional testing, and automated tools. This multifaceted approach ensures that both the technical aspects and user experiences and perceptions regarding accessibility are thoroughly evaluated. Accessibility evaluations also help in identifying the barriers and limitations faced by targeted audiences, providing valuable insights into their experiences and perceptions of the overall communication experience (Sharov et al., 2021). These results can thereafter be used in bettering communication to achieve intended objectives. In this regard, therefore, this study by examining the accessibility of the message content on the various SNSs used in communicating about SA to the participating university students can provide insights into the implications of accessibility on the target participants' engagement while using the communication platforms.

2.3 Implications of Audience Engagement with Content on SNSs

The unprecedented growth of social media platforms and their users has led to social media engagement being a phenomenon attracting research on the subject from as early as the mid-2000s. However, it was not until 2009 that one of the earliest studies exploring dialogic communication (a resemblance of the concept of engagement) in platforms such as Facebook and Twitter/X, was published (Waters et al., 2009; Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Shao, 2009). At that time, social media was a fairly new frontier, and organisations were hesitant to put information on the various platforms for public consumption due to fear of the unknown both in practice and in research (Kapoor et al., 2018). This early research aimed to understand how organisations were using social media to communicate with their audiences and to identify the effectiveness of different communication strategies.

Alluding to the evolution of social media research, Kapoor et al. (2018) noted that early research on social media initially focused on user-generated content as a new type of online content, with studies exploring social media as a marketing tool. For example, the study by Waters et al. (2009) found that non-profit organisations on Facebook were primarily using the platform for one-way communication instead of engaging in dialogue with their audience. Bortree and Seltzer (2009) on the other hand explored the relationship between the creation of an online space for dialogue and dialogic outcomes on Facebook profiles of environmental advocacy groups.

However, the sustained development and evolving nature of social media and SNSs has continued to create a need for continued research on the topic to keep up with the changing communication landscape. Consequently, researchers have aimed to understand not only the best practices for social media engagement, but also the impact of social media engagement, and how organisations could effectively measure and track their social media undertakings (Trunfio & Rossi, 2021). Ultimately, the goal has been to help organisations navigate social media and utilise it to improve relationships, build reputation, and achieve other desired outcomes (McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014). Their research has thus diversified its focus, subsequently shifting towards examining online communities and blogging, including the analysis of blogger behaviours, reader retention, and blog visibility. Furthermore, various studies have acknowledged the value of social media in disseminating information during critical events, especially on

platforms like Twitter/X. This recognition, coupled with organisations' commitment to open and honest communication with their audiences, has led to a renewed interest and research on social media engagement (Camilleri & Falzon, 2021). It is against this backdrop that this study contributes to the scholarship on audience engagement on SNSs by examining how students, a distinct demographic, engage with SA content on these platforms, and how this relates to their perception and acceptance of the communication process.

Nonetheless, the question of what exactly constitutes social media engagement remains an ongoing debate among communication practitioners and scholars. For this study, clarifying the parameters of social media engagement was essential in designing an appropriate data collection and analysis framework. The earliest attempt at defining social media engagement was by early researchers of social media who operationalised engagement as the quality of user experience with web-based technologies that enable users to interact with, create and share content with individuals and organisations in their social networks (Shao, 2009; McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2016; Guerrero-Pico & Scolari, 2016). McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase (2016) established that social media users are inclined to join media platforms where they can interact with their peers and obtain access to content that is both entertaining and relevant to their everyday lives. The concept is also acknowledged by scholars such as Guerrero-Pico and Scolari (2016) in relation to transmedia communication, where the content produced due to these interactions are referred to as 'user generated content'. These postulations (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2016; Guerrero-Pico & Scolari, 2016) support Shao's (2009) initial conceptualisation that individuals deal with user-generated media platforms like Twitter/X and Facebook by consuming, participating, and producing. This means that audiences may consume communication content in the form of information and entertainment, participate by engaging with other users on the sites or opt to produce their own content for self-expression and self-actualisation.

In recent years, other definitions have also been put forth on what comprises social media engagement (Perreault & Mosconi, 2018; Drivas et al., 2022). This study adopts Drivas et al.'s (2022) conceptualisation, which defines engagement as users' interactions such as likes, shares, comments, and reaction, with content posted on social media and SNSs. Examining these behavioural metrics, alongside experiential factors,

can help researchers understand why people engage at the level they do, with what kinds of social media platforms, and to what effect (Perreault & Mosconi, 2018). Drives et al.'s (2022) definition aligns with today's digital landscape, where user-generated content thrives due to accessible content creation and distribution software (Jenkins et al., 2013; Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016; Guerrero-Pico & Scolari, 2016). It is however important to note that how the users of the SNS decide to interact with the content is what engagement is all about.

In this regard, engagement is considered an important factor in any SBCC strategy because interactive communication campaigns that encourage participation and engagement rather than providing a one-way flow of information have been shown to have greater potential of promoting behaviour change (Crutzen et. al., 2011; Neiger et. al., 2013). Young people's engagement with relevant social media content, demonstrated through their awareness and approval of the content, can foster their development of desired knowledge, attitude, and ideal practices (Kennedy & Engebretsen, 2020). This belief is anchored on the supposition that users tend to engage with content based on their various interests in either the subject or content and that when they do this, there is some transmission of knowledge and eventually learning involved.

Di Gangi and Wasko (2016) also postulated the various attributes to social interactions that influence engagement on social media platforms as including: personalisation, social accessibility, perceived risk, and transparency. These interactions reflect the level of personalisation of the communication process and how the users perceive the content based on their interests. When users perceive the interactions as tailored to their specific interests and needs, positive attitudes tend to increase, leading to more personal relevance and greater satisfaction, eventually resulting in higher user engagement. Social accessibility on the other hand refers to the ability of users to access social resources that enable them interact with others. Perceived risk is the perception of the potential harm and potential risks the users can experience due to their engagement online. The perception of higher risk can discourage users from engaging or cause them to be more cautious. The final dimension is transparency and how trustworthy and safe the users perceive the online community. The greater the perceived transparency within the social media community, the higher the level of engagement tends to be (Di Gangi

& Wasko 2016). The impact that content on social media and SNSs can have on the engagement levels of young people is therefore profound, as it not only provides a venue for them to demonstrate their knowledge and attitude, but it is also a platform for them to connect with the communication content.

Evidence from various studies underscore the significance and relevance of considering audience engagement on SNSs as platforms for communicating health messages and advocating for social and behaviour change among young people (Deller & Tilton, 2015; Dawnyéa et. al., 2016; Cole et. al., 2016; Andersen et. al., 2018). For instance, Deller and Tilton's (2015) study at the Cancer Research UK demonstrates that the centre was able to promote its work, answer questions, and engage in conversations with the public by utilising multiple social media platforms. Also, although majority of substance use prevention programmes have relied on face-to-face education, results from Dawnyéa et. al.'s study (2016) revealed that more interactive and personalised strategies may be beneficial for educating young people about substance use. Similarly, both Cole et. al. (2016) and Andersen et. al. (2018) posit that SNSs have the potential to increase the reach and efficacy of essential public health services and because of this, they are increasingly being used as communication platforms in preventive efforts targeting the youth because of the engagement opportunities they offer. While Deller and Tilton's (2015) employed qualitative methods with women of varying age groups, and Dawnyéa et. al. (2016) used quantitative methods with young people in the same age group as this study's participants, their findings provided both theoretical and empirical support for using SNSs in SBCC programmes targeting young people. Building on their methodologies, this study adopted a mixed methods approach to assess the University students' engagement with SA content on SNSs.

Despite these recommendations and considering the recorded successes of transmedia communication where engagement is a key factor, the concept of engagement in transmedia communication on SNSs aimed at promoting desired social and behaviour change in relation to SA has not been comprehensively explored. The concept of engagement in transmedia communication has however been studied from the perspective of culture, marketing, semiotics, education curriculum and pop culture (Vukadin, 2014; Plessis, 2019; Evans, 2019; Perry, 2020; Drivas et al., 2022; Hossain, 2019; Okocha & Ebi, 2022). Despite the gap occasioned by lack of studies on how

university students engage with content posted by university administration, these studies still provided valuable insights by highlighting the significance and relevance of considering audience engagement on SNSs as platforms for communicating health messages and advocating for social and behaviour change.

Drivas et al.'s study (2022) while emphasising the theoretical and practical implications of audience engagement, suggests that assessing users' engagement with content published on social media platforms can help improve the online social presence and visibility of an organisation's services, products, and activities. They summarised the implications of examining audience engagement as: helping organisations to understand how their online audiences build relationships with one another (online behaviour and interaction); enabling organisations to predict their audiences' loyalty to products, services, and activities, by understanding what type of content users are more engaged in; tracking the growth of an organisation's social media presence and understanding how content performs and resonates among its target audiences; and by analysing social media analytics, administrators can identify the types of posts that generate higher user engagement (Drivas et al., 2022). Their study proves that social media analytics and metrics can be reliable tools for effectively evaluating user engagement on SNSs. This study adopted their framework for measuring user generated engagement, through a categorised approach incorporating both the platform administrator's actions and user behaviour. This framework alludes to a cause-and-effect relationship between different types of posts and user engagement, providing practical insights for social media administrators.

Also, given that social media engagement is a broad term that covers a lot of different metrics, understanding what engagement is on a broad level and breaking it down to examine it at the micro-level helps in the analysis of the different metrics (Chenn, 2020). The representation of engagement differs from one social media platform to the other. Facebook, for example, determines all possible ways of interacting with content as engagement, whether it is through messages, mentions, shares, likes, profile clicks, or any other sort of activation through the viewed content (Monk, 2023). Hence, understanding the audience for each platform and what constitutes engagement for that audience is essential. Determining which metrics to focus on and what parts to focus

on, can also help in analysing engagement and setting goals for the target audience in question (Chenn, 2020).

Similarly, regarding the significance of engagement in the success of communication carried on SNSs, Hossain (2019) cites the positive correlation between the user's subjective norms and their engagement practices. Subjective norms in this case refers to the audiences' perceived social pressure to act on a certain behaviour. For instance, when a majority of a person's social circle prefer certain SNSs, then s/he may be inclined to use the same SNSs in order to fit into the circle and this goes further to include how they engage within the SNS, such as taking part in a popular online trend or sharing a popular meme. In line with this, Okocha and Ebi (2022) also established that popular culture (pop culture) has a significant influence on how people select, use, and engage on social media, by determining the content, trends, and discussions on the various platforms. Pop culture guides and influences the opinions and preferences of individuals, leading them to engage with certain content on social media platforms, while shunning those they perceive as not worthwhile. The relationship between pop culture and online engagement is however not one-sided, but a dynamic process shaped by both the audience and social media platforms, with both factors mutually influencing each other. This symbiotic relationship can be attributed to the various affordances of the platforms that attract audiences to them, hence encouraging engagement.

Hilde et al. (2018) established that different social media platforms have a significant influence on engagement and that engagement on social media and SNSs are context-specific, varying across different platforms with each platform offering a unique set of features, attributes, and user experiences. The types of experiences on each social media platform can influence engagement in various ways, by shaping users' perceptions and interactions with the platform and the content within it. In their study, Hilde et al. (2018) confirmed the types of experiences and expectations from each platform as including: entertainment, negative emotions related to the content or platform, stimulation, identification, practical use, social interaction, innovation, topicality, and empowerment. For instance, users perceived Instagram as more entertaining, Google stood out for offering practical content, content on Pinterest stimulated users and provided topicality, while content on YouTube, Facebook, and X (Twitter) elicited

more negative emotions compared to other platforms (possibly due to the intrusive nature of advertisements on these platforms).

The context-specific nature of engagement on each SNS emphasises the need for a more nuanced understanding when examining user engagement with SNSs and the content therein. These findings highlight the importance of not treating all SNSs as the same, instead demonstrating the need to study each platform separately while considering their unique characteristics and features. Because by treating SNSs as a single entity, researchers may overlook the qualitative differences between specific SNS, hindering our understanding of their multifaceted feature. Rather, by recognising the diverse experiences across the SNSs, communicators can tailor their content to make them more relevant and encourage engagement from their audiences.

Although Drivas et al.'s (2022) study while focusing on libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs), raised several concerns regarding the utilisation of social media analytics and metrics in examining engagement, the concerns can also be considered in any other study covering implications of social media user engagement. The concerns raised by the study revolve around the lack of skills and understanding among an organisation's staff to understand the concept of user engagement, lack of satisfactory reactions and engagement from users regarding distributed content, and the difficulties faced by an organisation's staff in utilizing social media analytics effectively to capture, analyse, and interpret social media analytics. These concerns underscore the need for further research and the development of strategies to address these challenges in order to enhance user engagement in SNSs. Drawing on Drivas et al.'s (2022) recommendations for social media analytics to examine engagement, this study employed analytical tools specific to each platform, to measure the students' engagement with SA content on the SNSs.

Furthermore, given that existing studies and literature prove that social media engagement helps grow the audience when users interact and engage with the account (Drivas et. al., 2022; Hilde et. al., 2018; Kennedy & Engebretsen, 2020), creating engaging content can help grow the online community and reach more audiences. Considering that social media engagement indicates how users respond to the content, content creators (SNS administrators) can use this information to adjust their

communication approaches to better match the audience's interests and expectations (McLachlan, 2020).

2.4 Significance of Audience Perceptions in Transmedia Communication Process

The significance of audience perceptions in any transmedia communication process cannot be gainsaid. In the context of a digital age where information is transmitted across multiple platforms and media, coupled with the ever-evolving media consumption habits, it is imperative to strive to understand how audiences' perceptions may influence their engagement with and interpretation of media content. This can provide valuable insights into developing effective communication strategies in this digital era because as Zhao (2023) posits, in the current society, people's perceptions are affected by the virtual environment supported by the social media ecosystem.

In mediated communication, early scholarship conceptualised audience perception through three key dimensions: perception towards the media, perception of the content or message, and perception of other users alongside their engagement levels (Austin et al., 2012; Tsfatı & Cohen, 2013; Phua, 2013). Recent studies (Camilleri & Falzon, 2020; An & Kerdpitak, 2023; Chung, 2018; Khan, 2017) have expanded this understanding by exploring perception in relation to an individual's opinions regarding source credibility, participation, ease of use and the perceived usefulness of the online technologies, particularly SNSs. Given the currency and dynamic nature of digital communication platforms, this study adopted the latter perspectives (Camilleri & Falzon, 2020; An & Kerdpitak, 2023; Chung, 2018; Khan, 2017) to examine the students' perceptions of the communication platforms, message presentation formats and engagement process.

These studies demonstrate the significance of audience perceptions in the success of any communication strategy incorporating social media and SNSs. For instance, Tsfatı and Cohen's (2013) research on audiences' perceptions towards new media and content, established that the audiences' perceptions focused on the credibility and trustworthiness of the media and on the media's impact on other users. Similarly, studies by Austin et.al (2012) and Phua (2013) provide insights into how the audiences' perceptions of media and media content influenced their reception and adoption of

messages advocating for behaviour change. Camilleri and Falzon (2020) also confirmed that university students' perceptions of the ease of using online streaming technologies coupled with the usefulness of the technologies to them, influenced how and why they used the technologies. Chung (2018) also used the concept of social media metrics to illustrate how social media users' interpretation of metrics such as the popularity of a media content can provide insight into the level of acceptance of the message therein by other users. This in turn may influence the immediate user's perception of the message and how they interact with it, either by taking part in the process of content creation or sharing. Chung's study (2018) confirmed that when audiences perceived popularity of specific content as a reflection of existing social norms regarding a specific recommended behaviour, they were more likely to consume and share the content too based on their need to belong.

Regarding the audience's perceptions towards the media, Tsfaty and Cohen (2013) argue that audience perceptions of the media can indirectly shape their response to both the medium and its content. Their study established that audiences' attitude towards the media affects their perception of how the media can influence them, especially regarding issues reported on the specific media that affect them emotionally and socially. Though their findings provide significant insight into the role of audience perceptions towards media, they recommend for examination of how these perceptions affect engagement within the media platforms. To this end, Phua's study (2013) on the importance of online engagement established that audiences tend to perceive themselves as capable of adopting certain health practices based on their observations and interactions carried out on SNSs. This is especially true in a scenario where the participants perceive themselves as members of the SNS community, and where in their attempt to develop social identification with other members, they are encouraged to adopt the beliefs, attitudes and values shared by the members of the group. This study also worked within these postulations, that if the communication content is taken to SNSs where the students are encouraged to engage with the content and with one another, they may develop social identity with the other members of the group, and thus be more likely to be influenced to model the behaviour deemed acceptable by the other members. Phua's (2013) study therefore guided this study by providing a theoretical basis for hypothesising and examining how the perceptions of the students towards the

other users and the level of engagement on the SNS may influence their adoption of messages.

Despite these studies having impactful contributions to the role of audience perceptions in online communication processes, which is an area of interest in this study, they fail to cover other factors in the communication process that may also affect the perceptions of audiences. For instance, a limitation to Chung's study (2018) is that it does not directly assess how participants interpret and perceive social media metrics in relation to the media platform and user engagement practices. Although Phua (2013) attempts to elucidate this by advancing that audiences are drawn to media content and messages that have been widely shared (both in frequency and number of platforms) and that they are more likely to perceive the content and message as interesting and reliable, other metrics such as popularity and availability of the media platforms still need to be studied to expound on how these affect the audiences' perceptions towards the media, message content, and engagement. Additionally, considering that engagement also includes the media users' ability to be part of content creation and dissemination, especially on SNSs (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2016; Jenkins et al., 2013), a factor that Phua's study (2013) does not consider, it is equally important to explicate how audiences' perceptions towards their ability to create and disseminate content on their preferred media choices impacts on their acceptance of the message. To address these limitations, the current study sought to establish the correlation between the students' perception of the SNS communication platforms, message presentation formats and engagement process, in relation to their online communication practices and message adoption.

These studies (Austin et al., 2012; Tsfaty & Cohen, 2013; Phua, 2013; Chung, 2018) have also not extensively explored entertainment, which is one of the gratifications that draw audiences to certain media and content. There is therefore need to examine how audiences' perceptions towards the ability of the media platform and content to meet these gratifications affect their acceptance and retention of messages. This is especially important because research shows that entertainment is one of the factors that young people look for when engaging in SNSs (Hilde et al., 2018). This study, thus, sought to establish the students' perceptions towards the media used in communicating with them, whether the content meets these gratifications and how this in turn affects their

engagement and retention of the messages therein. Examining the students' perceptions towards these factors will help in confirming the supposition by Austin et al. (2012) that an audience's perception of the medium's usefulness to them impacts on their selection of certain types of media and eventually the content therein. This is also in line with the Uses and Gratification Theory's (Ruggiero, 2000) position that individuals use media they believe meets their information and communication needs, such as info-seeking, socialisation and emotional support, ability to create and distribute content.

Various studies have also put forth factors that can influence media users' perceptions towards the content they access on social media platforms and SNSs (Harris et al., 2021; Beebe & Beebe, 2021). For instance, Harris et al. (2021) examined young people's perception of the content they accessed on YouTube, a SNS. Dividing their participants into young participants (13-15years) and old participants (16 and above, comprising college students), they provided data to the factors that influenced their perception towards content they accessed on the SNSs. Of interest to this study was the research findings on the older participants, that established that these factors included: the ease of accessing the content; relatability of both the source and message; sincerity of the source; motivations of the source; and generalisation of the message. These factors influenced the perception formed by these young people towards the content they engaged with on SNSs.

The assertion by Harris et al. (2021) that young people perceive content as relatable when it aligns with their own experiences, finds a parallel in Beebe and Beebe's (2021) acknowledgement that audiences tend to be interested in messages that relate to their interests, needs, goals and motivations. For example, in the context of SA messaging, relatability may depend on the extent to which the message reflects the audiences' own experiences, such as peer pressure to engage in misuse of substances, or whether the source of the message is perceived as a peer, reinforcing peer-constructed norms.

However, given that research shows that students get information about substances and SA from their peers, who sometimes offer unreliable information (Onah et al., 2019), questions arise regarding whether the sender's (for example the University administration) reliability as a source may influence the students' perception and reception of the message, or if they prefer getting the same information from trained peer counsellors. It is therefore equally important to consider the audiences' perceptions

towards the sender of the message and how these impact on their reception and adoption of the message. In this regard, Rainey and Taylor (2023) observed that college students were critical of the communication they received from their college administration. The students in their study reported viewing the communication as not meeting their preferences which they expected to be personalised and authentic. This was partly due to their inability to access, navigate and engage with both the communication content and media used by their university's administration. They instead were inclined to skim the subject lines before deciding on whether to open an email from their college administration. Following Rainey and Taylor's (2023) qualitative approach, this study also employed focus group discussions with the students, to establish their perceptions of the communication process (including the platforms used and message presentation format) and how these influence their access to the platforms and engagement with the SA content.

Similarly, Fosnacht and Calderone (2020) also attempted to measure trust across college undergraduate population. They established that students' valuation of their trust level was motivated by their assessment of the overall fairness of how the institution treated them. First year undergraduate students had higher trust in their institution compared to their seniors, while the seniors had negative perception of the institution either because of the negative interactions they may have had with the administration or their perceived lack of bargaining power with the institution. These findings point to the need for university administrations to comprehensively focus on communicating with the junior cohorts immediately they join college before they begin to lose their trust in the institution's administration. Because of the trust they have in the institution, they may be more receptive of the message and willing to adopt them. On the other hand, the administration should endeavour to restore trust in the older cohorts in order to encourage them to be receptive of the information they share with them.

Relatedly, Lewicka (2022) confirmed that in a university setup, the trust building between the university administration and the students is a dynamic process based on impersonal and interpersonal experiences. Their findings support Fosnacht and Calderone's findings (2020) that there is a strong initial trust when students join the university. However, that trust is lost as they continue to interact with the institution's

administration, and when they perceive the university's representatives as acting in a manner that does not meet their expectations. Trust is also lost when there is either lack of communication, communication incompetence and inequitable treatment. They posit that university students may not be confident that universities have their best interest at heart. According to Tse and Hildebrand (2023), building trust between students and universities can incorporate actions such as promoting open and free conversations in class and institution-wide programmes. It is therefore important to build student engagement in not only academic processes but also by improving communication practices. Institutions should use social media and SNSs to share information in real-time and make information credible by giving students a voice through verified platforms that encourage this (Fosnacht & Calderone, 2020; Lewicka 2022). This is the very essence of a transmedia communication, where engagement is encouraged by presenting audiences with opportunities to access and engage with content on their preferred communication platforms.

Sincerity, being a product of relatability, has also been shown to be a determining factor to audiences' perception of information. Harris et al. (2021) found that young people perceived information that included the communicator's life experiences as more sincere compared to generalised information which they discerned as being biased and unrepresentative of them. Similarly, the perceived motivation of the source for producing the content and their perceived concern about their audiences (whether they genuinely cared or not) is also a factor that can influence young people's perception and response to a message. Likewise, Zhao's study (2023) on how audiences' perceptions are shaped by the media they use in accessing information corroborated the role of opinion leaders (both online and offline) in influencing the dissemination and development of information. The expressions of opinion leaders can effectively influence the audiences' cognitive biases. Such opinion leaders, especial on social media, are also referred to as *influencers*. This supposition is supported by other studies (Zhao, 2023, Hong et al., 2021) that advanced that the key factor influencing people's attitude and perceptions is their level of trust in the information they receive. Opinion leaders play a crucial role in information dissemination, acting as a bridge between information sources and audiences. In a university setup, this would involve including opinion leaders, such as student leaders, in the dissemination of information targeting students.

Culture has also been shown to be a determinant of how audiences form perceptions during any communication process. Rachlinski (2021) acknowledges the role of cultural cognition in communication, as influencing how people perceive information from different sources. People's cultural commitments can shape how they process information from news sources, scientists, and public officials, thereby dictating which information they accept or reject. In accordance with this, Aririguzoh (2023) reports that globalisation has necessitated the interaction of people from diverse cultures and nationalities. The social media ecosystem has necessitated and facilitated this through the various affordances of specific SNSs that provide varied gratifications to users. The same cultural scenario is represented in any public university in Kenya where the students, despite majority of them coming from the same nationality, also come from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Taaliu, 2017; Statista, n.d). Effective communication in such a case is achieved when both the sender and receiver, in this case the University administration and students, create common meaning to information passed between them. This is important because miscommunication and misunderstanding can result from poorly encrypted messages that the receivers may not decode correctly, hence the need to carefully consider how messages are packaged and delivered to these culturally diverse audiences.

Drawing upon the work of Beebe and Beebe (2021), this study hypothesises that analysing students' demographic traits, can reveal insights into their preferences, behaviour, and cultural underpinnings, thus informing an audience-centred communication approach. Similarly, Hinsley (2021) investigated the impact of various variables, including ideology, on individual's evaluation of information. He argues that variables such as level of education, age, gender, and race - some of which are applicable to students found in any Kenyan public university- are foundations of audiences' identities. These variables significantly influence how individuals behave and perceive themselves plus the world around them. Understanding these characteristics of a target audience can help in tailoring messages, such as those on SA, to effectively address their needs. This targeted approach can ultimately influence their knowledge, attitude, and adoption of ideal practices.

2.5 Influence of Tailored Information on Audiences' Knowledge, Attitude and Practices

Within the discipline of health and behaviour change communication, information tailoring has been proposed as a communication approach that involves any combination of individualised information, intended for specific persons, based on pre-established characteristics unique to them and related to desired outcome of behaviour change or adoption (Lustria et al., 2013; Kukafka, 2013; Enwald, 2013; Noar et al., 2014; Chapman et al., 2021). Tailoring can thus be considered both from a message effect perspective or a communication channel perspective. Proponents of the approach opine that tailoring helps in eliminating unnecessary information, thus ensuring the information received is relevant to the recipient who in turn may be more inclined to pay attention to it. The result being the likelihood of the information influencing the recipient (Kukafka, 2013; Lustria et al., 2013; Enwald, 2013). Information tailoring therefore, aims at increasing the perceived personal relevance of information by matching an individual's information needs, consequently engaging the individual and providing ideal conditions for persuasion and attitude or behaviour change to occur.

Regarding the impact of tailored information, various studies have proven that providing information tailored to the audience's existing knowledge level, attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviours is more effective for learning and persuasion than non-tailored information (Kukafka, 2013). Other studies (Akoja & Adefarasin, 2019) have also established that since tailored health communication can attract and hold attention better, they are more likely to be remembered and perceived as relevant compared to non-tailored materials. Similarly, tailored communication that appeal to personal motivations and interests have been found to be more likely to change attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions on a health topic since they aim at improving knowledge and understanding of health risks and behaviours (Anundo, 2019; Ndung'u, 2022).

The success of tailored communication has been attributed to the tailored messages' ability to: command greater attention, be better remembered and processed more intently, contain less redundant information, be perceived as more relevant by consumers, and be discussed with peers than general health information (Lustria et al., 2013; Kukafka, 2013). Although Lustria et al. (2013) advise that audiences' information needs and preferences can be used as basis for tailoring health information,

information tailoring should also include which channels the targeted audience want to access the information from, or what other gratifications they want to fulfil. Thus, despite the successes recorded by studies (Kukafka, 2013; Bull, 2011; Abbas & Agosto, 2013) that have explored the impact of tailored content delivered through different communication channels on social and behaviour change, these studies have not satisfactorily expounded on the impact of tailoring messages by aligning the messages with the various attributes of specific media and communication channels, a factor that guides channel selection on the part of the user.

Correspondingly, the tenets of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) acknowledges that each channel has certain attributes that endear users to them, hence to the messages (Kili et al., 2022). This is because these needs determine the overall experience the audiences will have during the communication process, which in turn affects their perceptions and reception of messages. Whereas there are studies that have proven that young people prefer receiving information from the SNSs (Steinberg et al., 2018; Feroz et. al., 2021), there are other studies that further advance that the same young people prefer information that is entertaining as well as informative (Hilde et al., 2018). Thus, when planning on how to effectively communicate with university students who fall under this demography, it is important to factor in their preferred communication channels when disseminating content specific to their established knowledge, attitude, and behavioural needs. To meet this requirement, this study applied the tenets of the UGT to ascertain the various communication needs of the participating students to effectively reach them with correct information on substances and substance abuse. Consequently, the tenets of the UGT were of significance in not only selecting the channels but also in evaluating what factors within these channels endeared the participants to them.

Information tailoring has been extensively explored in the global north, including the United States, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Australia, Norway, Canada, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (Noar et al., 2014). These studies have examined the efficacy of tailoring messages targeting the youth, while using internet-based communication channels (Lustria et al., 2013). The empirical findings from these studies indicate that tailoring content produces better outcomes than generic content across various behavioural measures. Nevertheless, a notable gap persists in the Global

South, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where limited studies have explored this approach. Nonetheless, existing studies on this topic have focused on addressing information tailoring for journalistic purposes or addressing misinformation in the Global South (Mutsvairo & Bebawi, 2022; Blair et al., 2023). This study, therefore, addressed this gap by examining the influence of tailored information pertaining to SA when disseminated to undergraduate students through their preferred SNSs.

Although these studies (Lustria et al., 2013; Kukafka, 2013; Enwald, 2013; Noar et al., 2014) show the significance of information tailoring when targeting the youth, there is still a lack of intensive research on information tailoring when the target audience are undergraduate students. Thus, the fact that the University under investigation is specific in its media and message selections shows it is already using tailored information targeting the specific audience. However, to contribute to the discourse on information tailoring, it is prudent to establish the students' perceptions regarding both the communication process and the tailored information. Moreover, considering that each medium has specific attributes endearing them to their users, it is equally important to establish whether this has been factored in the message selection and tailoring. The answers to these questions can help in establishing the impact of the tailored information on the students' acceptance of the message and overall contribution to their knowledge, attitude and practices relating to substance use.

For a comprehensive understanding of the practice, Chapman et al. (2021) conceptualised tailoring in two ways: the first being tailoring the message and the second involves targeting the message. Tailoring the message entails customising the content and format of the message to match the needs and characteristics of the targeted audience. This is based on the fact that different individuals or groups may have distinct preferences, interests, motivations, levels of understanding, and may respond differently to various types of communication. Thus, a one-size-fits-all approach is no longer effective in communication. This corroborates previous findings by Lindita (2018) that different demographics of audiences have varied information needs at different points of their lives. For example, a younger audience may prefer a more visual and interactive approach, while an older audience may respond better to a more formal and informative style. By tailoring the message, communicators can increase the relevance and personalisation of their content, making it more relatable to the intended recipients while

capturing the audiences' attention and interest, thereby increasing the chances of acceptance and engagement (Chapman et al., 2021). For instance, if the target audience consists of young adults who are interested in fitness and health, the message can be framed in a way that highlights the benefits of exercising and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. By understanding the audience and customising the message accordingly, the chances of effectively reaching and resonating with them are significantly increased. Targeting the message on the other hand, involves directing the message to specific individuals who are more likely to benefit from the information. This can be achieved by incorporating multi component communication techniques such as using different media to reach the audiences as they would prefer (Chapman et al., 2021).

On the need for incorporating multiple communication techniques, Chapman et al.'s (2021) proposition echoes Lindita's (2018) emphasis on the importance of tailoring intervention to meet the target audiences' digital communication preferences and habits so as to increase their levels of engagement. Lindita however introduces the idea of incorporating transmedia approaches in targeting the audiences and disseminating content specific to the affordances of the platforms. She also proposes the evaluation of audience engagement in SBCC initiatives to incorporate mixed methods such as analytic tracking, surveys, social network analysis, content analysis, participant observation and in-depth interviews so as to effectively assess the various aspects of audience engagement such as reach, narrative engagement, attitude, knowledge, and behavioural intentions.

In line with this, Akoja and Adefarasin's study (2019) confirmed the effectiveness of a transmedia communication intervention tailored to specifically increase awareness, knowledge, and perception of teachers on substance abuse among adolescents. Their study used traditional communication channels like posters, flyers, and seminar, while incorporating multimedia components like videos, pictorials and life-stories and not online technologies like SNS. However, the fact that they were able to record positive levels of knowledge acquisition among the participants while using the above channels, implies that awareness can be created using different communication platforms preferred by target audiences. These findings (Akoja & Adefarasin, 2019; Chapman et al., 2021) reinforce the argument that incorporating multimodal strategies, particularly visual and narrative components like videos and graphic images, can enhance the

effectiveness of a communication intervention. By appealing to the emotions of the audiences, such approaches increase message resonance and retention. The credibility of the source has also been shown to increase when emotional and thought-provoking messages are incorporated in an intervention. Akoja and Adefarasin's findings (2019) also confirmed that using videos, graphic images and real-life stories make communication more believable and trustworthy, thereby further enhancing its effectiveness in creating awareness, knowledge, and ideal perceptions of substance use.

In a scenario where a communication strategy involves the use of online social media and SNSs, recognising the unique characteristics of each platform is important for tailoring content for distribution (AIContentfy, 2024). This involves identifying their different attributes, limitations and how audiences use these platforms (Akoja & Adefarasin, 2019). Acknowledging these distinct characteristics of the SNSs enables the creation of content that is optimised for each site while satisfying the audiences' preferences and information needs. A communicator can also effectively utilise the unique features and tools available on each platform such as hashtags, tags, and captions to maximise on reach and encourage engagement with the content. Furthermore, the tailored content promotes engagement when the target audience perceives them as meeting their information needs. Hilde et al. (2018) make the supposition that users find content in Pinterest and Instagram to be entertaining while YouTube provides practical content. This also supports Lim et al.'s findings (2022) that SNSs like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter/X, Tumblr, and Instagram, that are popular with young people, provide entertaining experiences through the content posted on the sites, with a focus on maximising on connection, engagement, and interactions between users.

In order to capitalise on the rise in the use of the internet and social media to fulfil health information needs of young people, innovative prevention programmes have been designed and rigorously examined in previous studies (Mandal et al., 2020; Lim et al., 2022). Concerns have, however, been raised regarding the reliability and quality of information provided on health issues such as SA (Rodriguez et al., 2021). Subsequently, majority of studies have focused on examining the content quality through readability scores, as well as the formality and design of the sites (Mandal et al., 2020). Yet, it is important to consider other aspects when evaluating the overall quality of information, such as the impact of the message, or the credibility of the

information as well as the user experiences and preferences for the platforms. These can be aptly captured through audience surveys that provide insights into users' perceptions of information credibility and quality on SNSs (Gupta & Bashir, 2018). Tailoring information effectively requires understanding the audiences' characteristics to ensure message clarity, engagement and application (Chapman et al., 2021). Given varying audience preferences across media platforms, where young audiences have been shown to favour short-form videos, while older demographics lean towards long-form content, analysing these preferences allows for content customisation. The current study also used a survey to establish the students' online habits and preferred content, and how these impact on their perceptions and reception of the information they receive from the University administration on SA.

Tailored information approaches maximise on knowledge, attitude, and desired practices by using communication strategies adapted to recipients' needs. This involves customising the content, format, and delivery method of the information to ensure relevance and personalisation. The use of these tailored messages based on reliable evidence has been shown to not only increase knowledge but also influence decision-making practices of the target audience (Akoja & Adefarasin, 2019; Chapman et al., 2021). Chapman et al. (2021) equally summarise the key components of effective tailored information strategies that lead to positive changes in Knowledge Attitude and Practices (KAP) as including audience targeting, message tailoring, audience motivation to apply information learned, and using multi-channel dissemination strategies. Thus, understanding both the media platform's distinct qualities and the audience's behaviour is important in content tailoring as it enables the creation of content that is personalised, engaging and relevant to the audience, thereby increasing their engagement with the content. For instance, SNSs like YouTube and TikTok focus on video content, while Facebook, Twitter/X, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and Instagram support a variety of content formats such as text and visual content such as images and videos (Hilde et al., 2018).

Despite its benefits, implementing tailored information strategies faces barriers within organisations. Kukafka (2013) and Pereira et al. (2021) identified these barriers to include: insufficient time for training staff on tailoring benefits and methods, inadequate financial resources and infrastructure, organisational cultures that hinder

communication, and limited training and peer support in identifying target audiences' needs. In line with this, Mandal et al. (2020) underscore the need to clearly define the objective of communication tailored for SA among young people, whether it aims at preventing the onset of substance use or urging cessation of substance use. This distinction depends on the target audience's existing knowledge, attitudes and practices relating to substance use, thereby, enabling the message to resonate with the audience. For example, in a university setup like the one where this study took place, current substance abusers might receive messages focusing on cessation, while non-users would receive messages highlighting the dangers of initiation.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Prototype Willingness Model. The theoretical synergies of the two theories were useful in achieving the specific objectives of the study. The tenets of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) were applied in establishing the gratifications students seek when they choose various SNSs and content; in verifying the value judgements the students make when choosing the SNSs and the content therein; and the social, economic, and environmental factors that determine their media choices. The tenets of the Prototype Willingness Model (PWM) helped in determining the perceptions and attitudes of the participating students regarding the SNSs and message content therein and how these influenced their knowledge, attitude and practices relating to SA.

2.6.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory

The UGT as advanced by Katz et al. (1974) strives to explain why people choose various media and what they do with media content. The theory posits that media users are actively choosing specific media and media content according to their needs, desires, and other gratifications (Pierce, 2009). Although initial studies from a UGT perspective focused on TV, radio and newspapers, recent advances in computer-mediated communication have led to renewed interest in the postulations of the UGT. Scholars (Ruggiero, 2000; Carolyn, 2002; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Godlewski & Perse, 2010) attribute the upsurge and ubiquity of new media such as SNSs, as having revived the significance of the UGT in contemporary media studies.

For instance, Carolyn (2002) asserts that the theory can be used in predicting computer-internet communication because it emphasises on the psychological needs and gratifications that motivates choice of media and communication contents. Ruggiero (2000) also advises that contemporary models of UGT need to include concepts such as interactivity, hyper-textuality and synchronicity. Thus, with importance being placed on the key feature of any medium and not the message, a researcher using the theory may be able to understand audiences' needs especially when they are presented with a myriad of media to choose from, as occasioned by the current digital and social media sphere. Similarly, there are researchers who have used the theory to study the factors influencing internet use (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Godlewski & Perse, 2010). For instance, Papacharissi and Rubin, (2000) identified predictors of internet use to include information seeking, entertainment, convenience, interpersonal utility, and economic security. Godlewski and Perse (2010) also postulate that audience gratifications can be derived from at least three different sources: media content, exposure to the media, and the social context in which one is exposed to the media.

The above studies (Carolyn, 2002; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Godlewski & Perse, 2010) recognise the various gratifications that have emerged from the array of online and digital communication platforms available to audiences. They posit that the control and choices brought about by new media has opened up new avenues of uses and gratifications research and has led to the discovery of new gratifications, especially in regard to social media. However, despite these conceptualisations of the theory that clearly put the audience at the centre of communication, it has been noted that designers of communication approaches involving transmedia modes on SNSs often do not incorporate the tenets of the theory to establish the reasons why audiences use various media (Wang, 2014; Gilliam et al., 2012). Nonetheless, Wang (2014) opines that the UGT can be used to identify the various motivations for SNS use such as entertainment or information sourcing. Applying the UGT to user-generated media like SNSs can help in understanding how users engage with the platforms and the roles they take such as consuming, participating and producing, as well as the gratifications they derive from their usage (Wang, 2014).

Ergo, this study postulates that since the foundation of any communication relies on the audiences' engagement and contribution to the communication process, it is important to establish at the onset the gratifications sought by the target audiences when using SNSs. This may help in curbing the limitations highlighted by Wang (2014) and Gilliam et al. (2012) that audiences sometimes resist to engage or contribute to the communication process, either as content developers or transmitters, because the content does not meet their gratifications. Thus, the tenets of the UGT were applied in this study to achieve the objectives of examining how the students accessed the SNS and engaged with the content therein.

The first tenet of the theory considers the audience as constantly active in their choice of media and willing to expose themselves to media they feel will give them desired gratifications (Wang, 2014). In relation to social media and SNSs, gratifications as conceptualised in the UGT, denotes the satisfactions or pleasure experienced by an individual when using the platforms to fulfil specific needs or wants. In this regard, among the myriads of gratifications sought by SNS users, of interest to this study are the information-seeking and convenience gratifications that users seek from the various SNSs (Bharath et al., 2024; Jahan, 2024). The information-seeking gratification is associated with their desire for knowledge and staying informed. Considering that SNSs have become significant sources of information on various topics, these users will seek gratification from their ability to access relevant and timely information through their SNSs (Bharath et al., 2024). Convenience gratification signifies the users' ability to effortlessly find and consume information or content from the SNSs (Jahan, 2024). The convenience of accessing content on the SNSs substantially motivates users to use these platforms and provides a form of gratification they seek. In the context of university students, it has been established that these gratifications significantly impact on their engagement with content, because they actively choose platforms and content based on their needs and desires, and these gratifications can influence the type of content they engage with (Hoang et al., 2024).

It is therefore recommended (Byrd & Lamm, 2025; Hoang et al., 2024) that university administrations understand their students' motivations (the gratifications) for using specific SNSs so as to tailor both the communication platform (such as using the SNSs preferred by students) and content (often determined by the SNSs' affordances). This

can lead to more effective and engaging communication strategies. Thus, in this study, this tenet helped develop the data collection tool (questionnaire) focussed on obtaining quantitative data on the students' SNSs preferences, the type of information and content they seek from these sites, including the University SNS pages. The tenet also helped in understanding the relationship between the students' gratifications, such as ease of accessing the content on SA, their information seeking behaviour, and their engagement with the content posted on the SNS. This is based on the assumption that students are more inclined to seek information from SNSs they find easy to access and are more likely to engage with the content that meets their information needs.

Another tenet of the theory posits that culture plays a significant role in the value judgements audiences attach to their choice of media and content. Accordingly, studies such as Vyomakesisri et al.'s (2020) show that pop culture influences the values young people, like university students, have regarding their communication choices. Linked to this is the postulation that audiences also depend on their own perceptions and previously held beliefs, values, and interests when seeking specific gratifications from the media and media content (Wang, 2014). It is therefore important to consider these factors when choosing communication media, in order to effectively reach and communicate with target audiences. This tenet was useful in analysing how the students' values, beliefs and interests affect not only their choice of SNSs but also how they engage with content while on the various SNSs and whether the communication they receive from the University on SA meets these values, beliefs, and interests.

The third tenet of the theory posits that audiences' social, economic, and environmental circumstances are responsible for endearing them to specific media. In line with this, university students have been shown to be in a unique environment where their communication choices are determined by their peers, economic abilities, and availability of communication gadgets (Ragusa, 2017). It is therefore important to establish from the onset of any communication with them how these factors may affect the success of the communication process. For instance, in a university setup, technology such as smart devices or internet services, can enable students to access online platforms (Kharono et al., 2022). This in turn may mean that lack of such devices will hinder them from accessing such online platforms. Thus, this tenet guided the current study in establishing how the students' social, economic, and environmental

circumstances influence their choice and usage of SNS and how this in turn may have impacted on their reception of information on SA.

Although the UGT has been shown to be successful in predicting media use, in a study such as this, it was also necessary to incorporate another theory that could help in explaining how media audiences interact with content and how this in turn impacts on their attitude and behaviour. The PWM has thus been advanced as being able to explain audience perceptions and subsequent behaviours, especially among young people.

2.6.2 Prototype Willingness Model

The PWM developed and proposed by Gibbons et al. (2003) is a dual-process model that specifically targets young people. It proposes reasoned and reactive processes as significant to decision making, where reasoned behaviour is seen as deliberative and planned, while reactive behaviour is influenced by social and situational prompts (Stock et al., 2013; Eslami et al., 2014; Link et al., 2015). Given that the model presents a link between perceptions of peers' behaviour (their descriptive norms) and prototypes they represent (Gibbons et al., 2003), it has been used in predicting a wide range of young people's risky behaviours, such as unsafe online dating behaviour (Schreurs et al., 2020), substance use (Gibbons et al., 2010; Stock et al., 2013), and the relationship between social norms created on SNSs and substance use (Link et al., 2015).

The first tenet of the model is founded on the premise that opportunities to engage in risky behaviours, specifically among young people, often occur within social contexts (Gerrard et al., 2008). These social contexts lead to subjective norms, referring to an individual's beliefs that an important person or group of people will approve and support a particular behaviour. Hence, rather than being planned or intentional, a young person's decision to engage in a risky behaviour will be more strongly influenced by their willingness to engage in that behaviour, enhanced by circumstances conducive to the behaviour and their need to belong to a social network (Armenta et al., 2015).

Therefore, in a study such as this one, it is important to establish the social contexts that may present opportunities for the students to engage in substance use and the need to examine these social contexts to better educate the students on how to identify and avoid them. Also considering that these risky behaviours are not planned but may occur

when students find themselves within social contexts where they may be pressured to engage in them, there is need to examine the peer and social pressures that may persuade the students to engage in substance use. This will in turn be beneficial in enlightening the students on the need to be assertive and avoid being influenced to engage in these behaviours. The tenet is therefore useful in selecting content with information on how to build self-confidence and counter peer and social pressure when presented with them.

The second tenet of the model posits that an individual's willingness to engage in a risky behaviour can be influenced by their beliefs regarding the extent to which others are engaging in that behaviour (subjective behavioural norms) and the positive or negative characteristics that they associate with the prototypical individual who engages in that behaviour (the behavioural prototype). This is because young people are often preoccupied with their social image and sensitive to the impact of their behaviour on the images they portray to others (Stock et al., 2013). Hence, in the current study, it was important to establish the students' beliefs regarding the extent to which others engage in substance use in the university and the prototypes they have regarding those who engage in substance use. This is important because a student who believes that most of his peers engage in substance use (high subjective behavioural norms) and holds a positive image of the individual who engages in that behaviour (positive behavioural prototype) will be more willing to, and thus at greater risk of, engaging in substance use (Amenta et al., 2015).

Conversely, as Eslami et al. (2014) and Link et al. (2015) advise, the more negative an image is, the less willing an individual will be to adopt the behaviour when given an opportunity. The same may be applicable to the university students in the current study, where it may be necessary to help them form negative prototypes of People With Substance Use Disorder, (PWSUD) as a means of discouraging them not to adopt the behaviour. In such a scenario where the aim is to promote a negative prototype of substance use, the communication content can have embedded in them scary images of the effects of substance use. This approach can be linked to fear appeal, where threatening health messages are strategically used to influence attitude, intentions, and behaviour (Ort & Fahr, 2018).

Thus, in this study, the two tenets were used to establish the social contexts that may present opportunities for the students to engage in substance use. They were also used

to determine how students perceive substances, PWSUD, and the recovering PWSUD. Additionally, they were employed to ascertain the students' perceptions regarding the extent to which others engage in substance use in the University and the prototypes they have regarding those who engage in substance use. The tenets also helped in understanding how the students' subjective norms, determined by their social contexts, influence their choice of media and how their cognitive perceptions impact on their engagement with the content on the SNSs.

2.6.3 Conceptual Framework

This study integrated specific tenets of the UGT and PWM to evaluate the effectiveness of transmedia communication approaches in conveying SA information to university students on SNSs, with the goal of fostering desired knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours. The tenets of the two theories complement each other, for instance, while the UGT focuses on the gratifications and value judgements that influence audiences' choice and usage of SNSs, PWM also advances that belief and perceptions may impact on choices young people make not only when communicating, but also in their acceptance and adoption of messages. In the context of this study, belief refers to the students' conviction that something is true, their interpretation of what they perceive as being the norm, or their acceptance of a behaviour as true. This includes subjective behavioural norms regarding how they engage on the SNSs, especially when they interact with SA content, or their acceptance of a behaviour as true depiction of preconceived characterisation such as the behavioural prototype they have of their peers who abuse substances. By combining these viewpoints, the study examined how the students' value judgments toward specific media platforms and content are influenced by their beliefs about their peers' media preferences and engagement with SA content. It also considered their perceptions of both the media platforms and content posted on the SNSs by the University, assessing whether these meet their communication and information needs. Ultimately, this framework helps elucidate how these factors may affect the students' acceptance and adoption of SA related messages from the University.

The UGT also advances that social, economic, and environmental factor such as socio-economic, demographic, and culture may necessitate and enable an individual's access and usage of media. In the same breath, PWM advances that social context influences

the willingness of individuals to engage in recommended practices. Combining these tenets helped in establishing how social factors such as the students' social context or

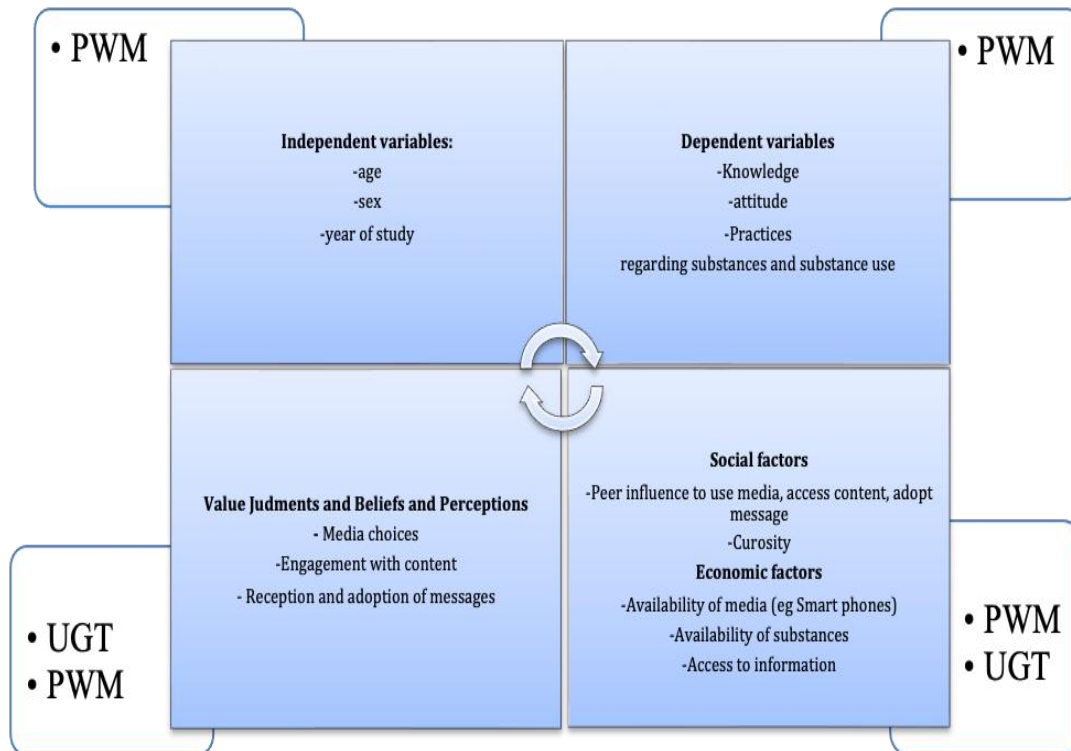


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework

peer pressure, impacted on their choice of specific media, usage of media, engagement with content and eventually their adoption of messages promoting ideal substance use practices.

According to the conceptual framework (Figure 2.1), the UGT focuses on:

- Factors that lead to participants' choice of media and communication platforms such as value judgements and gratifications that they seek.
- Content and media platforms they access based on the gratifications they seek.
- Social, economic and environmental contexts enabling use of media and media platforms
- How they engage on preferred platforms for example by socialising and sharing information.

The PWM focuses on:

- How social contexts influence the students' willingness to engage in recommended practices and behaviour and communication choices including

media preference, reception and adoption of messages on substances and substance use.

- b) How perceptions (prototypes) regarding others/peers influence students' willingness to access media and content, engage with the content and receive and adopt SA messages.
- c) How attitudes are related to self-image and social acceptance.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the methodology adopted when conducting the research is outlined to cover the research design, study area, study population, sampling procedure, data collection techniques used and how the data was analysed, interpreted, and presented. It also covers the ethical considerations undertaken during the study.

3.2 Research Design

This study used an institutional based cross-sectional convergent mixed methods design. A cross-sectional study allows for the detailed description and analysis of a single group at one point in time with the objective of determining how the group works and to identify the factors that lead to success or failure (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The convergent mixed methods design enables the researcher to collect qualitative and quantitative data concurrently, analyse them separately and merge the results during interpretation, thereby yielding more comprehensive results (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Combining the two in this study therefore helped in assessing the levels of knowledge and attitude among the study sample at a specific point in time, where the participants' conversations and engagement were qualitatively and quantitatively analysed to meet the objectives of the study.

3.3 Location of the Study

The study was conducted in Laikipia University. Being one of the public universities in Kenya grappling with SA among its undergraduate students just like all other public universities, the institution has established a student affairs department that coordinates student welfare matters including a guidance and counselling services unit. The unit coordinates the provision of counselling services to the students in line with their academic affairs, vocational training, personal life, and social behaviour (related to, among others, SA). As part of their communication approach, the institution also manages various social media accounts on different SNSs including Facebook, Twitter/X, and Instagram. These are regularly updated with information related to various activities affecting the University, the students, and partners.

Like other public universities in the country, the institution also implements a drugs and alcohol prevention policy hence it was purposively chosen because it presents an ideal environment that can be used to assess the communication approaches that have been factored in the policy, their implementation and how these have been effective in creating awareness and promoting desired knowledge, attitude and practices relating to substance use. Creswell (2009) asserts that an ideal environment may be that which presents a researcher with the ability to access a target population. The University therefore presented a unique area for establishing the effectiveness of the communication approaches used by the University to communicate about SA with the institution's students.

The sample from Laikipia University was considered a representative of the other public universities in Kenya because the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS) used in the country ensures that students are picked from the same pool for placement to public universities without special considerations. This placement process ensures that the population characteristics of public universities in Kenya are the same. This is in line with recommendation by Kothari and Garg (2014) that a sample should be such that the results of the study can be applied in general and for the universe with a reasonable level of confidence.

3.4 Target Population

The study population was the 1st and 2nd year undergraduate students of Laikipia University. This population was chosen first because it is an accessible population for the study. Warner (2008) describes an accessible population as the population to which the researcher has reasonable access to. Secondly, the students were chosen because they fall within the bracket of youth among whom studies show that for majority of students in this cohort, the campus life introduces them to sudden independence and a sense of freedom that was previously unknown to them (Midford, 2009; Musyoka et al., 2019). Certain et al. (2009) also posits that the university environment presents a setting where alcohol and addictive substances are readily available, making the students susceptible to peer pressure to engage in risky behaviour.

The approximate number of this population based on the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (2021) statistics was 2,338 first year students and 1,777 second year students.

One professional from the University's Guidance and Counselling department and the University's communication office were also included to offer professional input, such as the communication approaches applied by the institution in relation to SA.

3.5 Sample and Sampling Procedures

Stratified sampling technique was adopted in sampling the students, with the four (4) academic schools in the University used as the strata. Stratified sampling is recommended for populations that are naturally divided into mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive subgroups (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, given the established academic schools in the University, the four schools were used in the sampling process to ensure proportional representation, thus reducing the sampling error. In calculating the sample for each stratum, Cochran's formula (1977) recommended for large populations was used as follows:

$$\text{Sample size } (n_0) = \frac{(Z_{1-\frac{\alpha}{2}})^2(p)(q)}{(d)^2}$$

Where $Z_{1-\frac{\alpha}{2}} = 1.645$ (from Z tables)

and:

$$p = 0.50$$

$$q = 1 - p = 0.50$$

$$d = 0.10$$

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.645)^2 (0.50)(0.50)}{0.10^2} = 67.65$$

(a) For Sample 1 (1st year students), where N=2338

$$n = \frac{n_0}{1 + \frac{n_0 - 1}{N}}$$

$$n = \frac{67.65}{1 + \frac{66.65}{2338}} = \frac{67.65}{1.02} = \mathbf{66.3 \text{ students}}$$

If we divide into 4 equal strata, then each of the $n_i = \frac{nN_i}{N}$ was 16.5 which is approximately **17 units per stratum**.

(b) For Sample 2 (2nd year students), where N=1777

$$n = \frac{n_0}{1 + \frac{n_0 - 1}{N}}$$

$$n = \frac{67.65}{1 + \frac{66.65}{1777}} = \frac{67.65}{1.0375} = \mathbf{65.2 \text{ students}}$$

If divided into 4 equal strata, then each of the $n_i = \frac{nN_i}{N}$ was 16.3 which is approximately **16 units per stratum**.

The 1st year and 2nd year students were distinguished based on their individual admission numbers which state their years of admission into the University and academic years. The students were recruited through their various academic departmental WhatsApp group pages, where an invitation to participate in the study was issued and a link provided to access the online survey platform. This process ensured that only those students who could access and use the internet were recruited. The recruitment continued until the required number of 135 participants for each stratum was attained.

Considering that the institution has a guidance and counselling unit in charge of providing services that cover substance use and abuse, a representative from this department was incorporated in the study as a key informant. Also included as a key informant was the University's online/SNS communication manager. The information

from the key informants provided the baseline data on the prevalence of substance use in the institution, communication approaches put in place to create awareness and promote desired knowledge, attitude and practices relating to substance use.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

Once the participants responded to the call to be part of the study, they were required to fill in an electronic informed consent when they visited the online survey platform (google forms). On the site, they needed to access the informed consent section, review the terms therein (such as maintaining respect) and if in agreement, click a button saying, “I agree to participate”. It was only after consenting to participate that one was allowed to proceed to the other sections of the survey questionnaire. Additionally, during registration and consenting to participate in the study, the participants were informed that all their responses on the questionnaire and during the Online Focus Group Discussion (OFGD) were restricted to English and Kiswahili. These languages were chosen because they are the official languages of communication in both the country and in the institution. The online questionnaires were designed with instructions that required a respondent to complete each section in order for them to proceed to the other sections. This ensured that the respondents answered all the questions in the questionnaires.

The OFGD participants were recruited from a pool, because at the end of the questionnaire, the students were asked whether they were interested in taking part in the OFGD. Those interested were requested to provide their phone numbers and email addresses. It is from this pool that the OFGD participants were recruited. Only those students who responded as having valid SNS accounts and who followed the University’s social media accounts were considered for the OFGDs. During the recruitment of the OFGD participants, the students were asked to account for their SNSs followers and only those who said that majority of their followers (70-80%) were their fellow students, were recruited. This was appropriate because it meant that there was a high likelihood that the content they posted would be accessed by their fellow students.

Once the OFGD participants were recruited, two WhatsApp groups were formed, one for the first-year students and another for the second-year students participating in the OFGD. Thereafter, content selected from the National Authority for the Campaign

Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse's (NACADA) public accounts on various SNSs were shared with the OFGD participants in their respective WhatsApp groups. The students were subsequently asked to choose content (among those shared) and post them on any of their preferred SNSs. In order to provide a natural setting with no manipulation of content, the students were guided to interact with the content as they would normally do when using their preferred SNSs. They were required to post the content and leave them on their SNS pages for three days, because of the timeliness of social media communication, where research has shown that content posted on SNSs have a 'lifespan' after which they stop being relevant (Graffius, 2023). The participants were also required to provide attributions confirming the content was from NACADA.

For the three days during which the content was shared on the SNSs, each participant was required to share a screenshot of their SNS pages at the end of each day. This enabled the researcher to record how their followers engaged with the content through the number of comments, likes, shares, tweets, re-tweets, and uploads. At the end of the 3-day period, the researcher held the OFGD with the participants.

3.7 Data Collection Methods

Online research methods were used in collecting the data. This refers to a set of tools for collecting qualitative and quantitative data by engaging people through online platforms (Currie et al., 2015). These methods included online questionnaires in the form of 'google forms', online focus group discussions, social media analytics, and online content analysis.

These tools facilitated the collection of data on how the participants engaged with the content presented on the SNSs, how the participants reacted and communicated during their interactions and their perceptions of the communication approaches (the platforms used and message presentation format). The tools also captured data on the students' knowledge, attitudes and practices relating to substances and SA.

3.7.1 Quantitative Data

The first self-administered online questionnaire was used to acquire data on the participants' existing knowledge, attitudes, and practice regarding SA. This was

adopted from the WHO recommended Assessment of Smoking and Substance Involvement Tool (ASSIST) for assessing basic information on drugs and illicit substance abuse. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: (1) Demographic information of the participants (2) Knowledge on addictive drugs and substances; (3) Perceptions about addictive substances and substance use; and (4) Practices relating to drugs and substance abuse. The data gathered was used in selecting content on substances and substance use, in order to address the identified gaps in the students' knowledge, attitude and practices. The second self-administered online questionnaire assessed the students' preferred SNSs, content preferences, and online habits. The development of the questionnaire was guided by tenets of the UGT and previously established scales (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Ali et al., 2020).

A Likert scale was used to collect data on the cognitive and affective determinants of the participants' choice of communication platforms, their subjective norms, attitude, prototype perceptions, behavioural intention, and behavioural willingness. The statements used in the scale were adopted from previous studies (Lin & Lu, 2011; Tang & Jang, 2011; Liang & Lim, 2011; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). These scales have been proposed for the analysis of factors that determine an audience's choice of SNS and because they consider the various determinants of behaviour as advanced by the PWM. Social media analytics tools applicable to each SNS were used to record the metrics of engagement.

3.7.2 Qualitative Data

For the qualitative data, internet qualitative data collection methods as proposed by Prescott et al. (2018) and Im and Chee (2012) were used. This also entailed using social media analytics tools applicable to each SNS to record and collect data on how the participants engaged with the content by either liking, sharing, commenting, or creating new content.

Online Focus Group Discussions (OFGD) were used to collect data on the participants' perceptions of the communication platforms used, the message presentation formats and the engagement process. The group discussions also provided data on the influence of the communication approaches used on the participants' knowledge, attitude and practices regarding SA. The two OFGDs (one for the first-year students and another for

the second-year students) were conducted synchronously using ‘google-meet’ online app. The participants for the OFGD were purposively selected from each of the four academic schools in the University, with two participants (1 female and 1 male) selected from each school. Thus, each OFGD had 8 participants. Selecting the two participants (1 female and 1 male) ensured balanced gender representation, meeting the methodological requirement for a manageable sample size for an effective focus group discussion.

Key informant interviews provided data on the prevalence, patterns and effects of substance use on the students’ social and academic lives, as well as the communication approaches implemented to raise awareness and promote desired knowledge, attitude and practices relating to SA

3.7.3 Datasets

The following table (Table 3.1) highlights the datasets in line with the objectives and research tools used in the study.

Table 3.1: Datasets

Data Type	Tool	Participants	Administration	Expected Data
Quantitative	Social media analytics tools for each of the SNS	Communication content posted on the SNSs during the study.	Frequencies recorded every day during the study.	3. The number of times content was (a) liked. (b) shared (c) created (d) re-tweeted (e) comments
	Online self-administered questionnaire for SNSs	146 Students	Administered at the onset of the study	1. The types of SNS used and preferred by the students. 2. The students’ frequency of use of the SNSs.

	(1 in total)			3. The students' engagement habits 4. Types of content preferred by the students. 5. The students' reasons for using the various SNSs. 6. The students' knowledge and appreciation of the University's official pages on the SNSs. 7. The content the students look for in the University's official pages on the SNSs. 8. The students' perceptions of the content posted by the University on the SNSs.
	Online self-administered questionnaire for Drugs and Substance SKAP (1 in total)	142 Students	Administered at the onset of the study.	Responses to questions focusing on knowledge, attitude, and practices.
Qualitative	OFGDs (2 in total)	2 participants from each school. (2x4= 8 participants for each OFGD)	Conducted at the end of the study, two OFGD were conducted (one for 1 st	1. Participants' ease of accessing the sites and factors affecting this. 2. Participants' ease of accessing the content and factors affecting this. 3. The participants' perceptions towards

		year students and another for 2 nd year students)	the SNS used, the message presentation formats, the engagement processes. 3. The participants’ observations regarding whether the information presented had any impact on their knowledge, attitude, and practices.
Key informant interviews (2 in total)	1. A representative from the department of guidance and counselling services 2. Online/SNS communication manager	Once, at the onset of the study	Provide data on: 1. Prevalence patterns and effects of substance use on the students’ social and academic lives. 2. Strategies (such as communication, life skills training and support systems) put in place to mitigate substance use in the institution.

Source: Researcher, 2023

3.8 Data Analysis Methods

The study used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to process, analyse and interpret data in the ways discussed in the next sections.

3.8.1 Quantitative Data

Quantitative data collected from the self-administered questionnaires were analysed using the Microsoft Excel application. This involved computing the descriptive statistics (frequency-distribution and percentages) to determine the frequency of the students’ socio-demographic characteristics, as well as their Knowledge, Attitude and

Practices (KAP) scores in relation to substances and SA. The application also enabled the visualisation of the data through bar graphs and frequency distribution.

Social media analytics tools that were used to collect data from each SNS were also used to analyse metrics involving the participants' online behaviour and performances relating to how they engaged with the posted content. The findings helped in answering the study questions relating to how the participants accessed the SNSs and how they engaged with the content. This was later compared to their perceptions regarding the communication platforms used, the message presentation formats and the engagement process.

3.8.2 Qualitative Data

Inductive content analysis, as advanced by Palys and Atchison (2014) was used to analyse and elucidate the inherent meaning in the data collected from the online engagement and OFGDs. This technique was ideal for this study because it allowed for inference making and for the correlation of the quantitative and qualitative data.

Prior to the analysis, the recorded data from the OFGD was transcribed. The OFGD data was then analysed and discussed in line with the emerging themes relating to the students' perceptions of SNSs, the content and the influence of the content on their knowledge, attitude and practices relating to SA. Thematic analysis is a research method where the tenets of a theory are used in identifying, analysing, and reporting prominent themes and patterns through careful reading of data (Sanders, 2010; Breakwell, 2012). Thus, this study used predetermined themes whose identification was based on previous scholarly works (Link et al., 2015; Gibbons et al., 2010; Stock et al., 2013; Schreurs et al., 2020; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Godlewski & Perse, 2010) that have used the PWM and the UGT in analysis of audience perceptions and attitudes in relation to substance use and media use respectively. Hence, thematic analysis of the transcribed content was used to highlight the important aspects of the OFGD participants' responses that resonated with the objectives of the study. These were also used to support the quantitative results through verbatim extractions.

Thematic analysis also allowed for the interpretation and examination of the underlying ideas, assumptions, meaning, and conceptualisation associated with the various themes that emerged from the transcribed data (Breakwell, 2012). This method of analysis helped in highlighting and identifying the participants' tones, (to reveal their attitudes towards the content and participants), feelings, thoughts, and motives for their interactions online.

3.9 Validity and Reliability of Instruments

The validity of the study instruments was established by cross-checking and authentication from experts in the field of study. Afterwards, modifications were made according to the recommendations and counsel. Accordingly, the questionnaire was pre-tested on students who are not part of the study population but who were in a study area similar to the one where the research was to take place.

The processes involved in establishing reliability included recording the data in tables to provide an overall assessment of the data collection process and an updated evaluation of the results as they were being received. The table also helped in building up concise conclusions about the study parameters. Reliability was also assessed through data triangulation, specifically theoretical triangulation. This entailed the analysis and presentation of other research works, within the same field of study, as literature review so as to validate claims made during the data presentation and analysis. This in turn provided an extensive understanding of the results and the research objectives.

3.9.1 Pilot Testing

Prior to the actual data collection, the researcher carried out a pilot study at Maasai Mara University. This area was purposively selected because, being a public university, it has the same characteristics as those found in the intended study area. The researcher also considered Fink's recommendations (2003, as cited in Saunders et al., 2007), that the minimum number for a pilot study should be approximately 10 percent of the sample size. Thus, for this study, 10 percent of 66.5 = 6 for 1st year students and 10 percent of 65.2 = 6 for 2nd year students. The participants were selected using the same parameters planned for the actual participants of the study, where only those who had

valid SNS accounts and who followed their university's social media accounts were considered for the OFGD. The piloting was helpful in refining the two questionnaires and the OFGD guide.

The questionnaires were administered to the participants with the aim of establishing the participants' ease of accessing the Google platform and the questionnaires therein, the time it took each of them to complete the questionnaire, and the clarity of the items in the questionnaire. Additionally, the pilot study was to enable the researcher to ascertain the reliability and validity of the instruments, and to familiarise herself with the administration of the research tools and thus improve the instruments and procedures. Pilot testing of research instruments is important in the research process because it allows the researcher to verify the validity, reliability, and practicability of the research instruments (Cohen et al.,2008).

In regard to the length of the questionnaires, a few participants observed that it was rather too long. To address this concern, the researcher removed redundant explanations and spaces, thereby reducing the length of the questionnaires. The participants also indicated that they could access the questionnaire using the Wi-Fi internet available for free in their institution. Conversely, those who decided to purchase their own data bundles reported using little data, as low as 2MB to fill the questionnaire.

However, the students suggested that to allow them fill in the questionnaires at their pace, they should be allowed to pause midway and continue later from where they stopped responding. This was implemented on the google forms by setting them to allow respondents stop up to five times, in line with the five sections, and continue later at their convenience.

All participants indicated that the issues raised in the questionnaires and the OFGD guide were relevant. They equally acknowledged that having the questionnaire in sections made it easy for them to respond.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Permission to carry out the research was obtained from the board of post graduate studies of Laikipia University and ethical clearance was done by the Laikipia University

Institutional Scientific Ethical Review Committee (LU-ISERC). A research permit was then sought from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). Research ethics observed in the study included informed consent, confidentiality, objectivity and honesty in data handling and storage.

The principle of Informed Consent requires that participants in the research are fully aware that they are taking part in the research and what the research requires of them. All the participants took part in this study voluntarily, without any coercion, inducement or deception, and were also free to opt out of the research if they so wished.

To ensure confidentiality, the participants were assured that the information obtained from them will not be used for any other purpose apart from academic work and research. They were also assured of their right to remain anonymous and their identities not revealed to unauthorized parties. In this regard, the responses by the OFGD participants were numerically coded to protect their identity.

With regard to honesty and objectivity, all the data and information were obtained from authentic sources, with all the data from primary respondents reported as they were without any fabrication or manipulation by the researcher.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study's findings, interpretations and discussions of the data collected. The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of transmedia communication approaches on Social Networking Sites (SNSs) as applied to Substance Abuse (SA) prevention among Laikipia University students. Since quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were employed, the results are presented in frequencies (graphs and bars), percentages, tables, figures, and excerpts. Discussion and interpretation of the data are guided by the tenets of the Uses and Gratifications theory (UGT) and the Prototype Willingness Model (PWM) and correlated with existing scholarly literature.

The findings are organised and discussed in line with the four specific objectives of the study which were to: examine the students' ease of accessing SA content on the various SNSs; explore how the students engage with the SA content on the various SNSs; assess the students' perceptions of the communication platforms, the message presentation formats and the engagement process; and evaluate the extent to which the information presented influences the students' knowledge, attitude and practices relating to SA.

4.2 Response Rate

The online survey targeted a sample size of one hundred and thirty-one (131) students drawn from each of the four academic schools in the University. This number was arrived at from a stratified sampling method, where the four (4) academic schools were used as the strata. Using Cochran's (1977) formula, the survey targeted seventeen (17) first year students and sixteen (16) second year students per school. The received responses were one hundred and forty-six (146) for the questionnaire on the SNSs and one hundred and forty-two (142) for the SKAP questionnaire. This shows a response rate of a hundred and eleven percent (111%) and a hundred and eight percent (108%) respectively.

The high response rate is in line with Holtom et al.'s postulation (2022) that online surveys record high response rates due to the availability, comfort and ease associated

with online data collection methods. Thus, in the case of the student respondents in this study, the high response rate could have been due to the ease of accessing and filling the online questionnaires, enabled by the use of mobile devices such as mobile phones and the availability of free Wi-Fi in campus. The response rate was found to be suitable for analysis, making interpretations and conclusions for this study because as Fincham (2008) advises, a response rate of eighty percent (80%) or more is expected for survey research intended to represent schools and colleges.

There were two Online Focus Group Discussions (OFGD) conducted, one for the first-year students and another for the second-year students, with each having 8 participants purposively selected. Table 4.1 shows the distribution of the participants.

Table 4.1: Online Focus Group Discussions – OFGD Participants

School		Targeted	Actual	Gender Distribution
School of Education	of	4 (2 first year & 2 second year students)	4	2 female students (1 st & 2 nd Year) 2 male students (1 st & 2 nd Year)
School of Humanities & Development Studies	of &	4 (2 first year & 2 second year students)	4	2 female students (1 st & 2 nd Year) 2 male students (1 st & 2 nd Year)
School of Business & Economics		4 (2 first year & 2 second year students)	4	2 female students (1 st & 2 nd Year) 2 male students (1 st & 2 nd Year)
School of Science & Applied Technology		4 (2 first year & 2 second year students)	4	2 female students (1 st & 2 nd Year) 2 male students (1 st & 2 nd Year)
Total		16 participants	16 participants	8 female students & 8 male students

Source: Researcher, 2023

Results in Table 4.1 show the researcher targeted and obtained 16 OFGD respondents comprising of 8 first-year students and 8 second-year students. The respondents were purposively selected from each of the four academic schools in the University, with two participants (1 female and 1 male) selected from each school, per academic year. The participants provided information regarding their perceptions of the communication platforms, the message presentation formats used in communicating about SA, the engagement process and the perceived influence of the communication approaches used, on their knowledge, attitude and practices regarding substances and substance use.

Two (2) key informants, comprising a representative from the department of guidance and counselling service, and the online/SNSs communication manager, were also interviewed. They provided the qualitative data on the prevalence, patterns and effects of substance use on the students' social and academic lives and the University's communication strategies in line with creating awareness and promotion of desired knowledge, attitude and practices relating to SA.

4.3 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

4.3.1 Gender Distribution of the Respondents

Available statistics (Statista, n.d) on university enrolment in public universities in Kenya indicate that there were more male than female students between the academic years of 2021/22 (334,461 males, 227,605 female) and 2022/23 (322,759 males, 240,166 female). It was therefore expected that in a university like the one in the current study, more male students would take part in the study as opposed to the female students. Consequently, the distribution of the respondents based on their gender differences is presented in figure 4.1. Among the students sampled in the study, 52.8 percent were male while the female students accounted for 47.2 percent of the sample.

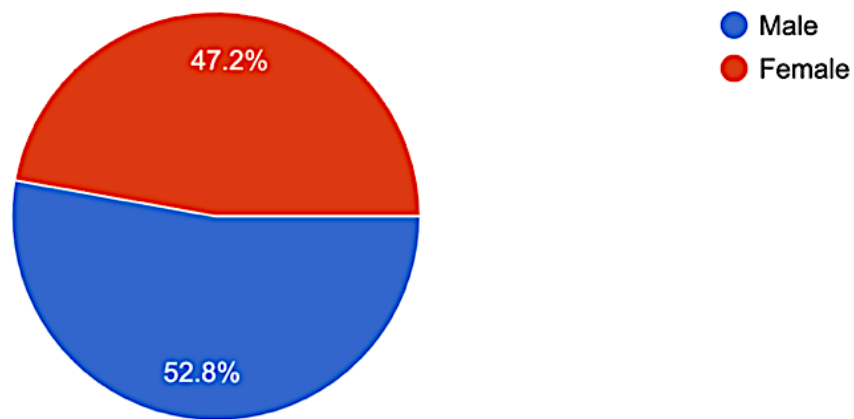


Figure 4.1 Gender Distribution of the Respondents

The statistics on figure 4.1 indicate that more male students were able to access and respond to the questionnaire than their female counterparts. This finding confirms the existence of gender disparity in the access and use of SNSs as established in previous research findings (Sharov et al., 2021; Knight-McCord et al., 2016). Also, considering other statistics indicating that more males are accessing social media and SNSs (Datareportal, n.d; Statista, n.d), such a result implies that the University needs to confirm the existence, extent, and cause of these disparities. Acknowledging this information may also shed light on how the inequality can influence the students' access to official information on online communication platforms.

4.3.2 Year of Study of the Respondents

The study targeted students in their first and second years of study. This was arrived at based on the fact that these groups fall within the bracket of youth among whom studies show are susceptible to being enticed and engage in SA in colleges and universities. This is often due to the environment encountered and experienced in the campuses (Musyoka et al., 2019; 2020). Figure 4.2 highlights the distribution of the respondents in this study.

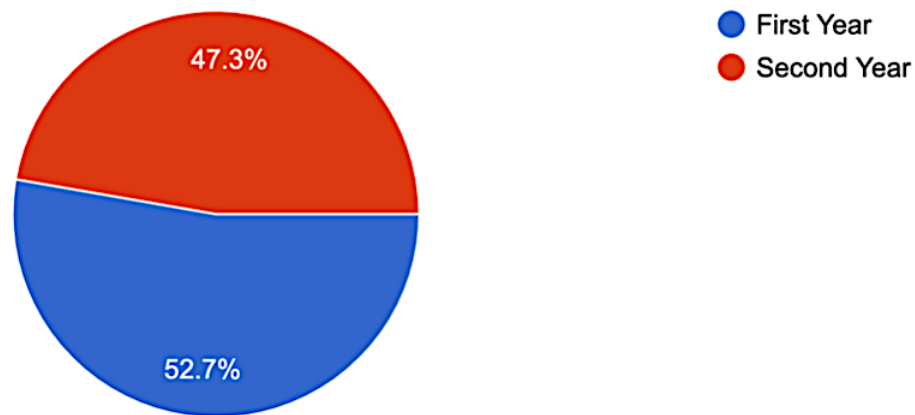


Figure 4.2 Respondents' Year of Study

The information in figure 4.2 indicates that majority of the respondents were from the first-year cohort. This can be attributed to their ability to access internet services through free Wi-Fi available in campus where they also reside, as opposed to the second-year group that do not reside on campus. Also, this result is a representation of the relative proportion of the admitted number of students per cohort in the University, where the first-year students were more (2338) than the second-year students (1777). This result therefore means that for the University to successfully communicate and engage with the cohorts residing outside the University, they may need to consider using SNSs where the students can access the content both online and offline.

In line with this, WhatsApp has been hailed as an ideal SNS that promotes an instant messaging approach where the users can, without charge, create, share, and receive up to 100MB of content in varied formats (WhatsApp, n.d.; Zan, 2019; Yılılmazoy & Kahraman, 2018; Yılmazsoy et al., 2020). And when considering the use of WhatsApp in an educational setup such as the university, research findings by Yililmazoy et al. (2019) and Hamad (2017) already offer support for the same, where they confirm that students realise convenience and enthusiasm towards using WhatsApp as an educational tool.

4.3.3 Age Distribution of the Respondents

Figure 4.3 shows the age distributions of the respondents. The sampled students were required to specify their ages while responding to the online survey questionnaires.

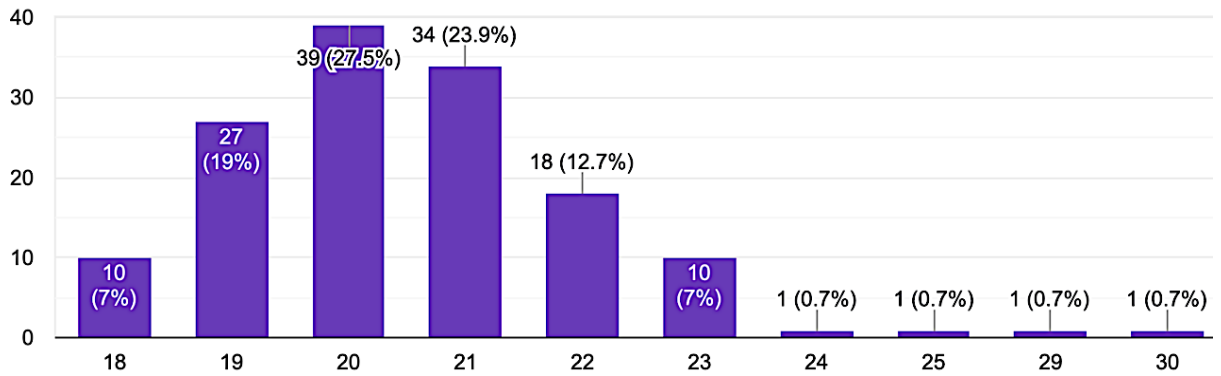


Figure 4.3 Age Distribution of Respondents

According to figure 4.3, majority of the students were 20 years old (27.5%), followed by 21 years old (23.9%), 19 years old (19%), 22 years old (12.7%), 18 years old (10%) and 23 years old (10%). There were also respondents who fell between the ages of 24, 25, 29 and 30 years old (each recording 0.7%).

This information is significant because it shows that majority of the students fall between the age brackets of 19 to 21 years which research uphold to be the most affected by SA in institutions of higher learning (Musyoka et al., 2019; Mbuthia et al., 2020). Thus, the information collected from their responses can be a representation of their peers in other public universities in the country. This is because of the central placement system by the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS) that ensures students placed to public institutions in the country are selected from a pool, hence share similar population characteristics.

4.3.4 Place of Residence of Respondents

In the University under investigation, it is recommended for first-year students to stay within the University's premises, while continuing students can opt to seek accommodation outside the University. Figure 4.4 illustrates the surveyed students' accommodation arrangements during academic sessions.

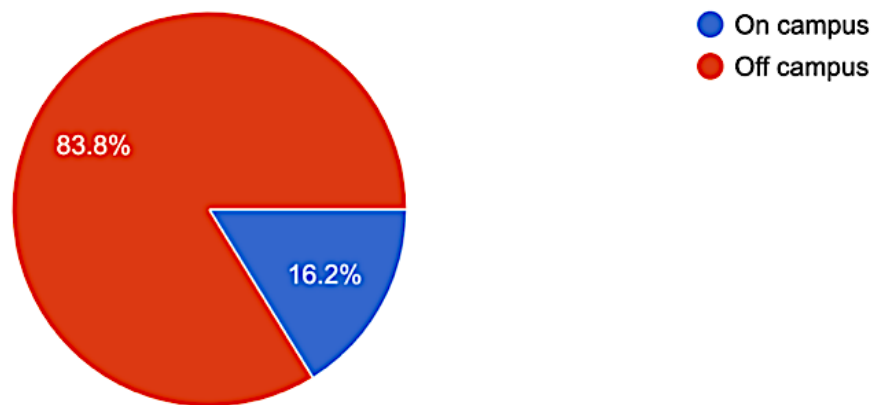


Figure 4.4 Place of Residence of Respondents

It is important to contemplate students' accommodation arrangements when formulating a communication strategy targeting the students. Various studies have established that in academic institutions, this can impact on the students' overall quality of living, studying and social interactions (Sanni-Anibire & Hassanain, 2016; Moore et al., 2019). In a university setup, like the one being studied, where Wi-Fi internet services is freely available within campus implies that students residing within the campus are able to access information from online platforms, including SNSs. The University can thus capitalise on this by extensively utilising these platforms to communicate with these students, especially the first-year students who need to be sensitised on socio-environmental issues that can lead them to SA.

4.4 Ease of Accessing Content on the Various Social Networking Sites (SNSs)

4.4.1 Students' SNS Preference and Practices

Accessibility of content on any communication platform is an important factor in ensuring that the message reaches the targeted audiences successfully. Various communication studies (Valkenburg et al., 2016; Valkenburg, 2017; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015) reveal that audiences tend to prefer specific media sites over others. Thus, in order to ensure that content reaches them, a communicator needs to consider these preferences. In line with this, figure 4.3 summarises the SNSs preferred by the surveyed students.

Which among the following Social Networking Sites do you use? (Tick against those you use)

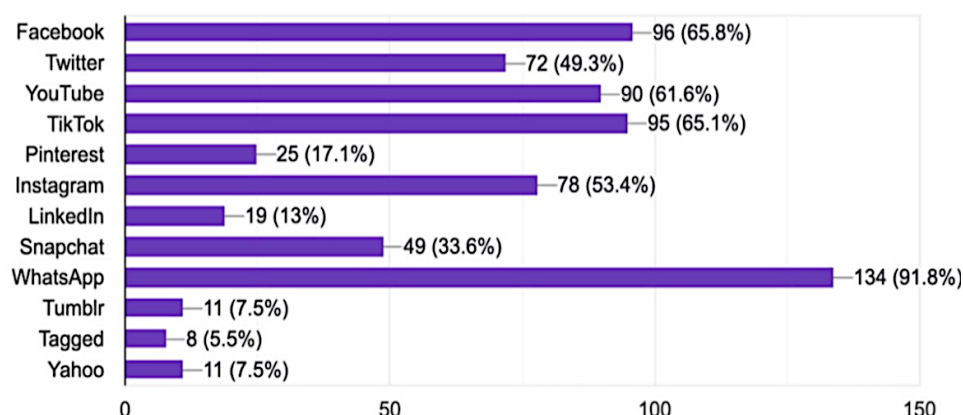


Figure 4.5 The Students' Preferred SNSs

Figure 4.5 indicates that WhatsApp has the highest number of users (91.8%) followed by Facebook (65.8%), TikTok (65.1%), YouTube (61.6%), Instagram (53.4%), and Twitter/X (49.3%). This finding supports the postulations by scholars such as Mese and Aydin (2019), Sharov et al. (2021), Hilde et al. (2018), Steinberg et al. (2018) and Feroz et al. (2021) that in order to reach the students with information, the institution must consider incorporating these SNSs in their communication strategies. These scholars advocate for the need to ascertain the types of social media and SNSs preferences of students and the gratifications they seek from these sites. This in turn would ensure a higher likelihood of the students accessing the information posted on the SNSs and encourage their maximum engagement with the content. Engagement has been shown to be a key determinant of how audiences perceive and interact with the content they access online (Andersen et al., 2018). These propositions by the scholars are in line with the postulations of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) that an individual's choice and use of media is determined by their perception of whether the media and the content therein fulfil their needs and desired gratifications. It is therefore necessary to establish the students' information needs and expected gratifications before settling on specific SNSs to use when communicating with them.

The study also sought to find out how frequently the students visited their preferred SNS. This would help in understanding how long they interact with content posted on those sites or the possibility of them accessing the content. Algorithms specific to each SNS can help communicators to determine how their audiences frequent the sites, or to determine the amount of traffic a particular post has attracted. In line with this, various

studies also confirm that SNSs or posts that receive high traffic rates are more likely to reach larger audiences, thereby increasing brand awareness and encouraging more engagement on the post (Dolan, 2015; 2019). The results are indicated in figure 4.6.

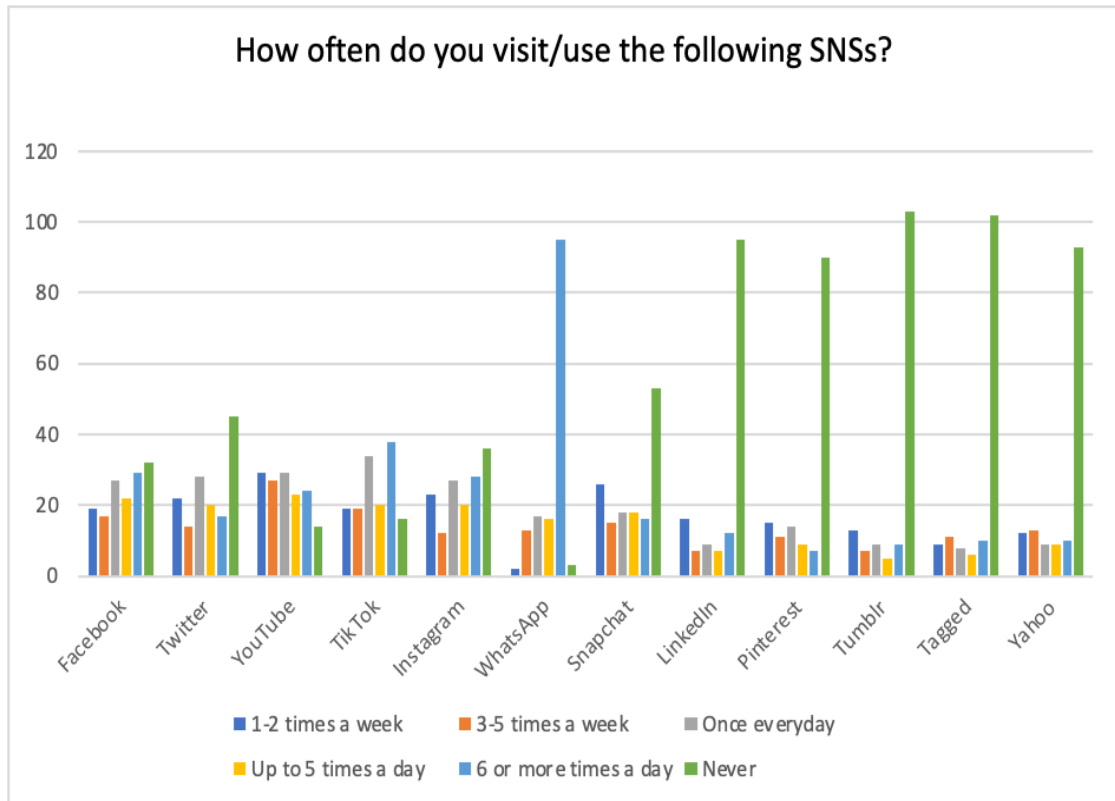


Figure 4.6 Students' Frequency of SNSs Visits/Usage

The 6-point Likert scale for measuring frequency was '*up to 5 times a day*' '*up to 3 times a day*' '*once every day*' '*3-5 times a week*' '*1-2 times a week*' and '*never*'. The highest frequency was recorded as '*up to 5 times a day*' while the least was '*never*'. In line with this, the results in figure 4.6 show that the most visited sites are WhatsApp, followed by TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. These responses indicate that a significant number of the students surveyed access the SNSs multiple times a day. The result agrees with existing online data reports indicating that the leading and most visited SNSs in Kenya among this age group are WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube and Instagram (Statcounter, n.d; Datareportal, n.d; Poushter, 2023).

This result (figure 4.6) also supports similar suggestions advanced by other scholars who have connected the frequency of being online with the time the users spent there (Hossain, 2019; Sharov et al., 2021). Sharov et al. (2021), Bozkurt et al. (2017) and

Apuke and Tunca (2022) further opine that the increase in time spent by university students on SNSs is due to either or a combination of the fact that they use smart phones which makes it easier to access the SNSs on-the-go, availability of internet via Wi-Fi or network providers, or due to the reduction of time spent on other extra-curricular activities. In line with this, as earlier established (Kharono et al., 2022), 48 percent of Kenyan youth under the age of 25 have access to smart phones, while 90 percent of those with smartphones use them to access social media.

The results in figure 4.6 also indicate that majority of the surveyed students rarely or never visit some SNSs such as LinkedIn, Pinterest, Tumblr, Tagged and Yahoo. Regarding this, several hypotheses have been put forth as to why SNS users may avoid certain sites. Martin et al. (2020) for example posit that a user may be influenced by whether the medium or content therein appeals and meets their gratifications. Apuke and Tunca (2022) also acknowledge that students may avoid the SNSs because of lack of interest in joining the sites, fear of infringement of their privacy, lack of time or their attitude and overall experience on the site. The students' digital competence coupled with their socio-cultural backgrounds can also influence their choice of SNSs (Davaki, 2018). In support of this, when asked about the SNSs they frequently use, some of the OFGD participants intimated as follows:

Excerpt 1

....I don't use Instagram because I don't even know how to post there. (OFGD participant 6).

Excerpt 2

Using Twitter/X is very hard because of the hashtags. I haven't understood how to put (sic) those. (OFGD participant 15).

Excerpt 3

Instagram requires a lot of photos and yet my phone camera isn't good enough. (OFGD participant 12).

From the above responses, it emerged that lack of technological know-how prevents some of the students from using certain SNSs (Excerpts 1 & 2). Others cite poor devices as the main hindrance to them using some SNSs that require devices like smart phones (Excerpt 3). The students' responses confirm the findings by various scholars (Sharov et al., 2021; Bozkurt et al., 2017; Apuke & Tunca, 2022; Martin et al., 2020) that individuals' choice and usage of SNSs can be influenced by factors such as compatibility of the devices used in accessing the SNSs, availability of devices such as mobile phones, and technology such as internet. These findings point to the need for the University's administration to incorporate different SNSs in their communication with the students, thereby enabling the students to access the SNSs they are able to and comfortable using. This is in line with the UGT postulation that individuals are actively and constantly selecting their preferred media based on psychological and sociological makeup such as ease of use and ability to access the platforms (Rubin, 2002; Ferris et al., 2021).

Closely connected to the SNSs that students use, is the gratifications they seek from the SNSs. Numerous studies have proven that audiences, especially SNS users, are influenced by various gratifications in their choice of both media and content (Chung, 2018). Fulfilment of these gratifications also determine their perception and acceptance of the message within the content (Hilde et al., 2018). Gratifications, as advanced by the UGT (Rubin, 2002) also affect content creation because communicators would want to ensure the content they upload meets the gratification needs of their target audiences and the affordances of the specific SNSs. Thus, considering the plethora of SNSs existing in the current media-scape, one may be confused as to which sites to use for specific audiences such as university students. In this study, it was therefore necessary to establish the gratifications the students seek from the various SNSs in order to determine whether the content posted fulfilled these needs. Table 4.2 below shows the various gratifications the students seek to fulfil from the various SNSs.

Table 4.2: Students' Reasons for Using the SNSs

SNSs	Reason For Using Social Networking Site (N=146)											
	For academics (Research, group discussions and class assignment)		To socialize with friends and family (for chatting)		To entertain yourself (Play online games)		To get information (news and topics that interest you)		To follow celebrities		To find, create and share content (e.g. photos, memes etc)	
Facebook	29	19.86%	74	50.68%	34	23.28%	38	26.02%	12	8.21%	18	12.32%
Twitter/X	23	15.75%	39	26.71%	26	17.80%	57	39.04%	18	12.32%	11	7.53%
WhatsApp	79	54.10%	76	52.05%	31	21.23%	24	16.43%	04	2.73%	27	18.49%
LinkedIn	24	16.43%	21	14.38%	13	8.90%	13	8.90%	11	7.53%	10	6.84%
Pinterest	16	10.95%	23	15.75%	16	10.95%	21	14.38%	14	9.58%	17	11.64%
YouTube	49	33.56%	22	15.06%	61	41.78%	33	22.60%	14	9.58%	24	16.43%
Instagram	20	13.69%	46	31.50%	44	30.13%	23	15.75%	30	20.54%	22	15.06%
TikTok	13	8.90%	36	24.65%	71	48.63%	24	16.43%	22	15.06%	24	16.43%
Tumblr	12	8.21%	23	15.75%	22	15.06%	09	6.16%	07	4.79%	08	5.47%
Snapchat	18	12.32%	31	21.23%	29	19.86%	16	10.95%	10	6.84%	16	10.95%
Tagged	16	10.95%	27	18.49%	19	13.01%	12	8.21%	08	5.47%	10	6.84%
Yahoo	26	17.80%	23	15.75%	17	11.64%	09	6.16%	09	6.16%	09	6.16%

Source: Researcher, 2023

By correlating the results highlighted in table 4.2 of the different gratifications the students seek to fulfil when visiting the various SNS, with those in figure 4.5 showing the students' preferred SNSs, it emerged that the students used WhatsApp for to access academic content (54.10%) and to socialise (52.05%). The students preferred to socialise (50.68%) on Facebook, to access entertaining content on both TikTok (48.63%), YouTube (41.78%), Instagram (30.13%), and Twitter/X (17.80%). This

therefore denotes that in the event that the content posted by the University does not fit these criteria, then the students may consider them as not fulfilling their needs and in turn may not appreciate both the communication site and the content therein.

Also, the fact that the most preferred SNS was WhatsApp where the students cited using it for both academic purpose and for socialisation, implies that the University needs to consider incorporating WhatsApp as part of its official communication site, especially considering that the SNS has introduced the 'communities' feature that enables users to connect in groups. The WhatsApp Communities feature allows one to combine multiple WhatsApp groups under a larger one known as a community. The feature has been advanced as an ideal system for large organisations such as academic institutions to manage their WhatsApp groups in one place, because administrators are able to send messages to everyone via a primary group or limit information to subgroups. This way, no one misses vital news while discussing other topics (Shah & Anu, 2024). This is in order because research shows that academic institutions are already adopting the communities feature as a tool for educational purposes (timelines.ai). An overview of the WhatsApp' official page (WhatsApp, n.d.) illustrates how academic institutions can use this feature to streamline communication and engage with their students, lecturers and parents in a way that is manageable and builds a stronger sense of community. For example, an educational institution can bring several class groups into a community and manage them efficiently.

When one forms a new community, an announcement channel is automatically created, where you became the administrator. The announcement channel is where important information will be shared and everyone in the other groups will be able to see it, regardless of the group they belong to. If a message is sent to a subgroup, only that group sees it. Only community administrators can send messages to the announcement channel, but they can assign administration roles to members to allow them to do the same. Adding groups to your community does not mean members automatically join every other group. They can only see the groups when they view the community's profile and must request to join. Community administrators can remove anyone from a group, but the member remains in the announcement channel until they remove them from the community. Similarly, privacy is further ensured with end-to-end encryption, and only community administrators can see all participants. Other members only see

and message contacts belonging to the same groups. This feature is ideal because it controls the type of information shared and prevents the spamming of messages from unauthorised parties.

Another advantage of the feature is that it enhances the streamlining of communication because by sharing common messages in the announcements channel, the administration will not need to forward the same text to different WhatsApp groups, instead the community group members will receive an alert for the message. The University for instance, can use it to regularly share information on SA with the students to continuously keep them informed and to update them on upcoming activities. Alternatively, the University can create a community for each of the academic year and share information specific to each, for example when 1st year students report to campus, it can be used to engage them on the challenges they might encounter in their process of settling down and also encourage them to reach out for help even anonymously on the platform. Communities can also be formed to introduce the peer champions to their peers with an official administrator overseeing the community.

An affordance of the WhatsApp Communities is that it combines both broadcast communication and group functionalities. It allows for up to 50 communities and one can add up to 5,000 members to the announcement channel. The communities feature also supports 32-person video and voice calls, file sharing of sizes over 2GB, message reactions and creation of polls. The University can therefore use this platform to send information that meet the students' gratifications as highlighted in table 4.3. Also to encourage engagement from the students through their reactions or polling results, it is advisable to conduct regular polls asking members for their feedback on the information shared (Shah & Anu, 2023). Community and group administrators can thereafter connect in an administrator only group to share what they think is working well and what isn't, what groups could be added or removed to keep conversations more relevant, and whether certain announcements are better handled at a group or community level.

4.4.2 Students' Knowledge and Appreciation of SNSs Operated by the University

Previous research has established that when audiences are aware of an organisation's official SNSs and social media accounts, they may be more inclined to access and engage with content on those sites (Pasioka et al., 2021). Other studies posit that university students are hindered from fully accessing and using SNSs because of mistrust and poor digital literacy on how to safeguard themselves from malicious and misleading content from pseudo accounts on SNSs (Apuke & Tunca, 2022). Universities therefore need to create awareness of their official SNSs so as to build trust in their students (Hinsley, 2021; Apuke & Tunca, 2022). Thus, in the case of the university being studied, it can be postulated that for the students to access information from the university on its official SNSs, they need to first know and acknowledge the existence of these sites. Figure 4.7 illustrates how many students are aware of the official SNSs managed by the University.

Are you aware of any social networking sites operated by Laikipia University?

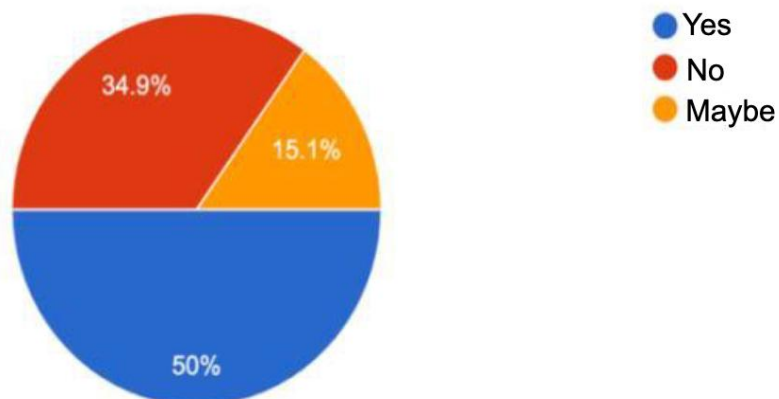


Figure 4.7 General Knowledge of SNSs Operated by Laikipia University

According to the results highlighted in figure 4.7, among the students who took part in the survey, 73 (50%) were aware of the official accounts managed by the University on various SNSs, while 22 (15.1%) were not sure/uncertain and 51 (34.9%) were totally unaware of the accounts. The students were further asked to identify the specific sites as indicated in figure 4.8 below:

If yes/maybe, which one(s) among the following are you aware of?

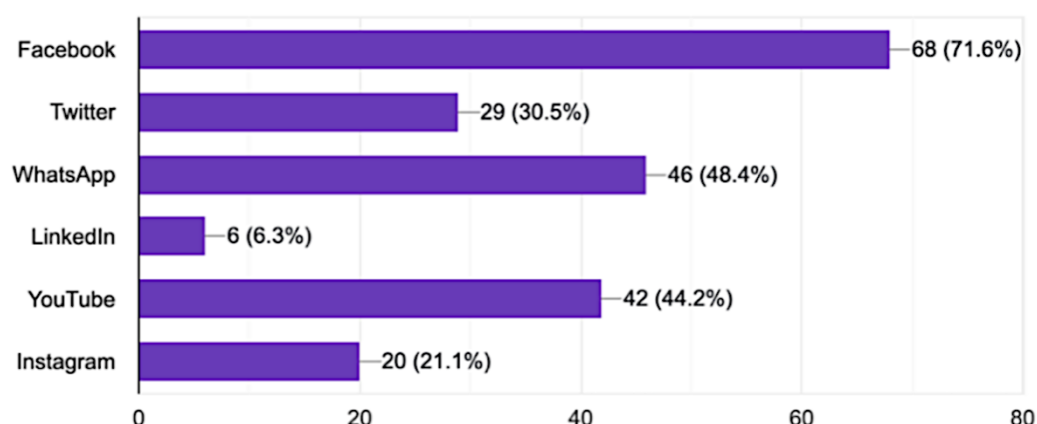


Figure 4.8 Specific SNSs Known by Students

According to figure 4.8, majority of the respondents confirmed being aware of Facebook account (71.6%), followed by WhatsApp (48.4%), YouTube (44.2%), Twitter/X (30.5%), and Instagram (20.1%). They were least aware of LinkedIn (6.3%). It is notable that although the students identified WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and Instagram as SNSs where the University manages various accounts, during the Key Informant Interview (KII), it emerged that the University despite having accounts on these platforms, actively runs the accounts on Facebook, Twitter/X, and YouTube only:

Excerpt 4

The University has official and active pages on Facebook, Twitter/X, and YouTube. The one on Instagram is not active. (Key Informant 1).

Pereira et al. (2021) and Anderson (2019) both opine that an online user can be aware of the existence of an organisation's online account but not necessarily follow the account. Hence, in this study, it was necessary to ascertain the accounts the students follow on the various SNS. This would help in correlating their awareness of the University's official pages with their appreciation of the SNS pages, which is demonstrated by them following the accounts. Figure 4.9 shows the SNS accounts followed or liked by the students.

Which ones do you follow or like?

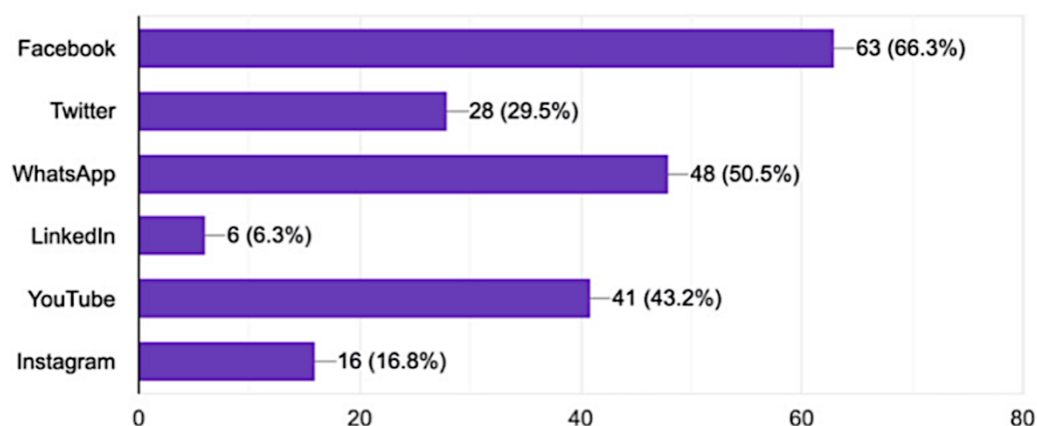


Figure 4.9 SNSs Followed or Liked by Students

Figure 4.9 indicates that most of the surveyed students follow Facebook (66.3%), followed by WhatsApp (50.5%), YouTube (43.2%) and Twitter/X (29.5%). Instagram and LinkedIn have the least number of followers among the respondents at 16.8 percent and 6.3 percent respectively. Despite the University not having active accounts on WhatsApp, LinkedIn and Instagram, there are students who are already active followers of these accounts as confirmed by the following sentiments by some of the OFGD participants:

Excerpt 5

I know of two, one being Twitter/X and the other Instagram. (OFGD participant 3).

Excerpt 6

I know of plenty of them, Facebook, Twitter/X, and Instagram. (OFGD participant 2).

Excerpt 7

I can add telegram (OFGD participant 5).

Excerpt 8

I have seen Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram. But they don't really post things there. (OFGD participant 8).

Excerpt 9

I know of Instagram; I also know of Twitter/X and Facebook. But most of the time they don't post anything they stay for a while without posting. (OFGD participant 6).

Excerpt 10

I know of Facebook and Instagram and Twitter/X. (OFGD participant 7).

The fact that some students are following SNSs where the University does not have official accounts can be attributed to the existence of pseudo accounts on the specific SNSs, which the students follow because they are not aware that the accounts are fake. This was confirmed by the following OFGD participants:

Excerpt 11

I follow them because they use the Laikipia name (OFGD participant 4).

Excerpt 12

When I see the page has the University name and logo I will follow the page (OFGD participant 10).

Excerpt 13

There are two pages on Instagram using Laikipia University name. I follow the one with the logo (OFGD participant 2).

When asked whether they were sure about the authenticity of the pages, one of the participants responded:

Excerpt 14

When I see the page has the University's name and logo, I assume it is an official page managed by the University. Plus, no one has ever told us which one is official, and which is not (OFGD participant 1).

Some of the students interviewed during the OFGD also confirmed that they followed WhatsApp more than the other SNSs:

Excerpt 15

Most students plus I mostly focus on WhatsApp because this is more active and we get information easily there. (OFGD participant 2).

The results on Figure 4.9 and the above OFGD responses (Excerpts 11,12, 13, 14 & 15) imply that the discrepancy between what the students assume are official accounts of the University on those sites (WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and Instagram) and the actual official and active sites needs to be addressed urgently. This is due to the fact that the students may already be following unofficial or pseudo accounts, hence in danger of getting misleading information. Considering that pseudo accounts can influence people's views or cause confusion among content consumers by spreading misinformation and rumours (Kim & Gil de Zúñiga, 2021; Pasioka et al., 2021; Hinsley, 2021), the University should create awareness of the official SNSs accounts it actively manages. This is important because as shown in figure 4.10, the students are already looking for various information and content on the University's accounts on various SNSs.

What do you look for when visiting the University's social networking sites (multiple answers are possible)

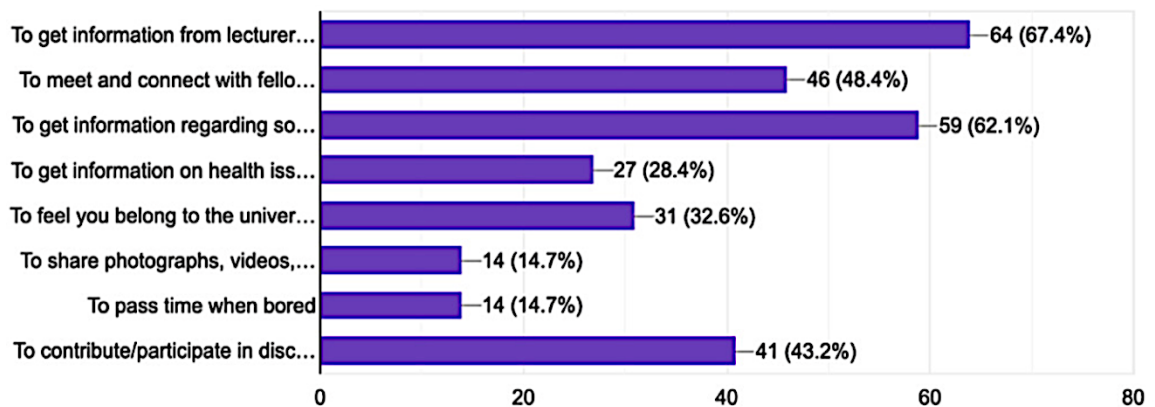


Figure 4.10 Content Students Look for on the University's SNSs

According to figure 4.10, among the respondents who indicated that they follow the University's official accounts on SNSs, majority said they visited the SNSs to get information from their lecturers and university relating to exams (67.4%), get information regarding social events organised by the University (62.1%), to meet and connect with fellow students (48.4%), and to participate in discussions (43.2%). The fact that some of the students revealed that they also visited the sites to access information on health issues (28.4%), corroborates Ikachoi's finding (2017) that the topics university students searched for while online included health information that ranged from sexual health to SA.

In relation to this, various studies have attributed young people's preference for SNSs as sources of health information to their need for anonymity, the availability of the content and trust (where they trust content from their peers whom they see as being able to understand and relate to their challenges, and content from reliable professional sites) (Stellefson et al., 2020). Hence, this study also sought to confirm the types of health information that the students in the University under investigation search for, so as to establish whether they consider SA as one of the key health topics they are interested in. Figure 4.11 highlights the students' feedback to whether they have searched for information on SA from the University's SNSs.

Have you ever visited any of Laikipia University's social networking sites (such as Facebook, Twitter and others) to look for information on drugs and substance use/abuse?

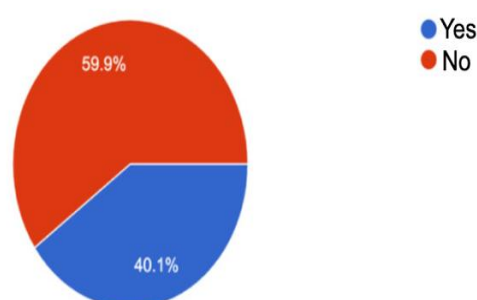


Figure 4.11 Students Who Searched for Information on Drugs and Substance Use on SNSs

Figure 4.11 indicates that majority (59.9%) of the surveyed students responded as having not searched for information on SA, while 40.1 percent of them had search for information on SA. This finding confirms that the students are not searching for information on SA, yet previous studies have linked the prevalence of SA among this age group to insufficient communication on SA available to them (Masese, 2020). Mbuthia et al.'s (2020) study findings also revealed that students were advocating for more information on SA to be made available for them access. Hence in a scenario such as the one presented by the result in figure 4.11, it was important to find out why the students were not interested in searching for information on SA. One of the OFGD participants shed light on this occurrence:

Excerpt 16

I stopped searching for the information because the information is never even updated. What I saw in first year is what is still there. So, I would rather search elsewhere like in NACADA (National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse) pages (OFGD participant 2).

The above response by the OFGD participant 2 (Excerpt 16) confirms the response by Key Informant 1 and Key Informant 2 on the regularity of posting content on SA on the University's SNSs as captured below:

Excerpt 17

Corporate Communications Department is willing to post content on SA so long as the content is available. It is just that the Counselling Department has grown thin, we can't say we have the content. (Key Informant 1).

Excerpt 18

The Counselling Department is not able to regularly provide the content because we are currently understaffed and cannot meet the demand. (Key Informant 2).

These responses from the two key informants (Excerpts 17 & 18) point to a need for the university, through the counselling department, to consider other options of providing the information. Peer counsellors have been applauded as key players in the reduction of SA among university and college students (Meera, 2019; Pere, 2018). Correspondingly, the results on table 4.2 that show the students use these SNSs to socialise with their peers, agree with research findings which confirm that students also tend to trust their peers because they perceive them as being able to understand them (Meera, 2019). Hence, incorporating peer counsellors could help in encouraging the students to access the University's SNS accounts as well as help in providing content on SA that meets the knowledge needs of the students. However, when asked whether the University would be willing to allow peer counsellors to provide content on SA, Key informant 1 responded as follows:

Excerpt 19

We do not allow the students to do the post themselves directly. The information has to be verified and monitored to ensure it is authentic and credible. We can work with them so long as what is to be shared is moderated to meet the organisational standards (Key Informant 1).

The above response (Excerpt 19) explains that the University does not allow students to post directly on to the official SNSs, so as to ensure that quality and credibility is upheld as per the corporate communication guidelines. Nonetheless, one way of boosting the information underload would be to incorporate the peer counsellors in content creation. The peer counsellors can source for content they perceive as relevant

to their peers after which an official from the counselling department can countercheck on their credibility before forwarding to corporate department for posting. The content can also be shared on WhatsApp through the communities' announcement page. Official government agencies like the National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA) also have content on SA on their official accounts on various SNSs that is free and accessible within the copyright requirements of attribution on each SNS like hashtag, tagging or retweeting. These can also be sources of information for the counselling department to boost their information databank.

In regard to searching for content online, various studies have established that social media users can sometimes encounter difficulties in accessing relevant information from the platforms they search on (Pereira et al., 2021; Seidel et al., 2023). This is often determined by the user's digital health literacy levels. Digital health literacy refers to a user's ability to seek, find, understand, and appraise health information from online sources and later be able to use the knowledge to inform health-related decisions and actions (Seidel et al., 2023). Digital health illiteracy therefore means that the user may not be able to know how and what to look for in relation to a specific topic. This study therefore sought to find out whether the students who searched for information on SA on the SNSs were able to access the information. The results are shown on Figure 4.12:

Have you ever come across information on drugs and substance use/abuse on any of the social networking sites operated by Laikipia University?

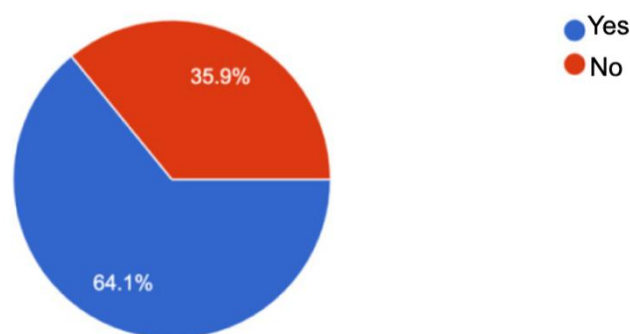


Figure 4.12 Number of Students Who Have Accessed Information on Drugs and Substance Use on the SNSs

The findings in figure 4.12 shows that 64 percent of the students have been successful in accessing information on drugs and substances, while 35 percent have not. When

linking the two findings (figures 4.11 & figure 4.12), it appeared that there were students who despite searching for information on drugs and substance use did not get any. This finding corroborates the postulations by Pereira et al. (2021) and Seidel et al. (2023) that online users, including social media users, can search for content and not be able to get the correct content. This can be attributed to them not knowing the right official SNS to search from, or due to digital health illiteracy. In connection to this, as indicated previously in Figure 4.8 and Figure 4.9, some of the students are already following the wrong SNSs accounts separate from the ones officially managed by the University. This means that if such a student looks for information from those sites, they will not be able to get the information. Digital health illiteracy also means that a student searching for information on SA may not know what to search for or how to search for the information from the SNSs. This point was supported by the following response by one of the OFGD participant when asked whether they had searched and accessed information on SA:

Excerpt 20

.....but I think drugs is just drugs, the information is the same (OFGD participant 16).

Excerpt 21

I have never really thought of different ways to search for information on drugs (OFGD participant 15).

The above responses (Excerpts 20 & 21) imply that the students may be using generic prompts or search words when looking for information on SA, yet as various documents and scholarly articles specify, there are specific topics under the banner of SA such as: types of drugs and substances; effects of drugs and substances; prevention and avoidance; guidance and counselling (W.H.O, n.d; World Drug Report, 2018). Available information can be classified under these topics for easier accessibility, depending on a student's information need at a specific time. A point of reference is how the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) has demarcated these topics on their website (nida.nih.gov) while providing hyperlinks to their accounts on various SNSs for those interested in accessing the information on these sites.

4.4.3 Students' Ease of Accessing Content on the SNSs Operated by the University

In order to further ascertain the link between the time the students spent on their preferred SNSs (online practices) and the accessibility of content on those sites, the study also sought to examine how accessible the message content on the various SNSs were to the students. The parameters for testing accessibility were accessible images and videos with hyperlinks; accepting feedback; physical/technical accessibility and availability of content as advanced by Pereira et al. (2021).

These parameters were ideal for a study such as this one because they present a standardised and practical method of measuring the accessibility features across different platforms which content creators, in this case the University administration, can use to assess whether the content they share are accessible to their target audience. This is especially factual bearing in mind Pereira et al.'s (2021) definition of accessible content as being the ability of audiences, to access and engage with content on various platforms used in the dissemination of information. It is equally essential to adopt these parameters because as Pereira et al. (2021) and Sharov et al. (2021) advise, it is important for content creators and communicators to continuously evaluate the accessibility of their content on the various SNSs. Using these standardised parameters can provide valuable insights by enabling the identification and reduction of the barriers that users face in accessing content online. Thus, table 4.3 highlights the summarised responses of the OFGD participants regarding the accessibility of both the SNSs and content therein.

Table 4.3: Accessibility of Communication Platforms and Content

Accessibility parameters	Summary of Responses from the OFGDs
1. Accessible images and videos with hyperlinks	Images are only used on Facebook, Twitter/X, and Instagram. They are accessible but no hyperlinks provided for cross-platform accessibility.
2. Accepting feedback and responses	Not on the official SNSs' pages and not by University officials, instead, it is fellow students who will respond to a comment.
3. Technical/Physical accessibility	Internet/Wi-Fi is available for 1 st years who reside on campus. Not easily available for the other groups residing outside campus.
4. Availability of content	They don't post regularly. They don't post all information. They prefer physical sites like notice boards.

Source: Researcher, 2023

The responses captured on table 4.3 point to varied results for overall accessibility of the content posted by the University on the SNSs. For instance, as a perimeter for measuring accessibility, accessible images and video content should have embedded in them hyperlinks for continued access and engagement with the content on other SNSs. In the case of content posted in the University's official accounts, embedding hyperlinks would assist in providing a connection between the three sites operated by the University, so that the students can continue interacting with the content or access the content in their preferred SNSs besides the one they came across the content in. Also, considering that some students reported using multiple SNSs (Figure 4.5 & Figure 4.6), they could share the content with their colleagues who follow them on those sites. This is the essence of transmedia communication approaches where the supposition is that by incorporating as many communication platforms as possible, the conversation may continue, with the audience taking part in redistribution of the content, while engaging with it (Jenkins, 2016; Wang & Singhal, 2016). Accordingly, when the students were asked whether they have encountered hyperlinks when accessing content posted by the University, they stated as follows:

Excerpt 22

I have never seen that in the posts either on Facebook or Twitter/X (OFGD participant 15).

Excerpt 23

I only access the content on each of the sites when I visit them separately. For example, if I go to Twitter/X, I will see the content there without knowing that it was posted on Facebook (OFGD participant 16).

Excerpt 24

When I want to share what I've seen on Facebook, I sometimes screenshot and share on WhatsApp. I don't share the link (OFGD participant 13).

The response (Excerpts 22, 23 & 24) indicate that the University needs to improve on providing hyperlinks connecting the content they post on the various platforms, so as to improve on visibility and accessibility of the content. This practice can also help the students become aware of the University's official accounts on various SNSs.

Accessibility of content on SNSs also takes into account the difference in 'lifespan' of content in different SNSs (Graffius, 2023). The 'lifespan' of a content refers to how long the post stays relevant, and the average amount of time people can engage with the post on the various SNSs. Engagement diminishes after the 'lifespan' has lapsed. Each site has its average lifespan with YouTube having the longest 'life span' of 20 days, Instagram's is 48 hours, LinkedIn's is 24 hours, Facebook's is 6 hours, Twitter/X's is 18 minutes, while TikTok has the least span of instant decay (Monk, 2023).

The content is relevant for less than 30 minutes in some of these sites because of overload of content for users to interact with. For example, a Twitter/X user's timeline can be 'swamped' with tweets within a minute because of the site's algorithm suggesting content to suit users' pre-established likes. On the other hand, Facebook's news feed algorithm ensures that the more relevant and engaging a post is to an audience, the more prominently it will be displayed on their newsfeed. YouTube's

algorithm dictates that a video will record an initial rise in views within the first few days of it being uploaded. Thereafter, it has the potential to continue attracting views and growing in popularity even after thirty days. Thus, the best practice recommended for using YouTube is to use other SNSs to announce new videos uploaded to the site (Monk, 2023). This implies that when the University uploads content onto YouTube, they should update the information on the other SNSs and provide links to the YouTube page. Thus, hyperlinking most of these SNSs when disseminating information can also improve on the availability of the content for a longer period of time on the various SNSs.

Regarding the availability of content as a determinant of accessibility, scholars such as Mutsikiwa et al. (2021) posit that SNS users are more inclined to access specific sites when they perceive the information as being readily available and of quality. Quality in this case refers to the accuracy, reliability, relevance, and completeness of the information posted. Thus, when the students were asked to comment on the availability of content posted by the University on the various SNSs, some of the participants made the following remarks:

Excerpt 25

They rarely post on Facebook and when you ask some question, they don't reply. Then you don't get enough information on Facebook (OFGD participant 5).

Excerpt 26

I've seen Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, but they don't really post things there (OFGD participant 8).

Excerpt 27

I know of Instagram; I also know of Twitter/X and Facebook. But most of the time they don't post anything, they stay for a while without posting (OFGD participant 6).

Excerpt 28

...another issue is the Instagram, I think the last post was in 2017, I've never seen anything there (OFGD participant 11).

These answers (Excerpts 25, 26, 27 & 28) emphasise the fact that the content posted on the University's accounts may be considered unavailable by the students, putting into question the quality and relevance of the information, especially when it is not updated. The end result to this would be the student losing interest in accessing the sites, thereby losing out on getting the information posted on the sites. Recommendations have been put forth on the frequency at which content should be posted (Houlahan, 2017; indeed.com). This is determined by the characteristics of the target audience and the type of content they prefer to engage with based on the affordances of their preferred SNSs. For instance, it is recommended that on Facebook, posts should be updated once a day or 5 times a week. On YouTube, content can be posted every one or two weeks; on Twitter/X at least three times per day and on Instagram one or two posts a day. These guidelines can be adopted by the University when scheduling how to communicate and encourage engagement on their accounts on the various SNSs.

Another determinant of accessibility on SNSs is the ability of the platform to enable users provide feedback and timely responses on their experiences (Mutsikiwa et al., 2021; Pereira et al., 2021). In this regard, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2020), document recommends ideal considerations for feedback and response mechanisms on SNSs. These should include multiple two-way channels tailored to the different needs, preferences, and capacities of the target audience. They also ought to incorporate confidentiality safeguards, established timelines, responsibilities, and methods for acknowledging, assessing, referring, and responding to feedback. In regard to this, the following responses by some of the OFGD participants capture their perception of how they felt the University performed in relation to allowing them to engage with the content through comments and feedback:

Excerpt 29

Personally, I've never tried but I normally see them responding when other people (students) respond. But most of the time they just pass information, so they rarely respond especially in the official groups. Now there are other groups that are most of the time managed by the student officials, there is where you'll get replies especially Twitter/X (OFGD participant 1).

Excerpt 30

Most times you'll find that in case someone asks a question it is not the officials who will respond. You'll find that maybe it is just fellow students who will respond. Response is not good in Facebook. But on other pages, it is okay. But on Facebook, no (OFGD participant 4).

Excerpt 31

They rarely post on Facebook and when you ask some question, they don't reply. Then you don't get enough information on Facebook (OFGD participant 5).

These sentiments (Excerpts 29, 30 & 31) imply that the University is not regular in uploading content onto some of the SNSs and also in responding to questions asked by the audiences, who are the students. The sentiments can be interrelated with Mutsikwa et al.'s findings (2021) that SNS users will consider content as trustworthy when the content is from credible sources, and untrustworthy when its only user-generated content such as comments and retweets, that is available on the specific SNS account. Hence, the fact that some of the OFGD participants indicate that they do not get responses from the administration but from fellow students, may lead to them avoiding those sites and information therein, as established by Mutsikiwa et al. (2021). It is therefore a responsibility of the University's administration to come up with workable timelines and methods of responding to relevant comments on their official accounts on the SNSs.

Physical accessibility as an indicator of accessibility in SNSs refers to the ability of users to access the sites either through availability of internet services or gadgets (Gleason et al., 2020). Although some studies show that internet penetration and the

subsequent use of internet services has significantly increased among young people in the country (Pew Research, 2018; Poushter, 2023), there are other studies that suggest inequalities between those who own internet enabled gadgets and those who do not, plus difference between those who can access internet and those who cannot. For instance, the study by Kharono et al. (2022) established that many young people in urban areas owned smart phones and were avid users of internet compared to their age mates in rural areas. He attributed this to the availability of free internet services via Wi-Fi in public place for the urban dwellers. Accordingly, when the students were asked whether they were able to access the content physically and technically, they responded as follows:

Excerpt 32

The issue about network coverage I think it is only limited to 1st years because the Wi-Fi hotspots are inside the school and most of the 2nd years to the 4th years they stay outside the campus. Wi-Fi is not accessible to those people who are staying outside campus (OFGD participant 2).

Excerpt 33

For my case, I stay within campus, so there is internet connection all the time. And I have enabled notifications, so in case of any event, there is an update (OFGD participant 1).

The above responses (Excerpts 32 & 33) indicate that there is free Wi-Fi internet services within the campus. This means that it is easier for the students to access online sites, including SNSs, while within the Wi-Fi hotspot range (a hotspot refers to a physical location where people can connect to a Wi-Fi network using a device like smartphone or laptop). Consequently, it can be deduced that the first-year students who reside in campus are able to access internet and online communication sites because of the availability of free Wi-Fi coverage in campus. However, this may not be the case for students residing outside campus. This in turn means that the students without access to Wi-Fi or internet services may have to depend on their fellow students to pass information to them. This is a scenario that can hinder effective communication due to possibilities of misinformation or disinformation from these sources.

In spite of the above responses, among the OFGD participants were those who acknowledged the existence of free Wi-Fi internet within the campus but bemoaned the fact that it was slow.

Excerpt 34

There are some designated spots in the University where we can get some free Wi-Fi. And there are some places where it doesn't reach, so you find the places where there is free Wi-Fi congested and the signal becomes very slow (OFGD participant 3).

Excerpt 35

The Wi-Fi is not really that strong, I find that some spots, like the study area, is not that strong that you can use to maybe open the Instagram, Twitter/X (OFGD participant 8).

Excerpt 36

I live in the hostels of the school, and you'll find that in some hostels there is Wi-Fi and there are those that don't have. So, you'll find that sometimes some people will post on their status that they've seen something maybe on YouTube. So, you'll also go there to check it out only after seeing their status post (OFGD participant 10).

Given that some of the participants (Excerpts 34 & 35) complain about the internet being slow also means they may not be able to access some of the data intensive SNSs. The amount of data and internet speed a SNS will need is determined by the type of content ascribed for the SNS such as images and videos that consume more data to view or download. Text and image-based sites like Facebook and WhatsApp can work with slow internet connection of 5MPS, while video-centred sites like YouTube and Instagram need between 10MPS to 100MPS. (Holmlin, 2023). The fact that one of the less data intensive SNS is WhatsApp correlates with the previous findings highlighted in figure 4.3 and figure 4.5 where WhatsApp and Facebook were the most preferred and visited SNS among the responding students. This explains why the students may prefer these sites (WhatsApp and Facebook) because they are easier to access even in

poor internet coverage. The University's administration should therefore maximise on posting official content onto these platforms and providing links to the other SNSs for the students to access at their convenience.

The responses from the OFGD also imply that the students expect to see content posted frequently on the University's official pages on the various SNSs. However, during the period of analysis, which also coincided with the University's drugs awareness campaign week, it emerged that some of the students were either not aware of the event or of the content posted on the SNSs, as captured by the following comment:

Excerpt 37

I think this is the first time am hearing there was a drugs campaign week. I never got the information (OFGD participant 8).

Additionally, it emerged during the OFGDs that some of the participants were not aware of the anti-drugs campaign because the information was posted on the noticeboards, yet the students do not visit these sites to access the information. The following quotes explain the situation:

Excerpt 38

Most of the students come to school for classes, and immediately they are done with their classes, they go home. Because most are from 2nd year, 3rd year and 4th year, they stay outside school. So, some of the students do not pass around the noticeboards where most information is posted because they don't have the time or interest. So, I prefer it being online (OFGD participant 12).

Excerpt 39

The real question is, how many people are going to go through the notice boards to read about such information? How many people can access data and how frequent in a day can they access that kind of information? (OFGD participant 2).

The above opinions (Excerpts 38 & 39) expressed by the students point to their desire to access information from the administration on the SNSs they are already familiar with. Nonetheless, the fact that they believed the administration was not fully utilising the SNSs for official communication raises a need for the University's administration to re-evaluate their consistency in using the sites and in creating awareness of the existence of the official accounts.

The students also reported that internet access is limited outside campus and as such, they prioritise when and how they communicate online. Borrowing from the study by Gleason et al. (2020), the administration can also consider ways of incorporating the SNSs as platforms for disseminating information and ensuring implementation of accessibility best practices at both communication platform and individual levels. This may in turn enhance engagement which is a key factor for effective online communication experiences.

4.5 Students' Engagement with Substance Abuse (SA) Content Posted on Various SNSs

There is overall agreement by researchers that engagement on SNSs can be conceptualised as users' behaviour specific to particular platform such as likes, comments, tweets, retweets and/or shares, (Perreault & Mosconi, 2018). Considering that engagement is a context-specific occurrence worth studying because it varies across SNSs, this study also sought to assess how the students engaged with the content on the various SNSs. To achieve this objective, the research sampled content from NACADA's accounts on various SNSs that are free for use within the recommended attribution guidelines. The content aimed to fill in the identified information gaps and gratification needs of the students, emerging from the pre-survey as was presented in table 4.2.

The selected content was shared on WhatsApp group platform with the participants of the OFGDs. The type of content ranged from written posts, images, videos, and infographics. The students were then requested to select the content they would normally post on their various SNS accounts and share it on their preferred SNS for three days. During the three-day period, each of the participant was required to share a screenshot of the networking site pages at the end of each day. This enabled the

researcher to record and examine how the students engaged with the content. Table 4.4 shows the SNSs the students chose to post the content on and the type of content they chose for posting.

Table 4.4: SNSs Used, and Type of Content Posted by the OFGD Participants
N= 22 (total number of contents shared for posting on the various SNSs)

Social Networking Site	Number of Posts	Content Type
Facebook	13	Written post= 6 Written with Image= 6 Video=1 Infographics=0
Twitter/X	6	Written post=5 Written with Image=1 Video=0 Infographics=0
YouTube	0	Written post=0 Written with Image=0 Video=0 Infographics=0
Instagram	8	Written post=2 Written with Image=3 Video=2 Infographics=1
LinkedIn	0	Written post=0 Written with Image=0 Video=0 Infographics=0

Source: Researcher, 2023

According to the results on table 4.4, the participants preferred posting on Facebook (13 posts) followed by Instagram (8 posts) and Twitter/X (6 posts). These findings confirm Hilde et al.'s supposition (2018) that different SNSs appeal to different users, which in turn affects their engagement practices. The features that may draw a user to a SNS include their experience on the SNS based on the ease of accessing and using the site. Also connected to this is Hossain's postulation (2019) that a user's subjective norms, such as their need to fit in a social circle, may determine their choice and use of SNSs. These assertions (Hilde et al., 2018; Hossain, 2019) were confirmed by the following responses by some OFGD participants as to why they opted for the SNSs:

Excerpt 40

Most of my friends are on Facebook, so I thought of posting there to share with them (OFGD participant 6).

Excerpt 41

In my circle, Twitter/X is the deal. Plus, it does not (sic) need effort to post there (OFGD participant 8).

The above responses (Excerpts 40 & 41) indicate that the students may have preferred the three SNSs (Facebook, Twitter/X and Instagram) because they either found the sites easier to use or they needed to copy their peers who are already using these SNSs. The findings highlight the influencing role of subjective norms in decision making among this age group. In this regard, the Prototype Willingness Model (PWM) also advances that young people's behaviour are determined by social contexts which in turn lead to subjective norms (Gibbons et al., 2003; Amenta et al., 2015). This would therefore influence how they engage with the content on their preferred SNSs. As such, the results on table 4.4, shows that the OFGD participants preferred posting content in the form of written posts and written posts with images embedded in them.

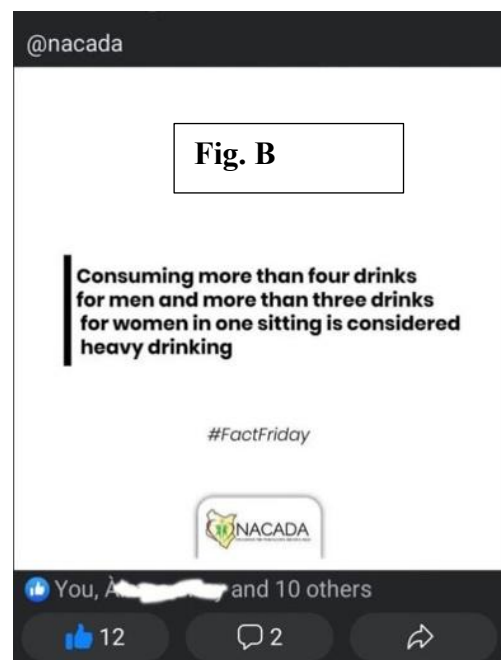
Conversely, according to table 4.4, YouTube and LinkedIn were not considered for posting by the students. This is despite earlier findings indicating that majority of participating students subscribe to these sites (figure 4.5). Also, although YouTube is a popular SNS among young people, with its affordances ranging from interactive video-sharing abilities where users can upload their own videos and receive feedback and comments (Dunlop et al., 2016), the results show that the students did not consider it when posting the content. These results corroborate research findings by other scholars that young people's preference for a platform is determined by various factors including their ability to disclose emotions (trusting and comfort), their self-identity arising from the values, emotional meanings and knowledge aspects associated with belonging to a group (Jiménez et al., 2016; Abdullah et al., 2021; Haris et al., 2021). This might have also been the case in the current study, because when asked why they did not pick on YouTube or LinkedIn, one of the participants stated as follows:

Excerpt 42

I prefer the other sites since it is not easy to post on YouTube, compared to Facebook and Instagram, because once you put it on Facebook it can automatically be posted on Instagram. I just like watching other people's post on YouTube, not posting my own stuff (OFGD participant 1).

Examining the demonstrable indicators of engagement, such as usage and activity counts, and theoretical indicators relating to positive user experiences, makes it possible to understand the kinds of social media platforms and content that appeal to young people, and why they engage at the level they do (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Thus, this study further sought to assess how the students engaged with the posted content on each SNS.

The metrics recommended (Perreault & Mosconi, 2018; Chung, 2018; Drivas et al., 2022; Chenn, 2020) and used in studying engagement in the SNSs include: likes, comments, shares, re-tweets, tweets, views and dislikes. Using these metrics, figures 4.13, 4.14 and 4.15 below show the posts with highest metrics on the three SNSs (Facebook, Twitter/X & Instagram respectively).



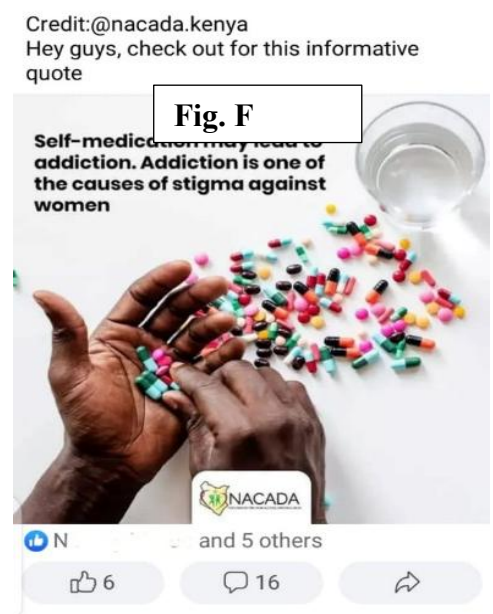


Figure 4.13 Facebook Posts with Highest Metrics

The metrics used in measuring engagement on Facebook were the comments, likes and sharing. Consequently, figure 4.13 shows that the post labelled *Fig. A* received twenty (20) likes, fourteen (14) comments and one (1) share. The post labelled *Fig. B* recorded

twelve (12) likes and two (2) comments, while the one labelled *Fig. C* had twelve (12) likes and two (2) comments. Also, the post labelled *Fig. D* recorded twenty (20) comments and eleven (11) likes and the one labelled *Fig. F* received sixteen (16) comments and six (6) likes. Finally, the post with NACADA's helpline number (*Fig. E*) had ten (10) likes and one (1) comment.

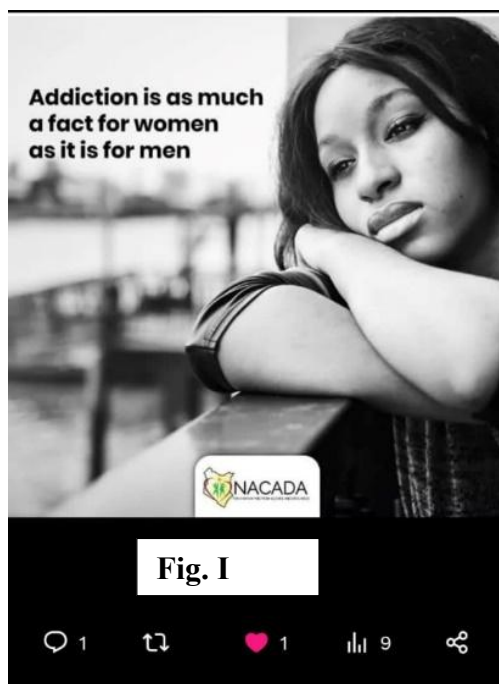


Figure 4.14 Twitter/X posts with Highest Metrics

The metrics for measuring engagement on Twitter/X were the tweets, re-tweets, replies, likes and views. Hence, according to figure 4.14, the post labelled *Fig. G* recorded one hundred and thirty-six (136) views, two (2) re-tweets and six (6) likes. The post labelled *Fig. H* received thirty (30) views, four (4) likes, one (1) retweet and one (1) comment. The other post labelled *Fig. I* recorded nine (9) views, one (1) like and one (1) comment.

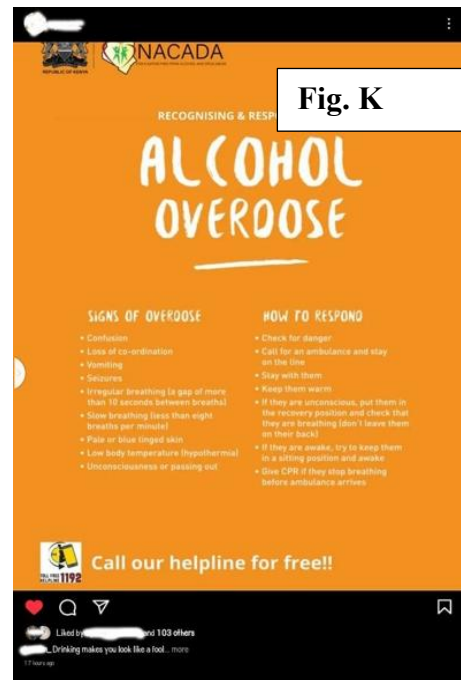


Figure 4.15 Instagram Posts with Highest Metrics

The metrics for measuring engagement on Instagram were likes, comments, and bookmarks. Hence, as shown on figure 4.15, the post labelled *Fig. J* recorded thirteen (13) likes and three (3) comments. The post labelled *Fig. K* received one hundred and four (104) likes and one (1) comment, while the post with NACADA helpline numbers (*Fig. L*) recorded eighty-one (81) likes and one (1) comment.

The results shown on the above figures (figures 4.13, 4.14 & 4.15) revealed that some posts recorded low engagement levels like just one comment or one share. This occurrence can be explained by Jiang and Anderson's (2018) findings that poor engagement on SNSs can be attributed to lack of consistency in posting or unfamiliar content. Additionally, the following responses from some of the participants of the OFGD elaborated why the above results were recorded:

Excerpt 43

When I posted my photos the likes that I received compared to what I normally get when I post for myself, wasn't enough. They were just 1 percent of the likes I normally get. I think people don't want to talk about drugs. I don't know why. Like they are not supporting, because they feel they have a freedom to choose what they do (OFGD participant 5).

Excerpt 44

People are used to seeing us post stuff for fun, so coming out of the blue and posting stuff to do with drugs people they were shocked, and we actually had some of our friends blaming us and asking us how we got saved by Jesus Christ but then we had to because you had asked us to do so (OFGD participant 2).

Excerpt 45

I guess the negative feedback were more than the positive feedback. Like when you post something on drugs, yet you normally post some other type of content, they start asking whether there is something to it, coz they are perfect sure that is something you didn't think on your own. Most of them assume that anything to do with drugs are only available on posts by NACADA, but not by people like us.

They expect that on the pages of all the drug fighters (peer counsellors) (OFGD participant 4).

There were however some students who felt that their posts received extremely positive engagement, as indicated in the following responses:

Excerpt 46

For me I didn't get any negative feedback. Most of them viewed the content as usefully. And now that I am a leader, most of the time I am expected to educate the rest coz we've been on workshops where the school organises where we are informed so that we can help others. for my followers they felt it was educational (OFGD participant 1).

Excerpt 47

So, for me I didn't get any negative feedback. Actually, it was the other way round, it more positive. Other than people keeping quiet, there are some people who responded by liking the message, by reacting in a good way. So, it had positive feedback, or no feedback at all (OFGD participant 3).

Excerpt 48

For me I didn't find any challenge. For example, the one that I posted last Thursday, all my followers agreed it's true. Because most of them are youth, so they are campaigning against drugs (OFGD participant 10).

Excerpt 49

So, on my side, it was positive because I got a lot of likes to the picture that I posted. So I think from my side it was a positive (OFGD participant 6).

From the responses on the positive engagement (Excerpts 46, 47, 48 & 49), it can be deduced that when some of the participating students who were either student leaders or peer counsellors posted the content, there was engagement on the posts as opposed to when the other student posted (Excerpts 47 & 48). Accordingly, these statements by the OFGDs participants raise two significant postulations that the institution may need

to take into consideration. First, these findings signify the need for the institution to consider a communication strategy that will ensure regular and sustained posting of content relating to SA which may in turn enable the students to access and engage with the content regularly. Secondly, these findings confirm Pere's recommendation (2018) for peer-to-peer preventive strategies. Given that the students are able to understand the context in which their peers are best able to access, consume and use the information, they can assist in message selection and transmission through shared communication platforms like SNSs. Musyoka et al (2021) also corroborates that peer mentors can positively influence behaviour aimed at the prevention, avoidance, and cessation of SA because of the established mutual understanding between them and their peers. In line with this, the University's administration can consider involving the already known student leaders and peer counsellors in the dissemination of information on SA through the communication platforms they share with their peers. This is due to the fact that they are perceived by their peers to be more credible and approachable (Pere, 2018; Musyoka et al., 2020).

These results also confirm the classification by Perreault and Mosconi (2018) of antecedents to social media engagement. These include brand's antecedent (trust, popularity, credibility, awareness), users' antecedent (peer communication, culture, attitude towards SNS, expertise), technical antecedent (timeframe, length of the wall post) and page/content antecedents (benefit perception, ease of use, usefulness, informative influence). The antecedents of social media engagement play a significant role in any communication process because they influence how people engage with content on social media and SNSs. Understanding these antecedents helps in measuring online social media engagement and determining the effectiveness of content strategies in improving audience engagement. By identifying and categorising these antecedents, communicators can also gain insight into what drives audience engagement on social media, and hence tailor their communication strategies to target the right audience and enhance their engagement with content posted on the SNSs.

In this current study, these antecedents would play out as follows: the brand antecedent refers to the students' awareness, trust, and perceived credibility of the official social media posts; the user antecedent would be the students communication habits and platform preferences; the technical antecedents denote the students' ability to access

and effectively use these platforms; and page/content antecedent refers to content the students' look for and whether it addresses their knowledge gap. Understanding these antecedents is important for designing and analysing communication strategies aimed at fostering student engagement on the University's official SNS accounts.

Thus, as already established in figures 4.6 and table 4.2 (referring to the users'/students' antecedents) figures 4.8, 4.9 and 4.12 (Brand's/university's antecedents) figure 4.10 (page/content antecedent) and table 4.3 and 4.4 (technical antecedent), there may be a relationship between the results on the antecedents and the students' engagement levels. Such as, the students' existing attitude towards the SNSs operated by the University can influence their trust of the information in the SNSs and their perceptions of the usefulness of the information posted by the University. For instance, when the students believe the content they access on the SNSs is credible because they accessed them from the official university accounts, they can be inclined to share the content within their social circles. Similarly, when they perceive the content as fulfilling their information needs regarding SA, they can be influenced to engage with it. Thus, how the students perceive these antecedents will impact on how they engage with the content posted by the administration.

4.6 Students' Perceptions of the Communication Platforms, Content Presentation and Engagement Process

Perception refers to the ability to become aware of something, or the way something is regarded and interpreted (Merriam-webster, online). Within the field of psychology, perception has been defined as either the processing of external information by the sensory systems, such as visual or auditory information (Montemayor & Haladjian, 2017) or an individual's experience involving the five senses of seeing, hearing, touching, and smelling of objects or people around him (Rogers, 2017). In social media studies, perception has been considered in reference to an individual's subjective evaluation and interpretation (or judgement) of the ease of use, and usefulness of digital technologies, such as SNSs, which in turn influences their attitudes, motivations and behavioural intentions towards using these platforms (Camilleri & Falzon, 2020; An & Kerdpitak, 2023; Khan 2017). This study adopted the social media definition because it emphasises how users access technological features (referring to ease of use), why

they prefer specific platforms (referring to their usefulness), and how these evaluations influence their engagement and communication decisions.

Deciphering these elements would therefore entail understanding ease of use as an individual's opinion regarding their ability to access and use a media platform without any difficulties. Usefulness of the technology can be understood in terms of whether the media meets the individual's communication needs and gratifications. These elements can thus explain why people choose certain media and how they engage with the content therein. This study used these parameters to examine the students' perceptions towards the SNSs, the type of content therein and the presentation format and their engagement practices within the SNSs.

4.6.1 Perceptions Regarding Communication Platforms

Camilleri and Falzon (2020) opine that an individual's perceptions motivate their intentions to use a media technology and is dependent on whether the four elements (source credibility, participation, ease of use and usefulness of the online technologies) are met by the media. The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) also conceptualises these elements as guiding needs or gratification when deciding on the media to use and how to engage therein. Considering that the UGT is grounded in psychological and social contexts, it explains the motives and reasons behind an individual's use of a specific medium to meet certain gratifications (Khan, 2017). Consequently, the contexts and perceptions of an individual, such as a university student, will influence the media they use and how they use it.

Thus, to establish the students' perceptions of the SNSs, they were first asked in a survey about their knowledge of the SNSs operated by the University, (the results are highlighted in figure 4.7 & figure 4.8) and which of these SNSs they liked or followed (the results are captured in figure 4.9). During the OFGDs, the students were asked to expound on their perceptions of the communication platforms used by the University. The participants' sentiments are captured in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 50

Most of the students come to school for classes, and immediately they are done with their classes, they go home. Because most are from 2nd year, 3rd year and 4th year, they stay outside school. So, some of the students do not pass around the noticeboards where most information is posted because they don't have the time or interest. So, I prefer it being online (OFGD participant 12).

Excerpt 51

They (students) only come when they have classes, and maybe when they want something to do in between the classes.... I prefer the online one because we can talk because you are not known, it's anonymous. Your opinion is not like you you you (sic). It can be understood and taken into consideration (OFGD participant 7)

Excerpt 52

I actually think there are these levels of information in Laikipia. We are different in some way. Like we only think the only association between us and lecturers are the courses they've been assigned to take us through. But they never talk about what's going to happen outside class. For instance, when we are having an activity in the campus, we never hear from lecturers. The real question is, how many people are going to go through the notice boards to read about such information? How many people can access data and how frequent in a day can they access data to access that kind of information? Lecturers should be speaking about these things in class. If we are having such a week, the lecturer should be informed so that they can also advocate for it (OFGD participant 2)

Excerpt 53

.....*I think our campus is mainly an offline campus* (OFGD participant 13)

From these responses (Excerpts 50, 51, 52 & 53), although the students acknowledge that the institution prefers communicating to them through noticeboards, they imply that they find the communication platform inaccessible. The students reveal their preference for accessing information from online sites such as SNSs because they perceive these as offering some degree of anonymity and freedom of speech (OFGD *participant 7*, Excerpt 51). Using Camilleri and Falzon's (2020) proposed determinants of audiences' perception of a communication medium, the above responses imply that because the students cannot access the communication platform (noticeboards), this lowers their perception of the ease of use and usefulness of the technology. The specific reasons behind these claims may be due to the context and individual circumstances as advanced by Camilleri and Falzon (2020). For example, some of the respondents say that the students stay out of campus, hence they only have time for classes. They also do not take time to walk around the institution (OFGD *participant 12*, Excerpt 50).

The students' response that accessing the noticeboards is a challenge to them alludes to medium limitations which in turn affects the ease of use. According to Camilleri and Falzon (2020), an individual's perceived ease of use of a medium and perceived usefulness of the medium will have a positive effect on their intention to use them. This assertion corresponds to the UGT's postulation that an individual will use a medium to enhance his gratifications. Hence, in the above scenario, the students' responses indicate that they are not comfortable accessing information on the notice boards and as such do not consider the medium useful to them because they do not meet their information needs or gratifications. In this case, as indicated by some of the respondents (OFGD *participant 12*, Excerpt 50), the students may decide to avoid the communication medium, resulting to them missing out on the information posted on the noticeboards. However, that fact that some of the students (OFGD *participant 2*, Excerpt 52) find the online platforms inaccessible because of technological challenges, suggests that they may perceive these as failing in their ease of use and usefulness.

Subsequently, in connection to creating awareness on SA, the OFGD participants were asked about their perceptions of the communication platforms used in disseminating information on drugs and substance use. They responded in various ways as follows:

Excerpt 54

Most of the sensitisation on drugs is mostly offline, of which you might find some posters around school but not online. I think it will be more effective when they use the online sites (OFGD participant 6).

Excerpt 55

Yes, they talk about drugs. The University tries to control, but not online. When you go to these pages, the online platforms, they do not talk much about drugs, but when you walk around, you will meet some posters about drugs (OFGD participant 13).

Excerpt 56

Yes, I prefer the online because now when you say that its physical, then there is no way someone is going to come from 'Karuga' the far end of the school, to come and hear about drugs. It doesn't even make sense. They (students) only come when they have classes, and maybe when they want something to do in between the classes. But you just can't wake up and say am going for anti-drugs campaign...(OFGD participant 7).

From the above responses (Excerpt 54, 55 & 56), while the students acknowledge that the University provides information on SA, they report that this information is mostly offline, on noticeboards. The students nonetheless suggest their preference for online platforms for communication and dissemination of information. Their inclination for online platforms is in line with the tenets of the UGT that users are motivated to use certain media because of the ease of use associated with a medium (Rubin, 2002; Ferris et al., 2021). These findings also confirm Harris et al.'s findings (2021) in their study on what motivates college students towards certain SNSs, some of which include their ability to easily access the medium and the availability of adequate and useful information.

Nevertheless, some of the respondents also indicated their preference for alternative modes of communication as shown below:

Excerpt 57

I think this is the first time am hearing there was a drugs campaign week. I never got the information. Sometimes I think there should be a proper way to communicate with all the students. Or even maybe sometimes they can tell the lecturers on Monday that this is a week of They should look for a way to communicate with the students, to be closer to the students (OFGD participant 8).

Excerpt 58

I think it would be easier if they have a way of communicating to the class reps. Because some students don't even know their leaders, like the (students) union president. The only leaders they know are their class reps. Because I am the one close to them. But they don't like using class reps. But I think they should use class reps because class reps have more impact than union officials. We are the ones sending information to the group. So, when I share information with my classmates about scheduled classes, I can also tell them about anti-drugs campaign and where to get more information (OFGD participant 14).

The above reactions (Excerpt 57 & 58) reveal that there are also students who are of the opinion that incorporating lecturers plus student representatives and leaders in the communication process would also be successful in reaching majority of the students. The main reason cited for these preferences is because the students perceive the lecturers and student leaders as credible sources of information. This perception is also captured by the findings of Onah et al. (2019) and Beebe and Beebe (2021) that audiences perceive a message as relatable and useful based on whether they believe the source of the information is credible.

Based on these findings, an ideal communication strategy for the University would be to use blended media as advanced by proponents of the transmedia communication strategy (Guerrero-Pico & Scolari, 2016). This strategy would entail placing information on various communication platforms so as to enable the students

access it from where they feel most comfortable and where their gratifications will be met. It is therefore important to take these perceptions into consideration so as to improve on accessibility and engagement and to ensure all students are reached inclusively and effectively with information.

Research findings also confirm that audiences' perception of the media used in specific communication situations can impact on their reaction to the content and message therein (Onah et al., 2019; Beebe & Beebe, 2021; Harris et al., 2021). Thus, how the students perceive the communication platforms used by the University can greatly impact on their perception of the content and eventually their acceptance of the messages. The fact that some of the students (Excerpts 52, 53, 56, 57 & 58) feel alienated from the administration when their preferred communication platforms are not used, points to the need for continued assessment of these preferences, in order to ensure effective communication about SA

4.6.2 Perceptions Regarding Content Presentation Format

The digital media-scape occasioned by numerous media platforms and content has led to renewed interest by scholars in media-consumption habits and how these are influenced by audiences' perceptions. Various studies have attributed media users' perceptions as key determinants of why they use certain media and how they interact with the content therein (Zhao, 2023; Hilde et al., 2018; Harris et al., 2021; Beebe & Beebe, 2021; Rainey & Taylor, 2023). These perceptions are formed from the needs or gratifications that motivate users to certain media and content. Hence, different SNSs appeal to their users because of their various affordances that enable the content to be presented in a format that appeals to the users' gratifications (Harris et al., 2021; Beebe & Beebe, 2021; Rainey & Taylor, 2023; Kili et al., 2022; Ferris et al., 2021; Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Lee et al., 2023). In turn, these affordances encourage engagement when the users perceive their needs to have been met.

In order to maximise on the target audience's engagement with posted content, it is therefore important to analyse the specificities of each SNS, their affordances and experiences presented to users. Hence, to establish the students' perceptions of the content on the SNSs, the study first sought to understand the types of content that appealed to the students as shown on figure 4.16.

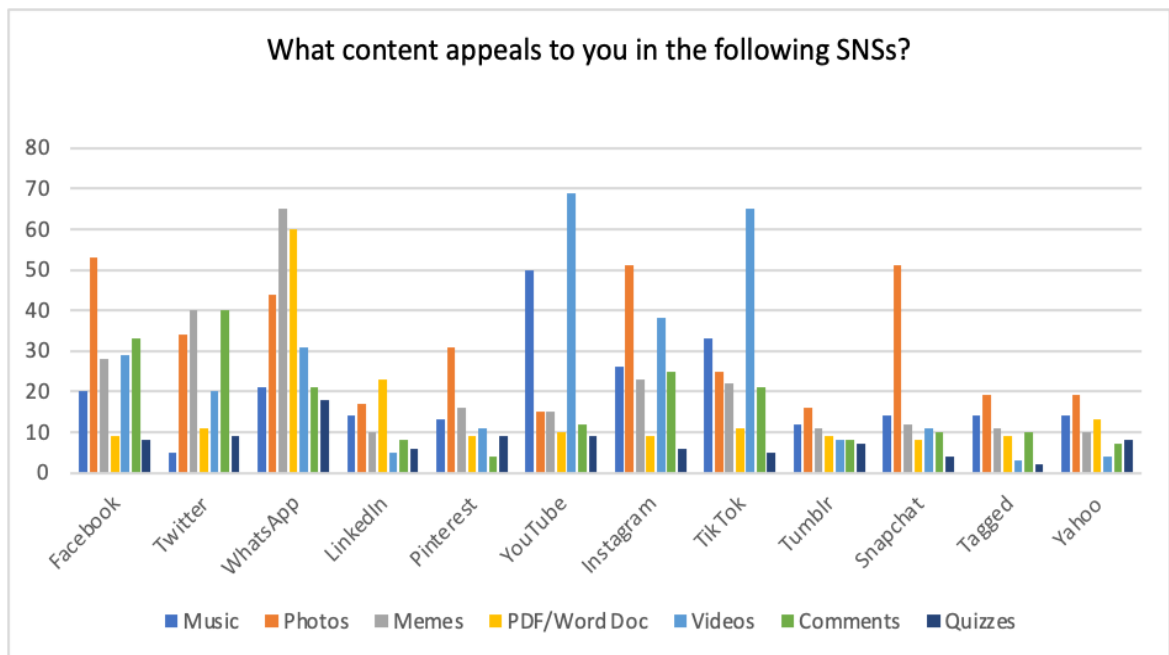


Figure 4.16 Types of Content That Appeal to Students on the Various SNSs

Considering the affordances of each SNS that contribute to the gratifications sought by users, the respondents acknowledged that they found different types of content appealing to them based on the type of SNS as highlighted in Figure 4.16. For instance, on Facebook, 53 percent found photos appealing; for Twitter/X, 40 percent preferred memes and comments; for WhatsApp, 65 percent preferred memes; for LinkedIn, 23 percent preferred PDF/word documents; for Pinterest, 31 percent preferred photos; for YouTube, 69 percent preferred videos; for Instagram, 51 percent preferred photos; for TikTok, 65 percent preferred videos; for Snapchat, 51 percent preferred photos; for Tagged, 19 percent preferred photos; for Yahoo, 19 percent preferred photos; and for Tumblr, 16 percent preferred photos.

These results are consistent with the findings by Kili et al. (2022) on the affordances of social media that endear Kenyan university students to various SNSs, where Facebook was preferred by the students for sharing of photos and videos. Accordingly, the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) posits that individuals make conscious decisions on how to use media to fulfil their needs. These needs are their reasons for seeking out and using certain media (Papacharissi, 2009; Rubin, 2009). The results captured on figure 4.16 highlight the various gratifications that the students seek from the various SNSs. This means that any communication content uploaded and distributed on these platforms should consider satisfying these gratifications. Different SNSs offer distinct types of experiences dictated by their affordances. The affordances in turn determine

the type of content that can be uploaded onto the SNSs and engagement practices. For example, Facebook allows for content to be shared, embedded, and discussed.

Understanding user motivations from a theoretical perspective like the UGT can guide communicators, in this case the University's administration, as they design communication strategies focusing on SNSs. For instance, considering the emphasis placed by the students on the different gratifications they seek (as elaborated in figure 4.16) can guide in the conceptualisation of communication approaches that adhere to gratifying these needs for sustained engagement. The engagement can be intensive based on the level of interest the users have in the content and the extent to which the content holds their attention. This relates both to the content, design of the content and the degree to which the affordance of the platform facilitates and stimulates engagement (Broersma, 2019). It is therefore important to be aware of the affordances of the SNSs at the time of conceptualisation of communication strategies.

It is also important to establish how users perceive the content they access on the various SNSs because this can influence their acceptance of the message in them. In line with this, the students were further asked to describe the content posted by the University on its accounts on various SNSs. Figure 4.17 shows their perceptions of the content on the SNSs.

How would you describe the content posted on the social networking sites managed by the University?

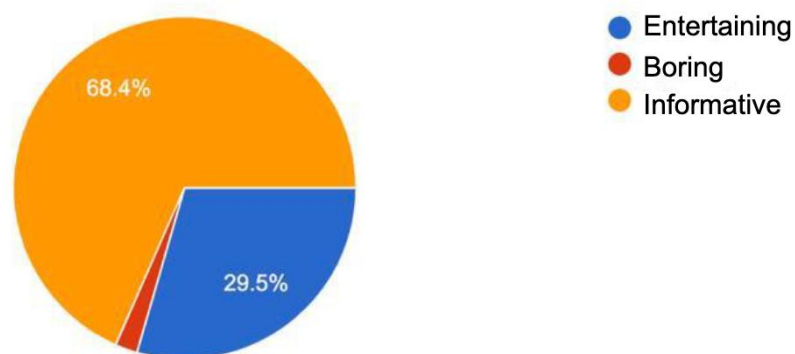


Figure 4.17 Students' Description of the Content on the SNSs

As presented in figure 4.17, majority of the student perceived the content posted on the SNS by the University to be informative (68%), entertaining (29%) and boring (2%). The OFGD participants further elaborate on this as follows:

Excerpt 59

I think the content that we find on the platforms are very boring honestly. They are very boring because you read a poster and that poster actually you find it on WhatsApp. It is there because a student leader was sent to post it and make it go viral through WhatsApp. And you find it is just a simple poster. Like the one we used recently, it was 'get high on life not on drugs' just like that and then we are done (sic). And there are so many questions revolving around it, like what do you mean? Like how is somebody who is an alcoholic supposed to grasp that message and use it for transformation? So, the information is very boring and is not that impactful in the first place. They need to do something about it. (OFGD participant 2).

From the above participant's response, it can be argued that the student cannot relate to the content because it is not interesting, hence does not meet their gratifications. One of the UGT supposition is that individual's psychological make-up influences the choices they make in relation to the media and content they consume (Ferris et al., 2021). Hence, the fact that a student perceives some particular content as boring, can influence how they interact with it.

The student's sentiments are also in line with Moreno et al.'s conceptualisation (2019) of emotional affordance that refers to the attributes of social media that can arouse a user's emotional reactions. These emotional affordances can result in emotional outcomes, for example when photographs affect judgements of personality than texts. Thus, the fact that the student perceives the content as boring means that the content has failed in fulfilling the student's emotional needs in relation to the information being communicated. This can have a negative outcome because the student may not benefit from the information either by learning or improving on their knowledge, attitude or practices relating to SA. They are also not likely to engage wholesomely with the content, in line with Khan's (2017) postulation that individuals can decide to engage

with content either through consumption, participation or production. This outcome was captured in the following response by one of the OFGD participant:

Excerpt 60

The information there isn't that very interesting because you find that they just print and then they put it in the media, like during the anti-drug campaign. They should even put something like a drug, a photo of a cigarette, or some other drug. Then they say they are doing something against it. If they are talking about the effects of drugs, they can even put a photo of infected/spoilt lungs. Instead, they are just using a letter, they scan the letter and post there. So sometimes you just go past it. (OFGD participant 8).

The above respondent (Excerpt 60) also alludes to the content as being boring and failing to meet their information needs regarding SA. Like the previous response by OFGD Participant 2 (Excerpt 59), this response suggests that the University uses cross-posting approaches when posting their content across different SNSs. A problem with this approach is that it does not take into account that SNSs work differently and have different features that help them gain traction among their users like hashtag for Twitter/X and Instagram (Dunlop et al., 2016). The platforms also have slightly different posting formats, for example, images from Facebook or Instagram cross-posted to Twitter/X will appear as a link to the image. Thus, although cross-posting has been shown to save on time in updating on SNSs (Bretous, 2022), the practice has equally been discouraged because there is often lack of customisation to utilise the unique features of each site, eventually leading to reduced engagement (Varghese, 2023). These disadvantages may ultimately impact on the success rate of the whole communication process because the gratifications the users seek when they visit these sites may not be met.

The responses also confirm the UGT tenet that media users are actively selecting content and actively interpreting the content, in line with whether it fulfils their needs and provide desired gratification. The UGT also advances cognitive needs (such as acquisition of information, understanding, knowledge) and affective needs (such as emotions, pleasure, feeling) as some of the needs influencing user's choices. Thus, from the above sentiments, it can be deduced that the students are actively evaluating the

content they get from the University's administration based on whether they perceive them as meeting their cognitive or affective needs. This behaviour was also confirmed through studies by Alhabash and Ma (2017) and Lee et al. (2023) that university students were inclined to use certain media and engage with certain content based on how they perceived them as meeting their needs. These perceptions act as motivations when selecting, using, and engaging in the various SNSs.

The comment by OFGD Participant 8 (Excerpt 60) also signifies that students are actively analysing the content, including the imbedded images based on their preconceived perceptions. In line with this, the Prototype Willingness Model (PWM) posits that an individual's willingness to engage in risky behaviour is influenced by his belief regarding the extent to which others are engaging in that behaviour and the positive or negative characteristics (prototypes) they associate with those who engage in the behaviour (Armenta et al., 2015). According to Pagani (2022), these subjective norms and prototype perceptions are important social influences in decision-making and behaviour adoption among young people.

Within the PWM, the two types of prototype perceptions influencing behaviour are the prototype favourability perceptions (the extent to which individuals positively or negatively evaluate the prototype) and prototype similarity perception (the extent to which an individual believes they are similar to the prototype) (Elliot et al., 2017). Thus, the fact that OFGD *participant 8* (Excerpt 60) expects the image used during the anti-drugs campaign to portray the negative effects of abusing substances, like an infected lung, denotes that the student has a negative prototype favourability perception of what a typical person who abuses drugs should look like. This finding corresponds with Farshidi et al.'s findings (2017) that students' negative prototypes of cigarette smokers changed their attitude towards smoking, resulting in them not engaging in the behaviour. Similarly, Elliot et al. (2017) established that when students have negative prototypes of substance users, then their intention to indulge was weaker.

However, the fact that the student's prototype perception of substance users is that of a scary outcome brings up the role of fear appeal as a mediating mechanism in communication. Although there are conflicting views on the effectiveness of fear appeals (Kok et al., 2018), the mechanism is still being favoured by institutions such as the Centres for Disease Control and preventions (CDC) and evidence from various

empirical studies show the effectiveness of the mechanism in achieving desired outcomes (Moussaoui et al., 2021). Fear appeal has been conceptualised as a message that describes the terrible consequences of not performing an action as recommended in a message (Meadows, 2020). In health communication, this mechanism has been used when message producers aim to inform the public about the severe consequences of unhealthy practices or that a disease may cause. Proponents of the mechanism argue that fear appeal positively motivates attitudes, intentions, and behaviours (Borland, 2018; Meadows, 2020; Moussaoui et al., 2021) and that fearful messages may be effective in persuading people to abandon a behaviour because of their fear of the adverse effects associated with the behaviour (Borland, 2018).

The OFGD participants' responses are therefore in accordance with Borland's postulations (2018) that graphic imagery, including graphic personal stories, are an effective way of communicating the risks of SA. Similarly, Meadows' study (2020) established that fear is a crucial element in eliciting individual's intentions to adopt a prescribed behaviour.

The University can therefore consider these recommendations when developing communication content aimed at providing information on SA, especially when the aim is to prevent the behaviour and promote cessation. In this regard, Kok et al. (2018) advise that fear appeal may be effective in interventions to promote substance use cessation when it is combined with messages that provide coping information aimed at increasing self-efficacy. Similarly, Borland (2018) posits that motivational messages can have a positive effect when people believe they have the capacity to successfully change.

As reported by the two OFGD participants (Excerpt 59 & 60), Meadows' study (2020) on the effect of fear appeal and message format on promoting ideal prevention behaviour among college students, also confirmed that message format, specifically narratives, did not have a significant effect on individual's intention to adopt the recommended behaviour. Thus, the study suggested that when the aim is to promote preventive behaviour to a specific population, then fear could be successfully used to mediate the effects of threat on individuals' risk assessment. High fear was found to elicit high risk assessment about a condition such as skin cancer, underscoring the role of fear in influencing individual's perception of risk. This therefore means that an ideal

fear appeal communication by the University should first present the threat and then provide coping information through links and information to sources of help (Moussaoui et al., 2021).

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) also posits that an audience's values, beliefs, and interests can directly affect their choice of media and content. There is therefore need to consider these factors if the intent is for the students to feel inclined to access the SNSs and content therein. Since audiences' interests correspond to the gratification they seek, it is important to consider the gratifications of target audiences so as to align the type of content with these needs (Valkenburg et al., 2016; Valkenburg, 2017; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). For instance, a message on SA can be in the form of videos for those seeking entertainment, or a write up for those audiences interested in reading or even comic. Each SNSs also incorporates affordances that endear audiences to them. These affordances have been operationalised as actual or imagined strengths of the SNSs, emanating from technological, social, and contextual factors that either enable or constrain specific uses of the platforms (Ronzhyn et al., 2022). Trepete (2015) defines social media affordances as the various specific functions that entice users to take certain actions, such as commenting, uploading contents, and tagging friends. Thus, during the OFGD when the students were asked whether they perceived the content on the sites as meeting their needs, they responded as follows:

Excerpt 61

Also, the person updating the Twitter/X and Facebook pages needs to up their game. Who said we cannot be informed at the same time entertained? (OFGD participant 15).

Excerpt 62

I at least prefer Facebook because at least it is updated frequently with some photos, but mostly screenshots of document. (OFGD participant 3).

These reactions (Excerpt 61 & 62) demonstrate that some of the students felt that the content on some of the SNSs needed improvement to conform with the affordances of the platforms and the gratifications sought by the students when they visit those sites.

Similarly, the OFGD participants were asked to expound on their perception of the content on SA that they had posted on the various SNSs. The following responses reflect their perceptions:

Excerpt 63

I believe they were educative. There were actually some things that I personally didn't know until I saw the poster and am sure there are a lot of people on my end who also were educated, and they understood (OFGD participant 3).

Excerpt 64

I think with a drug addict, a poster will not change him. They'll see it as a normal post. So, the peer counsellors should closely monitor them one on one, hold meetings with them. I don't think posting can change them (OFGD participant 4).

The above sentiments (Excerpt 63 & 64) reveal that the students had varied perceptions of the content they posted and shared on the various SNSs. Some of them were of the view that the content was informative, while also being interesting and enticing (Excerpt 63). Yet, there are those participants who were of the opinion that the information was not enough to convince PWSUD (Excerpt 64). The latter findings agree with WHO's (2017) strategic communications framework proposition that sometimes in special cases, online communication may not be enough to influence desired change in target populations, thereby necessitating personalised follow ups by professionals.

On the other hand, online communication platforms have been proven to be effective in reaching and engaging with young audiences because of the anonymity they provide the users (Musyoka et al., 2020; Kharono et al., 2022). Online platforms such as SNSs can therefore be used as points of entry connecting the University with the students, with personalised follow-ups incorporated in the final stage of the communication strategy. This assertion was reinforced when the students were asked whether they would want to see more content on SA. Figure 4.18 summarises their perceptions to engaging with more content on the SNSs.

Would you want to see more content on drugs and substance use/abuse on the University's social networking sites pages such as Facebook, Twitter or others?

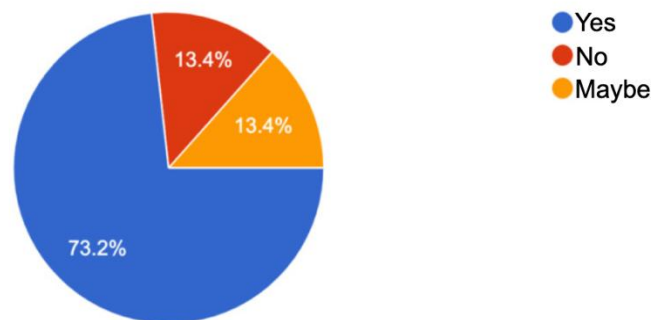


Figure 4.18 Students' Suggestions for More Content on SA

The results in figure 4.18 indicate that a majority of the students who responded to the survey (73.2%) want to access more content on SA, 13.4 percent were not sure, while 13.4 percent did not want the information. The responses from those who were either not sure or did not want more information can be attributed to their engagement experiences while using the SNSs. This assertion is in line with results from studies like Shahbaznezhad et al.'s (2021) and Steensen et al.'s (2020) that confirm that enriching experiences often encourage continued engagement on SNSs and responsiveness to the content and message.

Hence, as already highlighted (table 4.2) on students' motivations for using various SNSs, coupled with responses from the OFGD participants on the type of content they seek, the University's administration can consider the fact that across all the sites, the students are interested in information sharing and are looking for information. This means that the students are also looking for SNSs where they are allowed to engage with the content (either by sharing, liking, retweeting etc) and contribute through self-expression. This is the very essence of transmedia communication approach where users are encouraged to contribute to the development of a discourse through various forms of engagement like sharing, commenting, or liking. This type of engagement can be used to discern the audience's perceptions towards the content and thus act as feedback to the administration.

4.6.3 Students' Perceptions Regarding the Engagement Process

Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) scholars have confirmed that how social media and SNS users engage with specific content online can influence their

acceptance and adoption of messages embedded in the content (Kennedy & Engebretsen, 2020). This supposition is grounded on the fact that users will engage with specific content based on whether the content meets their needs. Similarly, SNSs users' perceptions of how their peers or those in their social circle are engaging with certain content or on a specific post will determine whether they also engage and the degree to which they will engage with the content. For example, when a topic or content on SA is trending, they may be inclined to take part in it because those in their social circle are doing it, so as to fit in or belong to the social circle (Hossain, 2019).

Engagement can be understood in terms of the audiences' behavioural, emotional, and cognitive perceptions they have towards the whole communication process (Noel et al., 2015; Broersma, 2019; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021; Steensen et al., 2020). These perceptions can motivate SNS users to engage intensively for longer periods and stimulate their loyalty, attentiveness, and thought formation. Behavioural perceptions refer to what the users think they need to do, in line with what others are doing, so as to fit in their social circle. The emotional perceptions denote how the users feel about the content and the message embedded in it, while cognitive perceptions refer to what the users believe is okay and acceptable based on their existing knowledge about the topic (Broersma, 2019).

Considering the significance of engagement on SNSs, where engagement has been found to influence audience acceptance of the information or interaction with the content (Drivas et al., 2022; Kennedy & Engebretsen, 2020; Hilde et al., 2018), it is therefore important for any communicator to examine how their audiences perceive these practices so as to establish areas of improvement in order to maximise on engagement. The same would be the case when planning to communicate about SA with young people like the university students. It would be important to confirm their perceptions of the engagement practices on their preferred SNSs, so as to understand how these can impact on their acceptance and adoption of the information. Hence, this study also sought to explore the students' perceptions of their engagement practices while using their preferred SNSs. The results are shown in table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Students' Perceptions of Their Engagement Practices on SNSs

	Perceptions	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1.	When many members of my social networking group like a content (e.g., photograph, video, meme) then I am likely to like it too.	91	38	17
2.	When many members of my social networking group share a content (e.g., photograph, video, meme, quote) then I am likely to share it too.	78	42	26
3.	I believe that a widely shared and liked content/information means that my friends agree with the message	84	37	25
4.	I am likely to adopt a certain trend when it has been shared or liked by a majority of my friends	69	46	31
5.	I am likely to also share my photographs or video when a majority of my friends take part in a trending challenge	64	39	43
6.	I am likely to view content that has been liked by many of my friends.	96	39	11
7.	I am likely to view content that has been shared by many of my friends.	104	30	12
8.	I consider information that has been liked and shared by majority of my friends as trustworthy and believable.	67	50	29

Source: Researcher, 2023

Using Broersma's (2019) proposed parameters for measuring engagement perceptions, the students' response highlighted in table 4.5 were identified and categorised in terms of behavioural, emotional, and cognitive perceptions. From the results, the behavioural perceptions were identified when the students said they are likely to share content when members of their SNS shared the same content or took part in a trending challenge (*Perceptions 2 & 5*). Majority of the responding students were also likely to view

content that had been liked or shared by many of their friends (*Perceptions 6 & 7*). Emotional perceptions were identified when the students stated that they were likely to also like a content that was liked by many members of their SNS and to adopt a trend when it was shared or liked by a majority of their friends (*Perceptions 1 & 4*). Cognitive perceptions were identified when the students stated that they believed that a widely shared or liked content meant that their friends agreed with the message and that the information was trustworthy (*Perceptions 8 & 3*).

The Prototype Willingness Model (PWM) explains these behavioural and emotional perceptions through the concept of subjective norms, referring to a SNS user's perceived social pressure to adopt a certain behaviour, such as taking part in an online trend or sharing a trending content (Gerrard et al., 2008). Okocha and Ebi (2022) also links this behaviour to pop culture, which according to them, can also impact on how users select, use, and engage on the SNSs. Similarly, the concept of prototypes as advanced by the PWM explains why the students' cognitive perceptions can be a motivating factor to their engagement, based on the prototypes they have of their peers. For instance, when the students trust their peers, they may be inclined to use them as points of reference for what they should like and share on the SNSs. These results also support the notion that peers play a significant role in disseminating information and encouraging engagement on SNSs (Pozzi et al., 2019). This is seen in the responses of the students that believe that a widely shared or liked content means their friends (or they themselves) agree with the message and hence are likely to also share, like or take part in a trending challenge accepted by a majority of friends.

The above results also corroborate Di Gangi and Wasko's postulation (2016) that SNS users are constantly evaluating engagement practices on SNSs and when they perceive these as meeting their interests and needs, they may be more inclined to also participate. They also evaluate the risk involved in engagement, and when they perceive any potential negative consequences associated with their engagement or participating in discussions, then they can opt to avoid interacting or be cautious. This perception was further elaborated by some of the OFGD participants as follows:

Excerpt 65

Consistency is very good. For example, if all leaders are assigned a duty to campaign against drugs, maybe on a weekly basis, then someone will see that the same content has been posted by many people. At least now with that, the message is passed. Rather than if I am the only one posting then they might ignore, maybe mute, or unfollow because your content doesn't please him anymore. So if generally we the leaders can be doing that often, its a great idea (OFGD participant 1).

Excerpt 66

Majority of my friends are on FB (Facebook), so I also joined. We also like using WhatsApp to share info (information) about school and funny memes (OFGD participant 16)

These statements (Excerpt 65 & 66) imply that the students' level of engagement online was partly determined by how their peers engaged online. This supports the postulations already highlighted (Okocha & Ebi, 2022; Juan et al., 2019; Hossain, 2019), that in order to effectively reach and engage with the students on issues to do with SA, the University can consider involving student leaders and peer counsellors when developing and implementing communication strategies. The students' perceptions are likewise captured by the UGT tenet that explains why and how individuals actively seek out and use specific media. According to the theory, some of the motives for using SNSs include gaining a sense of belonging, connecting with friends, socialising, belonging to a community and attaining peer support. In this regard, it can be deduced that OFGD Participant 16's perception (Excerpt 66) of joining and engaging on WhatsApp is because it enables them belong to a social circle.

Additionally, the students' engagement practices and perceptions advance the supposition of the PWM that opportunities to engage in group behaviours among young people often occur within social contexts (Gerrard et al., 2008). Social contexts provided by the SNSs can lead to subjective norms. Thus, as established by Schreurs et al. (2020), the students' beliefs (subjective norms) that an important person (a friend)

or group of people (group of friends) will approve and support a particular behaviour can influence their social media engagement practices.

In the current study, the students' responses point to the fact that they perceive certain content as likeable because of how their friends view that content. Also, the way they engage with the content therein is determined by the social practices they have developed amongst themselves as a social group. Hence, as captured in the responses below, some of the students bemoaned the fact that they did not receive many likes on the Substance Abuse (SA) posts because the type of content they shared did not resonate with their followers:

Excerpt 67

When I posted my photos, the likes that I received compared to what I normally get when I post for myself, wasn't enough. They were just 1 percent of the likes I normally get. I think people don't want to talk about drugs (OFGD participant 5)

Excerpt 68

People are used to seeing us post stuff for fun. So coming out of the blue and posting stuff to do with drugs, people they were shocked, and we actually had some of our friends blaming us and asking us how we got saved by Jesus Christ but then we had to because you had asked us to do so (OFGD participant 2)

The above responses (Excerpt 67 & 68) imply that the students were not happy with the engagement levels they received on the content they posted. OFGD Participant 5 (Excerpt 67) believes that his followers did not engage with the content as expected because they might have not liked the type of content. Similarly, OFGD Participant 2 (Excerpt 68) supposes that he did not receive the usual engagement levels because the content did not resonate with what his social circle engages with and did not fulfil their need for entertaining content. These responses confirm the postulation of the UGT that one of the determinants of how audiences will engage with certain content is whether they consider the content as meeting their communication needs such as, entertainment, self-expression, social interaction, and information sharing (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). Hence, it can be deduced that the students' perceptions are based on what they think

are their peers' communication needs and the gratifications they expect to achieve when they engage with content on their preferred SNSs.

The fact that the students did not engage satisfactorily with the content that was posted by the OFGD participants, implies that to encourage sustained engagement with content focusing on SA, the student peer counsellors or leaders who may be engaged in the communication process need to be encouraged to constantly post this type of content. This may in turn erase the issue of 'novelty' cited as a reason why their peers found the posts strange. When this is done, as proven by Meera (2019), the students may consider these posts as normal from their peers and hence regard the students as reliable sources of information on SA.

Form the above responses on the students' perceptions of engagement behaviour, it appears that it is imperative to examine what the students consider acceptable content within their circle when creating and disseminating content to them. This will help in understanding why they engage at the levels they do on various SNSs and to what effect (Perreault & Mosconi, 2018). The University's SNS managers can use this information to adjust their communication strategies to better match the audience's interests and expectations (McLachlan, 2020).

4.7 The Influence of Information on Students' Awareness, Attitude and Practices Relating to SA

The success of Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) strategies lies in the information adequately and effectively reaching the target audiences, impacting them and achieving the intended communication objectives (Singal et al., 2014). This is especially true in a situation like in the case of universities, where insufficient communication has been linked to the sustained incidences of SA (Masese, 2020). In such a scenario, adequate communication can play a significant role in improving the students' awareness, attitude and practices relating to SA. In this regard, this study set to evaluate to what extent the presented information impacted on the students' awareness, attitude and potential practices relating to substance use.

4.7.1 Influence of Information on Students' Awareness

In order to establish whether tailored communication has had any influence on a target audience's awareness or knowledge of issues, it is recommended for the communicator to first establish the audience's existing knowledge before interacting with the message (Akoja & Adefarasin, 2019). Hence in this study, a pre-survey was conducted to establish the students' existing knowledge regarding substances and SA. This would later enable the correlation between what they knew before the content on SA was shared with them, and the influence interacting with the content had on their knowledge. In this regard, the results on Figure 4.19 and figure 4.20 show the substances known by the students and the students' awareness of the addictive capabilities of the substances respectively.

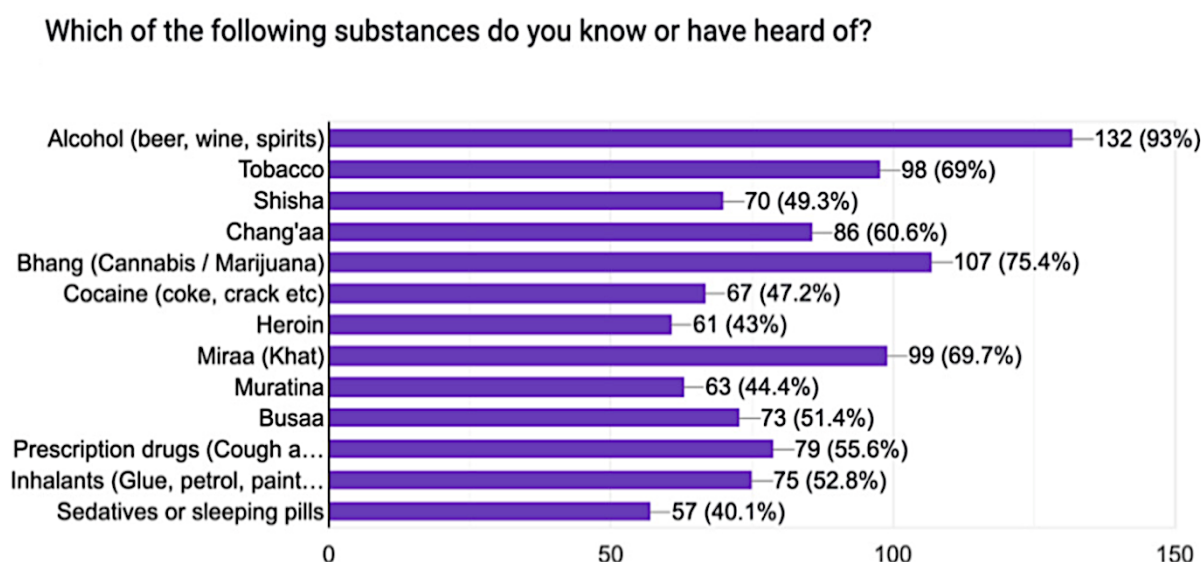


Figure 4.19 Students' Awareness of Existing Addictive Substance

The results in Figure 4.19 show that the students either know or have heard of the different types of addictive substances available in the country. The most known substances were alcoholic drinks (93%), Bhang (75.4%) and Miraa (69.7%). Conversely, the results show that the least known were sedatives (40.1%), Muratina (44.4%) and Cocaine (47.2%). This is in spite of studies showing that cocaine and prescription drugs were amongst the key substances abused by university students in Kenya (NACADA, 2021; Jelagat et al., 2023; Musyoka et al., 2020). This infers the need to focus on raising awareness of the various addictive substances that the students can encounter so as to empower them to make avoidance choices when they come

across such substances. In line with this, Kiriru (2018) confirmed in her study that university students were prompted to avoid and discontinue drugs and substance use when they were made aware of the consequences involved. Considering studies that have established the correlation between being unaware of addictive substances with likelihood of uptake of the addictive substances (Rono, 2014; Kiriru, 2018; Mbuthia et al., 2020), this study also sought to establish whether the students were aware of the addictive capabilities of the substances. The results are shown in figure 4.20:

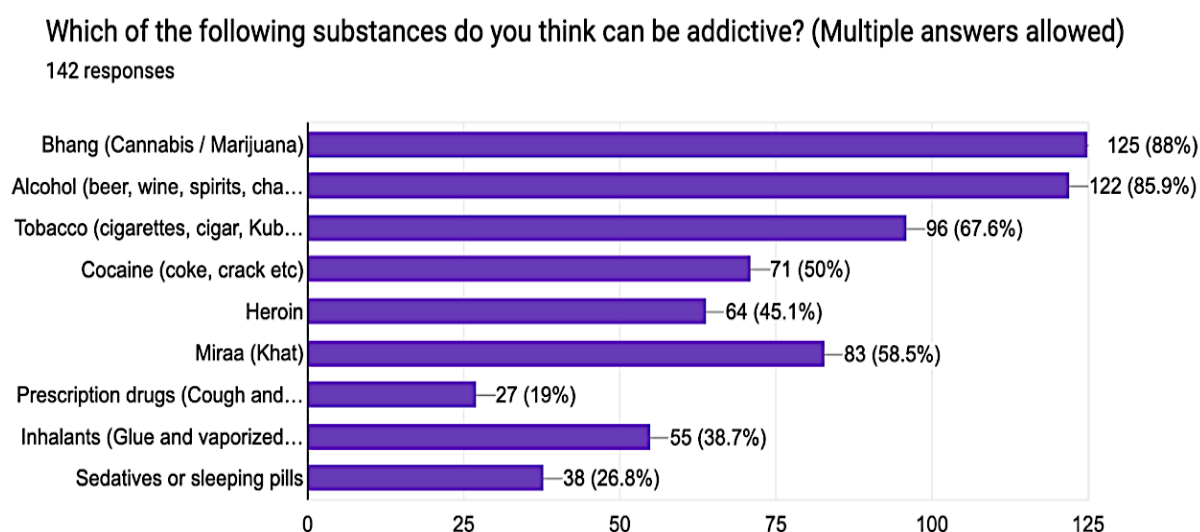


Figure 4.20 Students' Awareness of Addictive Capabilities of Substances

Figure 4.20 shows that majority of the students are aware of the addictive nature of Bhang (88%), Alcohol (85.9%) and Tobacco (67.6%). The students were however least aware of the addictive nature of prescription drugs (19%), sedatives (26.8%) and inhalants (38.7%).

When correlating the findings on students' knowledge of the substances (as shown on figure 4.19) with their awareness of the substances they think are addictive (as shown on Figures 4.20), it emerged that their knowledge of the existence of these substances did not automatically translate to them being aware of their addictive capabilities. For example, among the surveyed students, only 19 percent and 26 percent respectively, were aware that substances such as prescription drugs and sedatives could be addictive. Yet research (World Drug Report, 2018; Mutiso et al., 2022; Okoyo et al., 2022) indicate that these are some of the most abused substances among this age group based

on their lack of knowledge of the substances' addictive abilities. Consequently, the fact that some of the students perceive some substances as not being addictive, presents a likelihood of them engaging in substance use or abuse unknowingly (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration SAMHSA, 2019).

Further, in order to ascertain the influence of the information shared on the students' awareness of the substances and their effects when abused, the OFGD participants were asked to elaborate on how their interaction and engagement with the selected content influenced their awareness of SA. The following responses from the OFGD participants elaborate this:

Excerpt 69

Initially I thought that drug abuse was just drugs only. But I saw in those posts that we can also abuse medicine (OFGD participant 11).

Excerpt 70

I now know where to get the information. I saw you took them from NACADA (OFGD participant 4).

Excerpt 71

By the way, I used to see this topic as very off! but I realised that I could access interesting content about it and even share them on my socials (Social media accounts) (OFGD participant 2).

Excerpt 72

When I posted, some of my friends asked me where I got the information, and I told them. I can also direct them there (OFGD participant 16).

The above reactions (Excerpts 69, 70, 71 & 72) indicate that after interacting with the shared content, some of the OFGD participants became aware and knowledgeable on where to get reliable information on SA. This is noteworthy because studies show that one of the contributing factors to SA among this age group (university students) is insufficient communication and them being unaware of where access credible

information (Masese, 2020). Thus, considering the students felt knowledgeable on where to access information on SA points to the fact that sustained communication on accessible platforms such as SNSs can lead to the promotion of awareness and knowledge about SA (Pere, 2018).

Also, given that *OFGD participant 16* (Excerpt 72) felt confident to share the knowledge with their peers corroborates the postulation by various scholars (Duka-Pante, 2019; Ngure et al., 2019; Ngigi & Busolo, 2018; Pere, 2018) on the role of peer interactions in controlling SA. In line with this, Duka-Pante (2019) posits that when peer counsellors or leaders are equipped with reliable information on SA, they may be more confident and likely to share the information with their peers. Similarly, Ngure et al. (2019) advises that when peer-based approaches are incorporated in SA prevention strategies, they should be properly organised with booster sessions where the well-trained peers are constantly updated on emerging information and ideal delivery approaches. This can entail guiding them on how to effectively use social media or SNSs as communication platforms. Hence, in a university setting such as the one being studied, providing adequate information on SA to peer counsellors can encourage them to share the information with their peers, on the communication platforms they believe their peers will prefer accessing.

Similarly, some of the students felt they were able to improve on their ability to speak about SA because of the knowledge they got from the content. This was captured in the following response by OFGD participant 3:

Excerpt 73

As I said earlier that my friends liked reading the posts, some asked me some questions about them. So, me being a drug warrior, I was able to talk to them. That content helped me to have an opportunity to talk about drug abuse because it is not a common thing we talk about (OFGD participant 3).

The above comment supports the postulation by Pere (2018) that awareness can be a precursor to knowledge. Hence, SBCC proponents recommend focusing on awareness creation as an antecedent to knowledge and eventually attitude and behaviour change (Singal et al., 2014; Akoja & Adefarasin, 2019). Also, as was established by Duka-

Pante (2019) and Ngure et al. (2019), for peer-to-peer communication approaches to be successful, peer counsellors or leaders need to be empowered with adequate information which can translate to them being knowledgeable and confident to talk about SA with their peers.

Likewise, the following comment captures the sentiment of another OFGD participant on how the content on SA influenced them:

Excerpt 74

For me, I believed that only men abused drugs. That poster we shared on women being abusers helped me know better. We talked and laughed about it (OFGD participant 10).

This response (Excerpt 74) implies that the student acquired knowledge about the consequence of SA and her susceptibility to abusing substances. According to the tenets of the PWM, this response also demonstrates the existing prototype the student has of those who abuse substances: that only the male could abuse substances. However, this changed when the participant was made aware from the content that even females can be abusers. This implies that creating awareness regarding all aspects of SA, including the type of addictive substance, the susceptibility to addiction and desirable that enable avoidance and cessation, can have an influence on the attitudes of target audiences such as university students.

Although the above reactions by the students are for an intervention that lasted 3 days, they agree with Kukafka's proposition (2013) that tailoring information for a specific audience, such as university students, without omitting essential information or including redundant elements, can enhance positive outcomes. One way of tailoring information is by incorporating peer-to-peer approaches to compliment other substance use prevention strategies (Ngure et al., 2019). Similarly, Ngigi and Busolo (2018) advocate for peer-to-peer approaches such as online forums where young people can interact amongst themselves and engage with the content therein. They suggest that such social contexts can influence the participants' thoughts and behaviour towards an issue like SA. This is especially true when these forums are moderated by trained peer counsellors who can provide relevant information to issues raised by their peers. These

postulations support the PWM tenet that individuals, especially young people, will seek and copy role models from amongst their peers whom they perceive as trustworthy and hence who can influence their decisions (Kamenderi et al., 2019).

Meera (2019) also advocates for synchronous online peer-to-peer support groups, where students are able to share experiences with others in similar situations. These online forums can be successful in SA communication strategies because they appeal to young people since users can access information using their mobile devices and the information is available on demand. The online platforms are also preferred by young users because they promote privacy and anonymity; factors that can encourage the users to seek information and engage without fear. These recommendations are anchored on the postulation of the UGT that users will opt for media platforms that they think will meet their needs such as social (privacy and anonymity) and information regarding various issues such as SA.

4.7.2 Influence of Information on Students' Attitude

According to Aksoy and Mercan (2022), attitude refers to the learned or unlearned positive or negative cognitive behaviours and emotional reaction tendencies that individuals have toward things and issues they encounter or experience. Attitudes play a crucial role in shaping individuals' perceptions and behaviour because they can influence their decision-making processes and interactions with others (Ngigi & Busolo, 2018). Scholars of SBCC have also proven that the development of a positive attitude is parallel to the level of knowledge (Aksoy & Mercan, 2022). Thus, understanding one's attitudes can provide insights into their beliefs, opinion, values, and motivations. In a study such as this, the students' attitudes towards addictive substances and PWSUD can shape their behaviour with substances and how they relate with their peers who have substance use disorders. This study therefore, sought to establish the students' opinion regarding their likelihood of using the substances. The results in figure 5.7 show their viewpoints regarding their predisposition to using substances.

Do you think you can use any of the substances mentioned above?

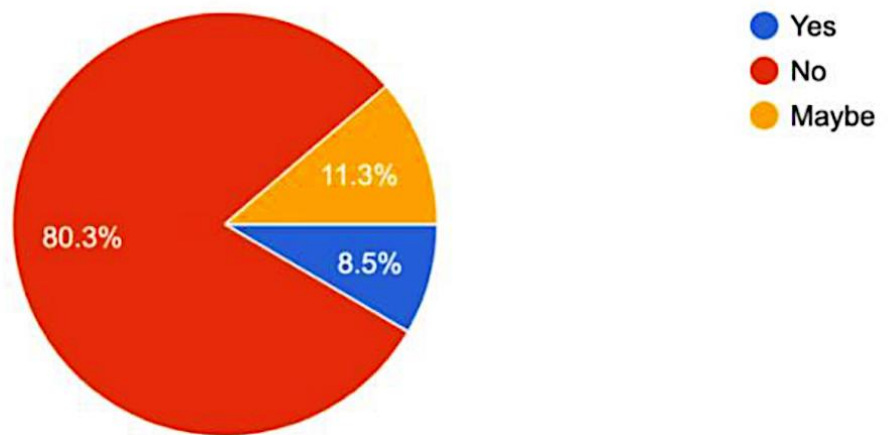


Figure 4.21 Students' Perception of Their Potential of Using Substances

According to figure 4.21, the students' opinions towards using substances indicate that 80 percent of them were confident that they would not use any of the substances. However, there were those who were either sure (yes at 8.5%) or not sure (maybe at 11.3%) that they can use the substances.

These findings reflect the suppositions of the PWM to the existence of the constructs of behavioural intention and behavioural willingness as precursors to potential behaviour (Armenta et al., 2015; Link et al., 2015). Behavioural intention (such as yes) and behavioural willingness (such as maybe) have direct effect on an individual's behaviour. Hence the students' responses as either being sure of using drugs (behavioural intention) or not sure (behavioural willingness), signify the need to focus more on these groups and try to change their behavioural willingness and intentions relating to SA. This can be done through sustained communication aimed at making them aware of the undesirable consequences of SA. For instance, one of the OFGD participants emphasised on the need for this as follows:

Excerpt 75

.... They should even put something like a drug, a photo of a cigarette, or some other drug. Then they say they are doing something against it. If they are talking about the effects of drugs, they can even put a photo of infected/spoilt lungs... (OFGD participant 8).

The above response (Excerpt 75) is in regard to the content the student accessed on the University's Facebook page. The student implies that the information presented did not convince them about the effects and dangers of substance abuse. The suggestion provided by the student on what should be portrayed as the effect of drug use denotes the prototype image the student might have regarding those who abuse drugs. This response correlates with the postulation of the PWM regarding the influence of prototypes on behaviour (Gerrard et al., 2008). The theory posits that media images can advance certain prototypes which audiences will use to understand issues or relate to those who behave in a certain way. For example, when an advertisement against drug abuse incorporates images of dejected and sickly users, then the prototype the audience might attach to PWSUD will be that of the negative consequences of abusing drugs. Thus, as the OFGD *participant 8* (Excerpt 75) suggests, it would be ideal to embed forbidding images when communicating about the dangerous effects of SA. This would in turn create a frightening prototype on the students, and maybe scare them from SA. As already discussed, fear appeal can have a positive impact on SA prevention and cessation (Moussaoui et al., 202; Borland, 2018; Meadows, 2020).

The PWM also posits that an individual's intentions and willingness to engage in a risky behaviour is influenced by the positive or negative characteristics that they associate with the individual who engages in that behaviour; the behavioural prototype (Elliot et al., 2017). Thus, in the current study, how the students perceive their peers who engage in SA can have an impact on their adoption, or not, of the behaviour. Table 4.6 highlights the students' responses to statements assessing their perceptions of those who use or abuse substances (the prototypes they have of those who use substances).

Table 4.6: The Students' Perceptions Regarding Those Who Use or Abuse Substances

		N= 142		
Perceptions		Agree	Not sure	Disagree
1	Only weak people get addicted to substances	8	21	113
2	Only people from urban areas get addicted to substances	6	15	121
3	Only people from rural areas get addicted to substances	3	12	127
4	Those who use drugs, tobacco and alcohol are very strong	4	34	104
5	Those who use drugs and alcohol are cool	2	31	109
6	Those who use illicit drugs and substances are sick	22	46	74
7	Those who use illicit drugs and substances are criminals	20	47	75
8	Addiction is a medical illness and is treatable	86	30	26
9	Addiction is preventable	112	16	14

Source: Researcher, 2023

Table 4.6 shows the various prototypes the students have regarding those who use substances or are addicted to substances. According to the results, the students' perceptions and attitudes towards those who take substances could be categorised as positive prototypes and negative prototypes. The positive prototypes the students have include considering those who use drugs, tobacco, and alcohol as being strong and cool (*perceptions 4 & 5*), while the negative prototypes regarded those who use illicit drugs and substances as weak, sick or criminals (*perceptions 1, 6 & 7*).

Elliot et al.'s study (2017) established that when students have favourable prototypes of alcohol drinkers, then their intention to drink was stronger, especially when they

perceived themselves as similar to those prototypes. Similarly, based on the findings (table 4.6), the fact that some of the students considered those who use substance as strong or cool is of concern because it means they can be tempted to engage in the practice in order to fit into these prototypes or because they consider themselves as having similar attributes as the prototypes. The same applies to the students who responded as ‘not sure’ because these ones can be swayed when their social context changes and they are persuaded to experiment with addictive substances. The following response from one of the OFGD participants echoes this:

Excerpt 76

Peer pressure is one of the things that make people use drugs. Actually, most of the students started using drugs when they were in campus. So, you find that on the weekends, maybe someone has gone to a bash (party), a friend may influence him to engage in drugs and alcohol. Most of the students do drugs because of peer pressure (OFGD participant 6).

The above response highlights a social context within which a student can be pressured into engaging in drugs and substance intake. This finding concurs with Jelagat et al.’s study (2023) which confirmed that friends and peer pressure were the most common influencers of substance use among university students. Correspondingly, this finding correlates with Mandal et al.’s recommendation (2020) for the need to incorporate avoidance messages as part of strategic communication on SA. They (Mandal et al., 2020) established that these messages were especially successful when the students were encouraged to engage and share the messages with their peers on the online platforms frequently accessed by their peers. In line with this, given that the students in the university under investigation frequently visit various SNSs (as shown in figure 4.6) means that such messages can be distributed on these SNSs for the students to access and engage with. While factoring this, it is also recommended that these avoidance messages should incorporate promoting negative prototypes that can dissuade audiences from adopting practices that can lead to SA (Lewis et al., 2020).

To further determine the students’ attitude regarding engaging with their peers who use or abuse substances, the OFGD participants were requested to explain how they felt

about associating with their peers who were PWSUD. The following responses describe their attitude:

Excerpt 77

I think we don't have to avoid them. Obviously when we avoid them, who will be their friends? The thing is, we should just be friends and help them change. Giving them ideas how they can stop. Maybe when they are planning for a party, with alcohol and drugs, you can come up with a different idea like hiking. Come up with an idea that will ensure you don't use 'those things'. Also, if you see the peer pressure is too much, you just avoid them. Because if you continue walking with them, you'll soon find yourself using. Also, how the society sees you, if you walk with them, they'll associate you with them and drugs (OFGD participant 4).

Excerpt 78

I think we should not avoid them. Coz maybe they've been your best friends. So, if you avoid them, creating new friends is hard. The best thing is to avoid them little by little, not abruptly, telling them you should stop using (OFGD participant 10).

Excerpt 79

These people are part of us. Like 70% of students in campus are abusing drugs. And if we start discriminating them on the basis of why they are using drugs, you going to find yourself lonely. So, besides talking about drugs, these are our friends, and we interact with them, day to day, a minute barely ends before you meet somebody who does drugs. So, we are basically free with them, we talk we do stuff together, just that we've drawn the lines, they cannot maybe indulge us into their issues, but they are our friends (OFGD participant 2).

Excerpt 80

That's a very tricky situation. Avoiding them especially if they are still so much into drugs and you are trying to avoid getting into drugs, you can decide to avoid them completely. You can even cut out that friendship so that they don't influence

you. You'll not do it suddenly, but you'll try to change them and if they don't change, you'll have to avoid them. You can also maintain the friendship but still have your stand. If it's things to do with drugs you just avoid, but if it comes to things to do with classwork, group discussion. I also like the idea of changing the activities you do with them like changing to hiking, gaming, activities that will avoid those drugs (OFGD participant 1).

The above responses by the OFGD participants (Excerpts 77, 78, 79 & 80) show that they were conflicted on how to engage with their peers. For the students (in Excerpt 78, 79 & 80) who were conflicted on whether to continue interacting with their peers who had substance use disorders, their attitude was prompted by their fear of abandonment or losing friends. Similarly, while some of the students (Excerpts 77 & 80) felt they did not need to avoid their peers who have substance use disorders, they were not sure whether this could make them susceptible to being influenced into experimenting with addictive substances. These reactions concur with Ronoh's (2014) and Joyce's (2018) studies which ascertained that a social factor such as peer pressure was a challenge hindering effective reduction of substance abuse among university students in Kenya. Similarly, Geusens et al. (2020) also established that young people were more likely to engage in alcohol drinking partly as a result of the positive alcohol references made by their peers on social media. These findings also agree with the postulation of the PWM that young people are more inclined to get involved in risky behaviour due to the social contexts they find themselves in, and where their peers play a role in convincing them and they in turn participate so as to fit in the social group (Armenta et al., 2015).

Similarly, for some of the students (Excerpt 77) who wanted to continue socialising with PWSUD, their fear of societal backlash that such interaction could earn them, prevented them from interacting with such students. This response supports the suppositions by Ngigi and Busolo (2018) that other people's values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour can have a strong influence on an individuals' behaviour.

Bustos-Gamino et al. (2022) also postulate that attitude is linked to stigmatisation of PWSUD, which in turn can prevent them from seeking help to stop the practice, adapt to treatment, and change their behaviour. There is therefore need to address the students' attitudes towards PWSUD so that they can be confident on how to socialise with them and avoid stigmatising them. In this regard, communication tailored for

specific audiences like students, coupled with peer education, has been effectively used to influence knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and practices among individuals in a social set up like academic institution (Ngigi & Busolo, 2018; Duka-Pante, 2019). Communication through specific media can ensure that correct information reaches specific populations, equipping them with facts, ideas, and attitudes they need to make informed decisions and hence model desired attitudes (Ngigi & Busolo, 2018).

In respect to this, Plaisime et al.'s study (2020) confirmed that effective social media campaigns can encourage young people to share health messages amongst their peers, in a way that influences knowledge, awareness and attitude. On how to go about this, their study established that young people preferred health messages that were short and simple, with testimonials they could relate to and details on how to successfully adopt a recommended behaviour. Hence, applying this to the university setting under investigation, means that the University administration needs to develop communication strategies and messages aimed at training and enabling the students overcome both societal and peer pressures relating to SA. Also considering that the students already interact on the social media and SNSs, where they may be susceptible to information from their peers encouraging them to experiment with addictive substances (Rodriguez et al., 2021), there is need to counter the misleading information with credible information on these communication platforms.

4.7.3 Influence of Information on Students' Practices

Various studies have shown that the behavioural practices of an individual and their peers can make them susceptible to SA. This is because substance abuse is often influenced by the environment and social factors surrounding an individual (Namada & Karimi, 2021). Behaviour has been defined as the totality of human activity in society, while practices are the accumulations of an individual's routines and/or habits towards the accomplishment of some goal (Lanham, 2008). Hence in a university setup, a students' behaviour can be likened to the activities they engage in while in certain settings like in-campus or off-campus. Their habits are what they do in relation to achieving a certain goal like having a good time during a party or relaxing after a hard day or to relieve stress.

Similarly, practices in regard to SA have also been considered in relation to the communication habits of individuals within a social context like online or offline including face to face communications. Various studies have established that how students communicate about SA can influence their attitude and willingness to develop appropriate avoidance or cessation behaviours (Kiriru, 2018; Namada & Karimi, 2021). Hence, it is recommended that prior to the implementation of a communication strategy, it is necessary to establish the target population's communication practices. This information will enable the identification of gaps that can be filled and later help in assessing whether the intervention had an influence on the population's communication habits. In this regard, this study undertook to determine the students' existing communication practices regarding SA. Figure 4.22 shows how open the students were with communicating about substance addiction with either their friends or family members. The Likert scales of *often*, *sometimes*, *rarely*, and *never* were used to establish the how frequently the students talked about substance addiction. In the scale, 'often' implied that they speak about the topic many times or in many instances, 'sometimes' denoted that once in a while, on certain occasions or circumstances they did speak about the issue. 'Rarely' implied they seldom, on rare occasions spoke about the issue and 'never' inferred that they did not speak about subject at all.

How frequently do you openly talk about alcohol and drugs addiction with your friends or family members?

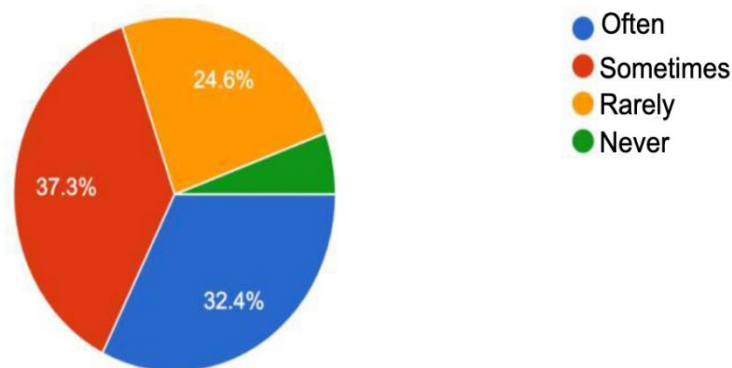


Figure 4.22 Students' Openness with Communicating About Substance Addiction

The results in figure 4.22 reveal that the students either sometimes (37.3%) or often (32.4%) spoke about addiction with their family members or friends. However, there are those who indicated that they either rarely (24.6%) or never (5.7%) discussed

addiction. When the OFGD participants were asked to elaborate on how openly they talked about addiction with their parents, some of them intimated as follows:

Excerpt 81

Ei! For me, it's not easy. My mum is a Kikuyu, obviously so if you start that topic, even before you continue, she'll ask you 'Which one you are using?'. Coz she thinks, next, you are going to break the news 'mum, am now a drug addict'. Starting that topic with a parent isn't easy (OFGD participant 4).

Excerpt 82

Same to me. It's difficult to start that topic because not all parents are easy with their children. You know there are those ones yes, you'll sit down and discuss issues. But if you start talking about drugs, maybe asking "Do you know about this drug" she will suspect you of using them. Shell start asking herself whether you've started using alcohol or bhang! (OFGD participant 10)

Excerpt 83

For me it's very easy because my parents started engaging me on drugs when I was in class 5. My dad was a campaigner. So, it's easy. In fact, last semester I was affected passively with these drugs issues. The person I was staying with was using drugs, so I quickly shared it with my dad, like am very comfortable with the conversation. Because he trusts I can't use drugs (OFGD participant 1).

The scenario emerging from the above responses (Excerpts 81, 82 & 83) can be understood using the postulations of the PWM, that the subjective norms (beliefs about whether a behaviour or practice will receive social approval or disapproval) can predict an individual's behavioural intention (Gerrard et al., 2005; Elliot et al., 2017). Hence, in reference to the above responses, when the students believe that conversation about SA will be disapproved by their parents implies that they will avoid talking about SA or seeking help from their parents.

Yet, various empirical research findings have confirmed the significant role that parents play in prevention of substance use by young people (Jelagat et al., 2023; Duka-Pante

et al., 2019; Pere 2018). For instance, the response by OFGD Participant 1 (Excerpt 83) supports Duka-Pante et al.'s assertion (2019) that parents play an important role in impacting life skills that their children can use to communicate, make decisions and cope in adverse situations like when confronted with peer pressure to initiate substance use. Similarly, Kamenderi et al. (2019) posits that an open relationship between young people and their parents is important in the development of their self-confidence, and where this is lacking, then they risk developing diffidence. This was aptly captured by the following responses from some of the OFGD participants when they were asked about how easy it was for them to talk about addiction with their peers:

Excerpt 84

It's easy coz it's like they are our age mates. I may take him up as a friend so Ill open up and tell him am using so and so drug (OFGD participant 10).

Excerpt 85

For me it won't be easy, coz I'll think he'll be judgemental. So, telling him will be hard. I'll just fight the feeling alone. But opening up and telling him that someone is pressuring me to use drugs will be a bit difficult (OFGD participant 4).

The above answers indicated that whereas some of the students like OFGD Participant 10 found it difficult to communicate with their parents (Excerpt 82), they were comfortable doing so with their peers (Excerpt 84). Also, there were those students, like OFGD participant 1 (Excerpt 83) who was comfortable speaking about addiction with the parent as opposed to their peers. These findings point to the fact that the students were not comfortable talking about substance abuse because of fear of either being misunderstood by the parents, like OFGD participants 4 & 10 (in Excerpts 81 & 82) or of being victimised by their peers, like *OFGD* participant 4 (Excerpt 85). Students like OFGD participant 4, who are not comfortable speaking about addiction with neither their parents nor peers present a group that needs further encouragement in opening up and seeking appropriate help from reliable sources.

The fact that some of the students cannot speak up about SA even with their peers point to a poorly developed communication ability as advanced by Kamenderi et al. (2019), that when young people do not develop self-confidence at home, then they become unsure and hesitant about speaking on arduous issues like SA. Jelagat et al. (2023) also confirmed that less parental closeness is an antecedent of substance use and abuse meaning that these students who are not able to open up and talk about SA are susceptible to being influenced to initiate substance use. In this regard, research indicates that college students' reluctance to talking about challenging issues like SA contributes to increased risks of substance abuse, unhealthy sexual relationships and depression-related suicides (Pere, 2018; Elliot et al., 2017). This, therefore, signifies the need for the University to play a socialising role, through training and education, to help the student develop communication skills encouraging them to speak up on emerging issues (Pere, 2018). The University can provide a reliable space, on various communication platforms, where the students can be encouraged to freely talk about SA and where the administration can also engage with the students through timely responses to their queries and comments.

4.7.3.1 Influence on the Students' Communication Practices

Speaking about substances use and abuse has been shown to increase the Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP) of those involved in such discourses (NACADA, 2021). It has been proven that reliable information can boost the ability, readiness, and preparedness of young people such as university students to talk about SA (NACADA, 2021). These conversations can be within their close social circles or with their peers in need of the information. In line with this, Kiriru (2018) suggests that one criterion of assessing the success of any communication intervention is through the ability and readiness of the participants to adopt ideal communication practices that include talking about SA. Thus, during the OFGD, the participants were asked whether after interacting with the selected content on SA they felt confident to engage with their peers on issues to do with SA. The following sentiments explain their perceived abilities to comfortably talk about substance use and abuse with their peers:

Excerpt 86

Even before this, we used to talk about Alcohol and Drug Abuse in Christian Union. And I think I will continue because now I have more knowledge about drugs, from the time you sent those pictures, I was able to learn more about drugs. I went and researched more on it. And I know now I can continue very well and very confidently (OFGD participant 5).

Excerpt 87

I think I will now be able to continue to push that message I've gotten forward because sometimes you have your friends who are totally addicted to it, so you try telling them these are effect of using the drugs too much (OFGD participant 8).

Excerpt 88

For me, it's something I have learnt to do. I had a friend of mine that was abusing drugs and he ended up going to rehab. So, I know the side effects of drugs. So, I will keep on spreading this initiative of not using drugs (OFGD participant 6).

Excerpt 89

For me, am now comfortable with the conversation. If I can do it often. The only problem comes in with the situation, especially face to face, you can't just meet somebody and tell them "last week I didn't see you in class", maybe he has been affected for some time. He'll try to shift the conversation especially if you know he uses drugs. The goodness (sic) with online, someone doesn't feel attacked personally. It is a general information, for a general audience. So someone will get the message and use it (OFGD participant 1).

Excerpt 90

For me, I can continue talking about drugs with my online followers. Coz online mostly there are a lot of people who will view, compared to face to face where

you can only approach one person at a time. If in a day you talk to ten people, you'll be very tired (OFGD participant 10).

The above responses show that for some of the students like OFGD participants 5 & 8 (in Excerpts 86 & 87), the information they interacted with improved on their existing awareness and knowledge of SA which in turn made them confident to talk about the topic with their peers. The students also suggest their preference for online communication sites as platforms where they could comfortably talk about SA. These responses corroborate the findings by Hilde et al. (2018) and Wee (2017) that young people will often consider media platforms that meet their communication and information needs. Thus, according to the students, some of the reasons why they prefer online communication include their need for anonymity (Excerpt 89) and the ability to reach a large number of the peers at once (Excerpt 90).

However, while some of the OFGD participants indicated their preference for online communication platforms like SNSs, it also emerged that there were those who preferred face to face communication:

Excerpt 91

I would also join in such conversations, but I prefer face to face. You know face to face you can see the reaction and you can change the mood, the tone as you are talking to them. Then they are your friends, you know what they'd like to hear, and how they would like to hear it. Online you'd have to type and fake those emojis but face to face you'll see their reaction (OFGD participant 7).

Excerpt 92

Personally, I believe more of if you feel like you want to let it go, you should look for someone to talk to. Coz, if I end up going to every Dick and Harry that I see, who is taking alcohol or smoking weed, they'll look at me like what's wrong with me? I prefer face to face, coz when you do text messages, the person can either fake it. But then again, text messages have their benefit because the person might feel more inclined to talk than face to face, because they'll feel like when they talk face to face, you might rebuke them. But then at the end of the day, I prefer that

as long as a person feels like they want to change, I can be there to talk to them and listen (OFGD participant 3).

Excerpt 93

I can now continue. I prefer face to face coz am not so popular on the social media platforms. But with face to face, am so talkative. So I'll learn more about drugs (OFGD participant 4).

Again, the above students' preference for face-to-face communication corroborates Pere's research (2018) findings, where the studied university students also indicated their preference for face-to-face peer counselling. The reason cited for their preference is that this mode of communication allows them to observe and interpret nonverbal cues and body languages (Excerpts 91 & 92) and their inability to comfortably use social media and SNSs (Excerpt 93).

Conversely, the fact that the students have different preferences for online and offline, including face to face communication, supports Chapman et al.'s (2021), Lindita's (2018) and Akoja and Adefarasin's (2019) recommendation for transmedia communication approach because it encourages the incorporation of multiple communication platforms in order to maximise on reach. Similarly, following the postulations of the UGT on audience gratifications and needs as precursors to media choices and use, the University can consider tailoring their communication approaches by incorporating different platforms preferred by the students. This may in turn encourage the students to access and engagement with the content.

The students' willingness to talk about SA with their peers is also an indication that they can be incorporated in the University's communication strategy as peer educators. However, for them to be confident, they need to be constantly supplied with information in various formats and on different communication platforms, including SNSs (Pere, 2018). They should also be encouraged to engage with their peers officially (using official channels) and unofficially (in unofficial settings such as online chats on WhatsApp) where they can share information on SA within their social circles. As suggested by Mandal et al. (2020), such social network tailored communication approaches can be effective in SA prevention.

4.7.3.2 Influence on the Students' Help-Seeking Practices

Poor help-seeking behaviour has also been linked to the continued rise in substance use among young people (Cadri et al., 2021). Help-seeking behaviour implies the choices, actions, and attitudes individuals display when they acknowledge their need for support and intentionally attempt to get help, whether from formal services like guidance and counselling or informal networks such as family and friends (Umubyeyi et al., 2016). This action, undertaken by an individual who believes themselves to be in need of personal help with the purpose of meeting this need positively, can be significantly influenced by psychosocial and contextual factors. As Adams et al. (2022) point out, help-seeking involves a conscious or planned decision shaped by an individual's attitude, subjective norms (perceived social pressures), and perceived behavioural control, while Divin et al. (2018) emphasise that communication about experienced challenges and difficulties forms an integral part of this behaviour.

Research has confirmed that when students encounter barriers to help-seeking, they tend to resort to substance use to help them cope with situations like stress and depression (Hudson et al., 2018). Encouraging young people to seek and receive professional help early can help arrest the onset of substance use and reduce the long-term harm associated with substance abuse (Berridge et al., 2018). Hence, in order to establish the help-seeking practices of the students, the OFGD participants were asked about the help-seeking behaviour of their peers plus themselves. They responded as follows:

Excerpt 94

They fear going to the office (the guidance and counselling office) because they will be laughed at and considered weak by their friends (OFGD participant 9).

Excerpt 95

Sometimes when one wants to access the office, you will not find those people there (the guidance and counselling office bearers) (OFGD participant 12).

Excerpt 96

The drug warriors (peer counsellors) are sometimes also hard to get because they are students and can also be busy (OFGD participant 13).

Excerpt 97

They (students) don't have time to go to the office. Same to me, I think it's easier for me to get the information online on Facebook (OFGD participant 15).

Excerpt 98

If you go there (to the guidance and counselling office), everyone in campus will just know what is troubling you. I'd rather search for the information online (OFGD participant 14).

The above responses (Excerpt 94, 95, 96, 97 & 98) confirm the results of previous research (SAMHSA, 2019; Cadri et al., 2021; Harries et al., 2020) that some of the barriers to help-seeking practices in young people include fear of being stigmatised, little confidence and trust in authorities and professionals, difficulty identifying symptoms of addiction, and limited knowledge about available health services. For instance, some of the OFGD participants fear stigmatisation from their peers (Excerpt 94), while others cite unavailability of the professionals as one of the reasons why they do not seek guidance and counselling services (Excerpts 95 & 96).

The responses by some of the students (Excerpts 97 & 98) also agree with the findings by Pere (2018) that students fail to seek guidance and counselling services because of fear of indiscretion, mistrust, lack of adequate time and negative attitude towards counselling services. Thus, the University should focus on encouraging the students to seek out these services by reassuring them of the ethical principles upheld by relevant offices. The institution can also incorporate communication platforms such as SNSs that can reassure the students of anonymity and earn their trust. Incorporating digital media can also broaden accessibility to guidance and counselling services, where the students can seek help anonymously, learn about substance abuse and recovery, and join moderated chat groups to share recovery experiences (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, AAWS, 2023). However,

Lewicka (2022) advises that building trust between students and the university' administration is a dynamic process that requires sustained communication (both impersonal and interpersonal) aimed at reassuring the students.

Accordingly, to encourage the students to seek for help, it is also advisable that the information be readily available. A recommendation put across (Lindita, 2018; and Akoja & Adefarasin, 2019; Hilde et al., 2018; Wee, 2017) is for the University to increase avenues of information by incorporating the student leaders and peer counsellor to cover the shortage of staff as alluded to by the KIIs (Excerpts 17 & 18) in order to meet the demand from the students. Through this, the students can be enabled to seek help from their peers, who in turn can also be able to recommend help for their peers in need of guidance and counselling services.

The study sought to determine whether the students felt confident in seeking help and helping their peers get help, after interacting with the selected content. Subsequently, the OFGD participants were asked to explain how they would go about assisting their peers who approached them for help. The following responses elaborate their level of preparedness and ability to help:

Excerpt 99

Personally yes, I think I know where I can direct them. Firstly, we can start off from peer counsellors that I know of. There are ten of them in their group. Who have been trained to deal with drugs and substance abuse. There is also the counselling office which can help out, and I also know various lecturers who have helped students walk through addiction till the moment they have transformed (OFGD participant 2).

Excerpt 100

Yeah. I know some of the peer counsellors I can direct them to (OFGD participant 6).

Excerpt 101

There is a way you can find the peer counsellors. I know them personally: you can also look for them at the peer counselling office. Which is the dean of student office, where I can be direct them to find the peer counsellors (OFGD participant 3).

Excerpt 102

Am confident enough. I can help her. You know this is someone who has opened up and told you he wants to change (sic). This you can help but if he hasn't told you, approaching such a person is difficult. Unless someone opens up to me and asks for my help. In that case, I guess I can help them (OFGD participant 4).

Excerpt 103

If she comes and tells me, maybe he/she is smoking bang, or abusing alcohol, the best thing I can do is that I can sit him down, and if I don't have that knowledge to tell him how to go about it, I can look for someone to help him, like the peer counsellors (OFGD participant 10).

The above responses point to the students' knowledge of the peer counsellors and counselling office as avenues where they can direct their peers to seek help and their readiness to do so (Excerpts 99 & 100 & 101). There are also some of the OFGD participants who felt confident to provide help, as long as their colleagues sought help from them (Excerpts 102 & 103). These reactions suggest that with sustained communication, coupled with provision of resources on substance use and avenues of help, the students are likely to get more informed and pass the knowledge to their peers. This is in line with Pere's (2018) proposal for learning through peer interaction, as a means of reducing SA among university students. According to Pere (2018), it is important that peer counsellors are trained continuously to equip them with current counselling skills and emerging trends in SA.

Although some of the students expressed their preference for online communication sites as sources of information on SA, research has shown that when they are not adequately guided on credible sites, they risk getting unreliable information which can

instead cause more harm than good (Onah et al., 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2021). A recommendation put across by various scholars such as Fosnacht and Calderone (2020) and Lewicka (2022) to counter this is by providing timely and consistent information on official institutional sites. The students also need to be made aware of the existence of these sites and encouraged to access them whenever the need arises.

In line with this, Hudson et al. (2018) advises that substance use prevention programmes that are engaging are more successful in creating awareness on the effects of substance use and changing attitudes for the adoption of ideal practices. Similarly, Harris et al. (2021) and Beebe and Beebe (2021) confirmed that young people considered content to be engaging when the message in them was similar to their life experiences and related to their interests, needs, goals and motivations. These assertions support the supposition of the Uses and Gratification Theory (Ruggiero, 2000; Ferris et al., 2021) that individuals use media they believe meets their information and communication needs, such as info-seeking, socialisation, emotional support, ability to create and distribute content. Hence, it is recommended that prior to using various communication platforms to disseminate information on SA, it is important to establish the students' preferred media and content formats like videos and graphic images. This can in turn appeal to their emotions and influence their adoption of the preventive and cessation messages in the content (Akoja & Adefarasin, 2019; Chapman et al., 2021). Tailoring the information and content in this way ensures relevance and personalisation because the information disseminated will be able to meet the identified knowledge, attitude, and behavioural needs of the students in relation to SA and can influence the decision making and help-seeking practices of the students (Akoja & Adefarasin, 2019; Chapman et al., 2021).

4.8 Chapter Conclusion

The findings presented and discussed in this chapter highlight the effectiveness of transmedia communication approaches used on SNSs by Laikipia University in substance use prevention among the university's students. Results for the first objective of the study, examining the students' ease of accessing the message content on the various Social Networking Sites, revealed that despite the students not being fully aware of the official SNSs operated by the University, they are actively searching for information, including information on SA, from the SNSs they believe are operated by

the University. Similarly, besides those who are able to access the free Wi-Fi provided by the institution, majority of the students rely on their own means to access the SNSs. The students also expressed their desire for the University to regularly update their official accounts on various SNSs. Under the second objective, the students' engagement with content posted on the SNSs was dependent on already established antecedents such as their preference for certain SNSs, their perceptions of the information posted and trust in the source of the information. On the third objective, on the perceptions of the students, it was found that although the students acknowledge the use of both traditional and online platforms by the University, they expressed preference for online platforms. They also expressed desire for content that met the specific affordances of the SNSs used. Their engagement with the online content was largely influenced by the online engagement practices of their peers. Results for the fourth objective revealed that although the information presented during the study period helped the participating students improve their knowledge of substances, the students still have varied attitudes towards PWSUD. The students also expressed their confidence in being able to talk about substance use with their peers and also help them seek help.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the summary of the findings, conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further research based on the study that was conducted. These are presented in line with the four specific objectives of the study which were to: examine the students' ease of accessing the message content on the various Social Networking Sites (SNS); assess how the students engaged with the content on the various SNS; examine the perceptions of the students regarding the communication platforms used, the message presentation formats and the engagement process; evaluate to what extent the information presented impacted on the students' knowledge, attitude and practices relating to substance use. The first section is a summary of the research findings arranged according to the research objectives; the second section contains conclusions that were drawn from the research findings while the third section consists of the recommendations accruing from the research findings. Finally, the last section has suggestions for further research.

5.2 Summary of Findings

5.2.1 Students' Ease of Accessing Content on the various SNSs Operated by the University

In order to assess the students' ease of accessing content on the University's official accounts on various SNSs, it was necessary to first confirm the types of SNSs preferred by the students. This is because studies have confirmed that media users tend to access media platforms and sites that they are already accustomed to (Valkenburg et al., 2016; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). The survey results indicated that the students' preferred SNSs, in descending order, were WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter/X. In regard to the students' frequency of use of the SNSs, the most visited site was WhatsApp, followed by TikTok, Instagram and Facebook. A significant number of students visited these sites multiple times in a day. They however rarely visited LinkedIn, Pinterest, Tumblr, Tagged and Yahoo.

The factors that influenced how frequently the students visited the SNSs included: lack of technological know-how, where some of the students reported not knowing how to

navigate some of the SNSs hence opting to avoid them; low quality equipment such as smartphones also limited their ability to access and use some of the SNSs like Instagram that required them to have good quality smartphones. The students' information needs and gratifications also influenced their choice of SNSs and their need to access desired content and information that met these needs. The prominent needs for accessing the SNSs were for academic content on WhatsApp; socialisation on WhatsApp and Facebook; and entertainment on TikTok, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter/X.

Subsequently, the study sought to establish the student's knowledge and appreciation of the SNSs where the University operates official accounts. This was necessary because research findings have proven that audiences' awareness of an organisation's official social media and SNS accounts is a determinant of whether they access and engage with content on those sites or not (Pasioka et al., 2021). In line with their awareness of the official university accounts on the SNSs, fifty percent of the surveyed students indicated being aware of the official accounts managed by the University, fifteen percent were uncertain of the accounts, while thirty four percent were totally unaware of the official accounts. However, when asked to identify the specific sites where the University operates official accounts, the students cited some SNSs such as WhatsApp, LinkedIn and Instagram, where the university did not have official accounts. Furthermore, majority of the responding students reported following the Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube and Twitter/X, while a few followed Instagram and LinkedIn.

Some of the reasons cited by the students for visiting the university accounts on the SNSs were to get information relating to exams and social events organised by the University, to meet and connect with their fellow students, to participate in academic discussions, and to search for information on health issues. When they searched for health issues, majority reported not looking for information on SA, while a few reported searching for information on SA. Among those who searched for information on SA, majority reported being able to successfully access the information.

On the overall ease of accessing (SA) content on the SNSs, it was established that the images posted on Facebook, Twitter/X and Instagram were accessible but lacked hyperlinks connecting the various accounts on the SNSs. The content is not also posted regularly on the various official accounts. Additionally, it was reported that some of the

students, especially the first-year students, were able to access the SNSs because of the availability of free internet Wi-Fi in the campus where they reside. The other students who do not reside within campus have to use the University provided internet only when they are in campus. Furthermore, although the students were allowed to provide feedback through comments, the response from the University was neither timely nor consistent.

5.2.2 Students' Engagement with SA Content Posted on Various SNSs

The students' engagement levels were evaluated based on how the OFGD participants and their followers interacted with the SA content that was sampled from NACADA's official social media accounts and shared with them to post on their preferred SNSs. Considering that SNS users' preferences have been shown to influence how they engage on their preferred SNSs, the study sought to establish the SNSs preferred by the OFGD participants based on the sites they chose to post the content on. The greatest majority of the OFGD participants preferred posting on Facebook, followed by Instagram and Twitter/X. Their preference for these sites were influenced by their subjective norms such as their need to fit in a social circle and use the SNSs preferred by their friends. Ease of use of specific SNS also determined the sites preferred by the OFGD participants, where they indicated they found it difficult to use some SNSs like YouTube and LinkedIn, despite findings which showed that majority of the surveyed students subscribe to these sites.

The OFGD participants preferred posting their content on Facebook, Twitter/X, and Instagram because of various reasons such as: finding it easier to use those sites; because majority of their friends and social circle used those SNSs; and the affordances of the platforms that enable them to hyperlink between different SNSs, thereby minimising the time spent posting. In contrast, other media such as YouTube, required them to make technical effort by download video content from other sites before uploading to the site.

Examining the demonstrable indicators of engagement such as usage and activity counts revealed that while majority of the posts recorded high engagement levels in the form of likes, comments, shares, re-tweets, tweets, views and dislikes, some posts recorded very low engagement levels. The low engagement was attributed to the

‘novelty’ of the posts where the OFGD participants insinuated that their followers were not accustomed to seeing posts with messages on SA. Conversely, the high engagement recorded on some posts was linked to the owners of the posts being peer counsellors and hence their followers were accustomed to receiving post on SA from them.

5.2.3 Students’ Perceptions of the Communication Platforms, Content Presentation and Engagement Process

5.2.3.1 Students’ Perceptions of the Communication Platforms

In order to ascertain the students’ perceptions of the communication platforms, this study relied on the determinants of perception as proposed by Camilleri and Falzon (2020). These include the audiences’ perception of the source credibility; participation; ease of use and usefulness of the online technology. The OFGDs revealed that the University prefers communicating with the students by posting on the noticeboards. The students however found this inaccessible thus lowering their perception of how easy to use and useful the communication platform (notice board) was to them. This was due to the fact that majority of the students reside outside the campus and hence do not take time to walk around the campus and be able to read the noticeboards on a regular basis. They instead suggested preference for online sites such as SNSs because of the anonymity and freedom of speech afforded by those sites. Additionally, they preferred the SNSs because of the ease of accessing information on the sites at a convenient time when they were off campus and hence could not access the noticeboards.

Regarding the participants’ perceptions of the communication platforms used in disseminating information on SA, the students acknowledged that the University provides information on SA. However, majority of the communication, such as information on upcoming events, were posted on noticeboards, of which majority of the OFGD participants stated their preference for the information to be shared on online platforms.

There were however some students who despite preferring online sites, felt they could not access them due to technological challenges such as unavailability of internet or Wi-Fi services outside campus. This category indicated their preference for alternative modes of communication such as incorporating lecturers and student leaders. This is

because they perceive the lecturers and student leaders as credible sources of information and hence could reach a majority of the students with information on SA.

5.2.3.2 Perceptions Regarding Content Presentation Formats

In order to establish the students' perception of the content posted by the University on the SNSs, the study first sought to find out the type of content that appealed to the students so as to correlate them with their preferences. Results from the survey revealed that the students found different types of content appealing based on the specific affordances of each SNS. Hence, photos were preferred on Facebook, Instagram, snapshot and Pinterest. They preferred reading comments on Twitter/X, memes on WhatsApp and Twitter/X, PDF or word documents on LinkedIn and WhatsApp and watching videos on YouTube and TikTok. These preferences were their reasons for seeking and using the specific SNSs.

In regard to the students' perception of the content on the accounts managed by the University on various SNSs, majority (68%) found the content to be informative, while others (29%) found them entertaining, and a few (2%) found them boring. Some of the OFGD participants insinuated that the content was boring because the administration practised 'cross-posting' approaches, where the information posted on different SNSs were in the same format in which they are posted on the noticeboards. This practice did not utilise the various unique affordances of the SNSs that determine the content format, and which initially endeared the students to the sites. When the surveyed students were asked whether they wanted to see more content on SA posted on the University's official accounts on the SNSs, while a small percentage (13.4%) did not want more information, there were some students (13.4%) who were not sure. Nonetheless, majority of the surveyed students (73%) responded that they wished to see more information on SA posted on the SNSs.

In response to the question of whether they perceived the content as meeting their information needs, the OFGD participants' responses demonstrated that they perceived the content as needing improvement to conform with the affordances of each SNS and gratifications sought by the students when using those sites. The OFGD participants' responses regarding their perceptions of the content they were asked to share on their preferred SNS revealed that they had varied perceptions. Some of them found the

content to be informative, interesting and enticing. Yet others felt that the information was not convincing enough. They thus suggested the inclusion of more graphic imagery when communicating about SA and the inclusion of content that specifically aimed at fulfilling their information needs in regard to SA.

5.2.3.3 Perceptions Regarding the Engagement Process

SNS users' engagement practices are influenced by their behavioural, emotional and cognitive perceptions of the communication process. These include factors such as how to fit in with the engagement practices of their friends and social circles; their perception of the content; and what they believe is acceptable engagement practice based on their knowledge of a specific subject. In line with these factors, the surveyed students indicated their behavioural perceptions by responding that they were likely to take part in a trending challenge, share or view content that was shared and liked by their friends or members of their SNS. Their emotional perceptions became apparent when they stated that they were likely to like a content that was liked by many of their SNS members. Their cognitive perceptions emerged when they responded that they believed their friends agreed with a message when it was widely shared and liked by them.

It became apparent that the students are constantly assessing the engagement practices of their peers and when they consider these as meeting their communication needs, they are likely to also engage in similar ways. It also emerged that the students evaluate the risks and benefits involved such as being accepted or shunned within their social circle based on how they engage on SNSs. Thus, their level of engagement with online content was partly influenced by how their peers engaged online.

The students' responses also implied that their perceptions of the engagement process are influenced by how they perceive the engagement practices of their peers and friends. These practices are informed by whether the content meets their communication needs such as entertainment, self-expression, social interactions and information sharing. Thus, they perceive certain content as likeable because of how their friends view those content. Also, the way they engage with the content therein is determined by the social practices they have developed amongst themselves as a social group. Hence, when the OFGD participants were asked about their perception of the engagement levels on the

content they were requested to share on their preferred SNSs, they considered the engagement to be low because their followers on the SNSs might have not liked the type of content or because the content did not resonate with what their social circle or friends preferred for entertaining content.

5.2.4 The Influence of Information on the Students' Awareness, Attitude and Practices Relating to SA

Considering research findings that have proven that adequate communication can play a significant role in improving students' awareness, attitude and practices relating to SA (Masese, 2020), this study set to evaluate how the presented information impacted on the student's awareness, attitude and potential practices relating to SA.

5.2.4.1 Influence on the Students' Awareness

In order to determine whether the content shared with the OFGD participants had an influence in their level of awareness of SA, a pre-survey was conducted to confirm the students' existing knowledge regarding SA before some of them were allowed to interact with the selected content. Accordingly, the most known substances were alcoholic drinks (93%), bhang (75.4%) and Miraa (69.7%) while the least known were sedatives (40.1%), Muratina (44.4%) and Cocaine (47.2%).

When asked about their awareness of the addictive capabilities of the substances, the results of the survey showed that majority of the students were aware of the addictive nature of Bhang (88%), Alcohol (85.9%) and tobacco (67.6%), and least aware of the addictive nature of prescription drugs (19%), sedatives (26.8%) and inhalants (38.7%). These results were recorded in spite of research findings that some of the substances the students were not aware of their addictive nature are the ones most abused among this age group (World Drug Report, 2018; Mutiso et al., 2022; Okoyo et al., 2022).

Subsequently when the OFGD participants were asked whether their interaction and engagement with the selected content influenced their awareness of SA, some of the OFGD participants reported becoming aware and knowledgeable on where to get reliable information on SA. Others reported being confident to share the knowledge with their peers. Additionally, some of the students felt they were able to improve on

their ability to speak about substance abuse because of the knowledge they got from the content.

5.2.4.2 Influence on the Students' Attitude

While working under the premise that the students' attitude towards addictive substances can influence their behaviour with substances and how they relate with their peers who have substance use disorders, this study sought to establish the students' opinion regarding their likelihood of using the substances. The surveyed students' opinions revealed that 80 percent of them were confident that they would not use any of the substances, while 8.5 percent were sure they would use the substances, and 11.3 percent were not sure that they can use the substances. Conversely, the students' perceptions of those who use or abuse substances were varied, where some of them perceived those who use drugs, tobacco, and alcohol as being strong and cool, while others regarded them as weak, sick or criminals.

When asked to explain how they felt about associating with their peers who are known Persons With Substance Use Disorder (PWSUD), the OFGD participants' responses indicated that they were conflicted on how to engage with their peers. For instance, some of the participants were conflicted on whether to continue or stop interacting with their peers who had substance use disorders because they feared losing their friends. Although others felt they did not need to avoid their peers who have substance use disorders, they were not sure whether this could make them predisposed to being influenced into experimenting with addictive substances.

5.2.4.3 Influence on the Students' Communication Practices Relating to SA

Various studies have established that how students communicate about SA can influence their attitude and willingness to develop appropriate avoidance or cessation behaviours (Kiriru, 2018; Namada & Karimi, 2021). Thus, prior to determining whether the content shared with the OFGD participants influenced their communication practices, the study sought to first ascertain the students' existing communication practices regarding how openly they spoke about substance addiction with either their friends or family members. In this regard, it emerged that the students sometimes

(37.3%) or often (32.4%) spoke about substance addiction with either their family members or friends. Nonetheless, there are those who indicated that they rarely (24.6%) or never (5.7) discussed substance addiction.

In relation to the above results, some of the OFGD participants intimated that they found it difficult to communicate with their parents because of fear of being misunderstood by the parents but were comfortable doing so with their peers. There were also some participants who were comfortable speaking about addiction with the parent as opposed to their peers because of fear of being victimised by their peers.

When the OFGD participants were asked whether after interacting with the selected content on SA they felt confident to talk about SA with their peers, some of them responded that the information they interacted with improved on their existing awareness and knowledge on SA which in turn made them feel confident to talk about the topic with their peers. The students also suggested their preference for online communication sites as platforms where they could comfortably talk about SA. Some of the reasons they cited for preferring online communication included their need for anonymity and the ability to reach a large number of the peers at once on the SNSs they share. There were also some students who indicated their preference for face-to-face communication because this mode of communication allows them to observe and interpret nonverbal cues and body languages and because of their inability to comfortably use social media and SNSs.

5.2.4.4 Influence on the Students' Help-Seeking Practices Relating to SA

The help-seeking behaviour of young people, such as undergraduate students, regarding SA has been shown to influence how they cope in situations that may make them disposed to experimenting with substances (Cadri et al., 2021; Hudson et al., 2018). Hence, prior to establishing whether the selected content impacted on the students' help-seeking behaviour, the study sought to find out the existing help-seeking behaviours of the students. When the OFGD participants were asked about the help-seeking behaviour of their peers plus themselves, it was established that the students encounter challenges that prevent them from seeking help. These included their fear of reproach from their parents and family members, fear of stigmatisation from their peers, and perceived unavailability of the professionals.

To determine whether after interacting with the shared content, the students were confident in seeking help and helping their peers get help in relation to SA, the OFGD participants were asked to elaborate on how they would assist their peers who approached them for help. In response, some of the OFGD participants felt confident that they could help their peers seek help from appropriate sources such as the guidance and counselling office and peer educators. This showed their appreciation of the significant role of peer counsellors and relevant offices within the University as forums where they can seek and get help.

5.3 Conclusions

5.3.1 Students' Ease of Accessing Content on the Various SNSs Operated by the University

In regard to the students' ease of accessing content on the University's official accounts on various SNSs, this study concludes that the students are adherent users of various SNSs which they visit multiple times in a day to fulfil their communication needs. Majority of the students are aware of some of the SNSs where the university manage official pages. The students ease of accessing these pages are either enabled by the free Wi-Fi internet services available within campus or hindered by lack of internet services outside campus. They cannot access content across multiple SNSs due to lack of hyperlinks on the content posted by the University's administration, who are also not consistent in providing feedback to comments posted by the students.

5.3.2 Students' Engagement with SA Content Posted on Various SNSs

Based on the findings, the study concludes that the level of engagement by the students on the University's official accounts on various SNSs is directly correlated with their attitudes towards those sites and accounts. Factors influencing the students' attitudes include platform preference, content relevance and accessibility, and perceived content trustworthiness.

5.3.3 Students' Perceptions of the Communication Platforms, Content Presentation Format and Engagement Process

In regard to the students' perceptions of the communication platforms, the content presentation format and the engagement process, the following conclusions were made from the results of the study:

5.3.3.1 Students' Perceptions of the Communication Platforms

The students regard the institution's primary mode of communication, noticeboards, as inaccessible due to their off campus living arrangements, lack of time, and disinterest in physically checking them. The students expressed a preference for SNSs for accessing information. This preference is linked to perceived anonymity, freedom of speech, and ease of access afforded by the SNSs.

The inaccessibility of the noticeboards further lowers the students' perception of their ease of use and usefulness. Conversely, the perceived ease of use of online platforms contributes to their preference for the platforms while their perceived challenges with online accessibility owing to technological challenges is a barrier to some of them preferring some online platforms.

The students' preference for lecturers and student leaders as key communication conduits stems from their perception of them as being credible sources, influencing the students' receptiveness to the information.

5.3.3.2 Students' Perceptions of the Content Presentation Format

A significant majority of the students perceive the content posted on the SNSs as boring, too simple, and lacking impact because the University seems to cross-post content without tailoring them to the specific features and affordances of each SNS. They view the content as not meeting their needs for entertainment and potentially other gratifications they seek when using social media.

They consider the content as failing to evoke emotional reactions or fulfil their emotional needs relating to the SA information. They prefer a more creative and

engaging approach to conveying information such as incorporating more powerful visuals, to make the content relatable, informative and impactful.

5.3.3.3 Students' Perceptions of the Engagement Process

The students perceive their peers' engagement practices on SNSs as influencing their own engagement. They regard their peers as 'prototypes' and are more likely to engage with content if they trust their peers' judgments. They also perceive their engagement levels as dependent on whether their information and communication needs are met by the platforms and content posted, as well as their evaluation of the potential consequences of their engagement on the SNSs.

5.3.4 The Influence of the Information on Students' Awareness, Attitude and Practices Relating to SA

Based on the study findings, it can be concluded that the students' awareness of the different types of substances does not necessarily correlate with them understanding their addictive potential. Targeted communication strategies can bridge this knowledge gap, increase the students' awareness of SA and improve their confidence to talk about the topic and seek help when needed.

While the majority of the students in the study believed they could resist the temptation to use or abuse any substance when presented with the opportunity, they were unsure about how to interact with PWSUD due to perceived social repercussions that may arise from such interactions. This indicates a potential discrepancy between their personal beliefs about substance use and their perceived social norms regarding interactions with PWSUD, highlighting the societal pressures that can influence the students' actions, even when their personal convictions are clear.

Despite a small percentage of the students discussing SA with their family members and friends, fear of being misunderstood by their family or victimised by their peers are factors that prevent some students from taking about SA. Hence, the researcher concludes that providing safe and supportive communication platforms can help students overcome these fears and develop their self-confidence and communication abilities to discuss SA openly.

Furthermore, stigma and perceived unavailability of professionals are significant barriers to the students seeking help for SA. Nonetheless, effective sensitisation and awareness campaigns can effectively address these barriers and encourage the students to seek help from reliable sources.

5.4 Recommendations

5.4.1 Students' Ease of Accessing Content on the Various SNSs Operated by the University

Considering the postulations of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) that an individual's choice and use of media is influenced by their perception of whether the media and the content therein fulfil their needs and desired gratifications, it is recommended that the University should first establish the various communication platforms preferred by the students and the type of gratifications they seek from those platforms. Thereafter, in order to reach the students with information, the institution may need to incorporate these platforms in their communication approaches. This in turn can ensure the students easily access the information posted on the SNSs and encourage their maximum engagement with the content. The information on the types of gratifications the students seek from the SNSs can also guide the University in creating content that meet these gratifications, and which is suitable for each SNS.

Also, the fact that the most preferred SNS was WhatsApp, where the students cited using it for both academic purposes and for socialisation, implies that the University needs to consider incorporating WhatsApp and its 'communities' feature as part of its official communication site. The feature allows for the combination of multiple WhatsApp groups under a larger one known as a community. The feature has been advanced as ideal for academic institutions, because it enables administrators to manage their WhatsApp groups in one place, and to send messages to everyone via a primary group or limit information to subgroups. In regard to communicating about SA, the University can use it to regularly share information on SA with the students in order to keep them informed and updated on upcoming activities. The administration can create a community for each of the academic year and share information specific to each year of study. Communities can also be formed to introduce the peer champions to their peers with an official administrator overseeing the community. Given that the communities feature supports 32-person video and voice calls, file sharing of sizes over

2GB, message reactions and creation of polls, means that the University can use it to send information that meet the students' gratifications. This can in turn ensure that the students access the information in various formats such as videos and images and encourage engagement through their reactions or polling results.

The research findings that showed that some of the students are not aware of the University's official accounts on the various SNSs implies that the University's administration should endeavour to create awareness of the institution's official accounts. The institution can consider having the pages certified or verified according to each SNS's requirements. This may in turn build students' trust in these accounts and protect them from unofficial and pseudo accounts that could provide misleading information. Verified accounts also ensure that students can easily access them, as they are aware of their existence and the various SNSs hosting them.

Since SNSs and social media users have been shown to be likely to look for and access information from sites that are regularly updated (Mutsikiwa et al., 2021) and considering the Key Informants' assertions that the university is not regular in posting content on SA, the University needs to develop a workable schedule for regularly posting content on the official SNS accounts. The University should consider incorporating student peer counselors, who have proven to be key players in reducing SA among university and college students (Meera, 2019; Pere, 2018). As part of the student community, these peer counselors are knowledgeable about the types of SNSs and content preferred by their peers. They can be trained and guided on sourcing credible SA content that meets their fellow students' information needs. In this way, the student peer counselors can help boost the information databank and help in sharing the information through various SNSs. In so doing, the students will be able to access updated information on various SA-related topics.

Moreover, the fact that digital illiteracy may be a contributing factor to some of the students not knowing where and what to search for in regard to SA means that the students are not accessing relevant content. However, given the different subtopics under the topic of SA, the University should classify the information on the website under subtopics like: types of drugs and substances; effects of drugs and substances; prevention and avoidance and guidance and counseling (W.H.O, n.d; World Drug Report, 2018). Additionally, for students who wish to access the information on other

platforms at their convenience, hyperlinks can be included under the subtopics, directing users to various SNS accounts for easier access.

Furthermore, for those students who cannot access the free internet provided by the University within the campus, the administration can consider incorporating SNSs that use less data such as WhatsApp and Facebook, to communicate with this group of students. These applications have been found to be accessible even with slow internet connections.

5.4.2 Students' Engagement with SA Content Posted on Various SNSs

Considering research findings that have proven that poor engagement on SNSs can be linked to inconsistency in posting, which may in turn lead users to find content unfamiliar (Jiang & Anderson, 2018), it is a recommendation of this study that the University should be consistent in posting content on SA, and in responding to comments made by students seeking clarifications.

Also, the results showing positive engagement with content posted by OFGD participants who were student leaders and peer counsellors, bespeaks a need for the institution to seriously consider peer-to-peer communication strategies. These can include peer counsellors and student leaders who can be trained and guided in disseminating relevant information on SA via the communication platforms preferred by their fellow students.

5.4.3 Students' Perceptions of the Communication Platforms, Content Presentation Format and Engagement Process

5.4.3.1 Perceptions Regarding Communication Platforms

Following the results that the students perceive the communication platforms used by the institution as inaccessible, and their preference for online sites as SNSs, it is thus recommended that the University adopts a mixed media communication approach when disseminating information on SA. This approach should include both the lecturers, student leaders and media platforms such as the SNSs.

Using a variety of media platforms to reach the students on the platforms they prefer will ensure all students are reached extensively and effectively with the information

they need on SA. The institution also needs to regularly ascertain the communication and media platforms preferred by the students so as to be certain of the ideal platforms to use for effective communication.

5.4.3.2 Perceptions Regarding Content Presentation Format

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) posits that individuals choose media based on whether they fulfil their needs, supported by each medium's affordances. This implies that any communication strategy should consider these needs and aim to fulfil them through the content posted. Considering that the students perceive the content posted by the university as boring and unimpactful, the institution needs to endeavour to establish the gratifications sought by the students when they choose to use different media platforms. This information can help in developing and disseminating communication SA content that meets these needs, such as videos or comic for those seeking entertainment or written information for audiences interested in reading.

The institution also needs to establish, at the onset, the affordances of the SNSs they intent to use in communicating with the students and align the content to these affordances. This can in turn enhance the students' engagement with the content and eventually promote desired outcomes such as improvement in knowledge, attitude and desirable practices relating to SA.

5.4.3.3 Students' Perceptions Regarding the Engagement Process

Empirical research evidence shows that an audience's engagement levels influence their acceptance of the information or interaction with the content (Drivas et al., 2022; Kennedy & Engebretsen, 2020; Hilde et al., 2018). Given that students perceive their engagement practices as influenced by their peers' engagement, their view of whether the communication platform and content meet their needs, and the consequences of their engagement, it is recommended that the University regularly examine students' perceptions of their peers' engagement practices on their preferred SNSs to understand how these can impact their acceptance and adoption of the information.

Additionally, to improve on the students' engagement with content on the various SNSs, the institution, while incorporating peer counsellors and student leaders, should

encourage them to be consistent in posting content on SA so as to normalise their interaction with the topic. It is also imperative for the university to regularly assess the students' preferred content and information needs so as to develop content that will meet these needs and thereby encourage their engagement with the content.

5.4.4 The Influence of Information on Students' Awareness, Attitude, and Practices Regarding SA

5.4.4.1 Influence on Students' Awareness

The fact that the students are not aware of the addictive nature of some substances they may come across while in campus, signifies a need for the University to raise awareness of the substances and their addictive nature. If possible, this should be done when the students report to college as first year students so as to equip them with the knowledge to make informed decisions when they encounter peer pressure that may lead them to initiate use.

5.4.4.2 Influence on Students' Attitude

The content posted by the University regarding SA should incorporate images that the students can use to understand the effects of SA. These can help propagate the avoidance messages and promote negative prototypes that can in turn dissuade the students from SA.

The institution also needs to develop communication strategies and messages aimed at equipping the students with the facts they may need to make informed decisions on how to interact with PWSUD and counter misleading information on SA. This information can influence their attitude, beliefs and practices relating to SA.

5.4.4.3 Influence on Students' Communication Practices

In order to encourage the students to be open to talk about SA, the University should play a socialising role by training and helping the students to develop their communication skills related to healthcare. The institution can also use the SNSs as platforms where the students can be encouraged to freely talk and engage with professionals on issues of SA. Online platforms have been shown to be preferred by

this age group because of the sense of anonymity they provide. Hence, the students can be free to talk about sensitive issues on these platforms.

Peer educators can also be incorporated in the University's communication approaches because of the students' willingness to talk about SA with their peers. They can be encouraged to engage with the peer educators both in official and unofficial settings.

5.4.4.4 Influence on Students' Help-Seeking Practices

Considering that some students fail to seek guidance and counselling services because of fear of indiscretion, mistrust, lack of adequate time and negative attitude towards counselling services (Pere, 2018), means that the University needs to focus on encouraging the students to seek out these services by reassuring them of the ethical principles upheld by relevant offices. Incorporating alternative communication platforms such as SNSs that offer some degree of anonymity can also encourage and reassure the students to seek help from these platforms. The students also need to be made aware of the existence of these sites and encouraged to access them whenever the need arises.

The institution should also ensure that the information on SA is readily available for the students whenever they seek them on the University's official communication platforms. The University administration can consider increasing avenues of information by incorporating the peer leaders to cover the shortage of staff as alluded to by the KIIs, in order to meet the information demands of the students. Through this, the students can be encouraged to seek help from their peers, who in turn can also be able to recommend help for their peers in need of guidance and counselling services.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

The findings of this research were limited to a public university and hence replicable to other public universities in the country. However, since SA is a problem in institutions of higher learning, it is recommended that further research be done on assessing the effectiveness of the communication approaches adopted by private universities in the country. This will provide a broader insight into the issue.

The sustained evolution of digital communication technologies has led to the adoption of new technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) in healthcare and behaviour change communication approaches. It is therefore suggested that further research be done to establish how AI can be incorporated in communication approaches targeting young people with information on SA.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I. QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

Declaration of Consent

I....., the undersigned, consent to participate in this post-graduate degree research investigation to be conducted by Ms. Juliet Oduor. I understand that the information provided will be confidential and protected. I also understand that I may revoke this consent at any time.

Respondent's Signature: _____

INTRODUCTION

Questionnaire ID: _____ Date: _____

Initials of your name: _____

Instructions: *(Please read the instructions given and answer the questions as appropriately as possible).* It is advisable that you read carefully and correctly fill in each section as provided.

1. Which among the following Social Networking Sites do you use? (Tick against those you use)

	Site	Tick
1	Facebook	
2	Twitter/X	
3	WhatsApp	
4	LinkedIn	
5	Pinterest	
6	YouTube	
7	Instagram	
8	Tumblr	
9	Snapchat	
10	Tagged	
11	Yahoo	
12	Tiktok	

2. How frequently do you use the sites?

	Site	Less than once a week	1-3 times a week	3-5 times a week	Once everyday	Up to 3 times a day	Up to 5 times a day	More than 5 times a day
1	Facebook							
2	Twitter/X							
3	WhatsApp							

4	LinkedIn							
5	Pinterest							
6	YouTube							
7	Instagram							
8	Tumblr							
9	Snapchat							
10	Tagged							
11	Yahoo							
12	Tiktok							

3. Why do you use the sites? (You can pick many options, depending on the site)

	Site	For academic (Research, group discussions and class assignment)	To socialize with friends and family (for chatting)	To entertain yourself (Play online games)	To get information (news and topics that interest you)	To follow celebrities	To find, create and share content (eg photos, memes etc)
1	Facebook						
2	Twitter/X						
3	WhatsApp						
4	LinkedIn						
5	Pinterest						
6	YouTube						
7	Instagram						
8	Tumblr						
9	Snapchat						
10	Tagged						
11	Yahoo						
12	Tiktok						

4. What content appeals to you most? (Multiple selection allowed)

	Site	Music	Photos	Memes	Documents (pdf, word)	Videos	Comments	Quizzes
1	Facebook							
2	Twitter/X							
3	WhatsApp							
4	LinkedIn							
5	Pinterest							
6	YouTube							
7	Instagram							
8	Tumblr							
9	Snapchat							
10	Tagged							
11	Yahoo							
12	Tiktok							

5. Please respond to the following statements based on your interactions when using your favourite Social Networking Sites.

		Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1.	When many members of my social networking group like a content (eg photograph, video, meme) then I am likely to like it too.			
2.	When many members of my social networking group share a content (eg photograph, video, meme, quote) then I am likely to share it too.			
3.	I believe that a widely shared and liked content/information means that my friends agree with the message PWM			
4.	I am likely to adopt a certain trend when it has been shared or liked by a majority of my friends			
5.	I am likely to also share my photographs or video when a majority of my friends take part in a trending challenge PWM			
6.	I am likely to view content that has been liked by many of my friends.			
7.	I am likely to view content that has been shared by many of my friends			
8.	I consider information that has been liked and shared by majority of my friends as trustworthy and believable.			

6. Are you aware of any Social Networking Sites operated by the University?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Maybe

7. If yes, which one(s) among the following are you aware of?

	Site	Tick
1	Facebook	
2	Twitter/X	
3.	LinkedIn	
4.	YouTube	
5.	Instagram	

8. Which ones do you follow or like?

	Site	Tick
1	Facebook	
2	Twitter/X	
3.	LinkedIn	
4.	YouTube	
5.	Instagram	
6	WhatsApp	

9. What do you look for when visiting the University's social networking sites (multiple answers are possible).

	Purpose	Tick
	To get information from lecturers and the university relating to exams	
	To create friends / meet fellow students	
	To get information regarding social events organized by the university	
	To feel you belong to the university	
	To share photographs, videos, memes and forwards	

	To pass time when bored	
	To contribute/participate in discussions	
	To get information on health issues	

10. How would you describe the content on the social networking sites run by the University?

- a) Entertaining
- b) Boring
- c) Informative

11. What language do you prefer when using the Social Networking Sites?

- a) English ()
- b) Swahili ()
- c) Sheng ()

End

Thank you for your cooperation and input.

APPENDIX II. PRE-SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR DRUGS AND SUBSTANCE USE

The questionnaire aims at establishing the Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP) of the students in regard to drugs and substance use.

Section A. Demographic information

Section B: Knowledge about drugs and substances

Section C: Attitude towards drugs and substances

Section D: Information on the practices relating to drugs and substance use

DECLARATION OF CONSENT

I....., the undersigned, consent to participate in this post-graduate degree research investigation to be conducted by Ms Juliet Oduor. I understand that the information provided will be confidential and protected. I also understand that I may revoke this consent at any time.

Respondent's Signature: _____

INTRODUCTION

Questionnaire ID: _____ Date: _____

Initials of your name: _____

Instructions: (*Please read the instructions given and answer the questions as appropriately as possible*). It is advisable that you read carefully and correctly fill in each section as provided.

Section A: Demographic Information

- a) What is your gender? Male [] Female []
- b) Which is your age?
- c) What year of study are you? Please tick as appropriate.
 - a) First Year []
 - b) Second Year []
- d) Where do you live when you are in the University?
 - a) On Campus []
 - b) Off Campus []

Section B: Knowledge Questions

1. Which of the following substances do you know or have heard of? (Please tick next to the known substance)

	Substances	Tick
1	Bhang (Cannabis / Marijuana)	
2	Alcohol (beer, wine, spirits)	
3	Tobacco	
4	Shisha	
5	Chang'aa	
6	Cocaine	
7	Heroin	
8	Miraa.	
9	Muratina	
10	Busaa	
11	Prescription drugs (Cough and Cold medicine)	
12	Inhalants (Glue and vaporized solvents, petrol, paint thinner etc)	
13	Sedatives or sleeping pills	

2. From where did you learn about drugs and substance use and abuse? (please tick where appropriate).

	Source of information	Tick
1	Friends	
2	Newspapers	
3	Television	
4	Social media (Facebook, Twitter/X, Snapchat, Instagram etc)	
5	Parents / Guardians	
6	Teachers / Lecturers	
7	Professionals (counsellors, health workers etc)	

8	Siblings (brothers, sisters, cousins etc)	
9	Posters / Billboards	
10	Official government websites such as NACADA	

3. Which of the following substances do you think is addictive? (please tick next to the substance. Multiple answer is possible)

	Substances	Tick
1	Bhang (Cannabis / Marijuana)	
2	Alcohol (beer, wine, spirits, chang'aa, muratina, busaa)	
3	Tobacco (cigarettes, cigar, Kuber)	
4	Cocaine (coke, crack etc)	
5	Heroin	
6	Miraa (Khat)	
7	Prescription drugs (Cough and Cold medicine)	
8	Inhalants (Glue and vaporized solvents, petrol, paint thinner etc)	
9	Sedatives or sleeping pills	

Section C: Attitude and Perception Questions

4. Do you think you can use any of the substances mentioned in 3 above?

1. Yes []
2. No []

5. For the following set of statements, please answer depending on your knowledge of drugs and substances used by either you or those whom you know.

		Agree	Not sure	Disagree
1	Only weak people get addicted to substances.			
2	Only people from urban areas get addicted to substances.			
3	Only people from rural areas get addicted to substances.			

4	Those who use drugs, tobacco and alcohol are very strong.			
5	Those who use drugs and alcohol are cool.			
6	Those who use illicit drugs and substances are sick.			
7	Those who use illicit drugs and substances are criminals.			
8	Addiction is a medical illness and is treatable.			
9	Addiction is preventable.			

Section D: Practices and Communication Questions

6. How frequently do you openly talk about alcohol and drugs addiction with your friends or family members?
 - a) Often []
 - b) Sometimes []
 - c) Rarely []
 - d) Never []
7. Do you know where you can get information about addiction and substance use in the University?
 - a. Yes []
 - b. No []
8. If yes, where can you get the information?
9. Have you ever visited any of the University's social networking sites to find information on drugs and substance use/abuse?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
10. Have you ever come across information on drugs and substance use/abuse on any of the social networking sites operated by the University?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
11. If yes, in which sites? (Please tick below)

	SNS	Tick
1	Facebook	
2	Twitter/X	

3.	LinkedIn	
4.	YouTube	
5.	Instagram	
6	WhatsApp	

12. Would you want to see more content on drugs and substance abuse on the official SNSs used by the University?

- a) Yes
- b) No

End

Thank you for your cooperation and input.

APPENDIX III. SEMI-STRUCTURED ONLINE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDES

GUIDE 1

Objective: To find out the perceptions of the target population regarding the communication platforms used, the message presentation formats and the engagement process.

a) Communication platforms

1. Which among the SNS are your favourites/do you prefer? (ask them to explain why)
2. Why don't you like the others?
3. How easy is it for you to access the content and media platforms?

b) Message presentation format

1. Did you like the information?
(a) If yes, why? (b) If no, why?
2. What other information on drugs and substance use would like to be posted?
3. Was the language used okay?
(a) If yes, why? (b) If no, why?
4. What content do you prefer when online (eg memes, videos, written, forwards etc)? (For each answer, why?)
5. What is your perception of the SA content you shared?

c) Engagement process

1. What are the challenges you encountered, either in connection with the communication platforms, the message posted or the just the whole process?
2. Did you at any time feel uncomfortable sharing your comments, liking or sharing the content? (Ask them to explain why)
3. If the process were to incorporate all students in the university, what do you think and could improve the process?
4. Who did you feel inclined to respond to or engage with?
(a) Everyone (b) Same gender (c) Different gender? (For each answer, why?)

GUIDE 2

Objective: To establish how the information presented impacts on the participants' knowledge, attitude and practices relating to substance use.

a) Knowledge

1. Did the information shared have any impact on your knowledge or awareness of substance use?
(a) If yes, how? (b) If no, why?
2. Do you know at least 5 types of substances that can be abused? (Ask them to name the substances).
3. Do you know where to seek help? (Ask them to explain where).
4. Do you know how to seek help? (Ask them to elaborate).
5. Do you know where to access credible information while online? (Ask them to name a few sites).

b) Attitude (Attitude refers to the tendency to respond negatively or positively towards a certain idea, situation. In the study I will need to establish whether the participants have a positive or negative attitude)

1. Do you consider substance use as okay, and not harmful? (For each answer, why?)
2. Do you think it okay to use some substances? (For each answer, why?)
3. Do you consider it okay to avoid those who use substances? (For each answer, why?)
4. Do you consider it okay to avoid recovering addicts? (For each answer, why?)
5. Do you think you can seek help, or help a friend seek help to their addiction? (For each answer, why?)
6. Do you fear seeking help from a professional when you feel inclined to use illegal substances? (For each answer, why?)
7. Do you think you should not avoid friends and colleagues who are recovering addicts? (For each answer, why?)

c) Practices PWM

1. Did any of you share the content with anyone/your friends outside the group? If yes, what did they think about it?
2. Do you feel capable of sharing your knowledge of substances with your peers/friends?
3. Would you be comfortable seeking help?

4. Do you feel capable of helping your friends who may be using substance? How would you do this?
5. Are you comfortable talking about drugs and substance use with:
(a) Your parents/guardians (b) College mates (c) Church mates (d) Family members such as siblings
6. Do you think peer pressure (both online and offline) plays a role in substance use?
7. Do you think you are able to overcome peer pressure to use substance? If yes, how?
If no how?

APPENDIX IV. KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Objective: To establish the prevalence and patterns of substance use within the institution and communication strategies put in place to mitigate the problem

a) For the Guidance and Counselling Department Representative

1. How does substance use among the students impact their (a) academics (b) social life
2. Which are the most abused substances?
3. What are the sources of the substances? / Where do the students get the substances?
4. Who between the male and female student do you think is most likely to engage in substance use and why?
5. Which year do you think is most likely to engage in substance use and why?
6. Who between campus dweller, off campus (private hostel dwellers) and home dwellers are most likely to engage in substance use and why?
7. Are there any thematic orientation programmes to educate 1st years, upon joining campus, on the effects of substance use?
8. Are there substance use prevention strategies in place? If so, what do they cover?
 - a) Knowledge
 - b) Attitude
 - c) Practice
 - d) Social / behavioural
9. Have any of the strategies incorporated social media and SNS as communication platforms to reach the student? If yes to what extent?
10. How frequently do the students access the guidance and counselling services in relation to substance use?
 - a) Often
 - b) Rarely
 - c) Sometimes
 - d) Consistently
11. Do you think a sustained communication programme focusing on knowledge, attitude and practices can play a role in mitigating substance use among the students?
 - a) If yes, why?
 - b) If no, why?

12. Which among the following topics do you think should be the focus of an intervention and why?

- a) Knowledge / awareness creation. (b) Attitude change. (c) Behavioural/practices change.

13. The University has accounts on various social networking sites. Does the guidance and counselling department have opportunities to update or contribute to these sites?

a) Yes

b) No.

14. If no, do you think the department should be given access to the sites and opportunity to post content and engage with the audiences?

15. Does the department have their own accounts on the social networking sites that students can visit and get information on substance use and abuse?

16. There is a section on the official university website allocated to counselling services. Do you get to upload and update information on substance use? if yes, how often?

17. During the University's health week, does the department get to post content on the university's SNS focusing on substance abuse?

b) For Social Networking Sites / Online Communication Manager

1. How many active accounts does the university have on the various social networking sites?
2. Who manages the sites?
3. Who are the University's primary and secondary target audiences for these sites?
4. What information do you consider important to post or share on the sites? (eg inform on university extra activities, on student activities, exams etc).
5. Did the institution carry out any survey to establish the students' preferred media platforms prior to choosing the various platforms to communicate with the students?
6. Are there provisions on the various SNS for students to participate either by:
 - a) Commenting
 - b) Posting content
 - c) Sharing content
 - d) Liking the posts

7. From your observation, what are the students' preferred means/methods of engagement when they visit the University's various pages on the SNSs?
8. How often do you follow up on comments and/or questions raised on the platforms? (Daily, twice or thrice in a week, once a week, rarely etc?)
9. Is the official website interactive? (Encourages communication and engagement with visitors through the use of interactive elements e.g. quizzes, surveys, polls, animation, calculators, training courses, 360 videos etc) If yes, to what extent? If no, can it be made (more) interactive?
10. Have you considered working with the counselling department when posting on various SNS? If yes, to what extent? Articles on weekly on different topic
11. During the yearly university health week, do you post content on substance use on the various SNS? If yes, which type of content and information? How do the students engage with the content?
12. Is it possible to have a day dedicated for health issues, and specifically substance use issues? If no, why?
13. Is it possible to collaborate / work together with the counselling department so as to post more content focusing on substances and substance abuse?

End

Thank you for your cooperation and input.

APPENDIX V. RESEARCH PERMIT

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