

**THE CONTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON STUDENTS' SELF-ESTEEM: A
CASE STUDY OF UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY (UCU), MUKONO
DISTRICT**

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S23B15/037

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A DEGREE OF BACHELOR
OF SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL ADMINISTRATION OF UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY**

April, 2026



**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
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DECLARATION

I, NAMBOOZO MERCY, declare that this is my original work and has not been submitted to any other university or institution for academic award.

Signature:  Date: 27/ 04/2026

APPROVAL

This is to certify that Namboozo Mercy has written this work under my Supervision and has submitted it for the award of a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work at Uganda Christian University.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rosemary Bwire', with a large circular flourish at the beginning.

Signature:

Date: 27/04/2026

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Table of Contents

DECLARATION	ii
APPROVAL	iii
List of tables.....	vii
ABSTRACT.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY	1
1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY	7
1.5.1 General Objective	7
1.5.2 Specific Objectives	7
1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	7
1.7 SCOPE OF THE STUDY	7
1.7.2 Content Scope.....	8
1.7.3 Time Scope.....	9
1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	9
1.9 Justification of the Research	12
CHAPTER TWO	15
LITERATURE REVIEW	15
2.1 Introduction.....	15
2.2 Examine the social media platforms that university students are engaged in.....	15
2.2.2 TikTok.....	18
2.2.3 Instagram.....	21
2.3.1 Social Effects	24
2.3.3 Psychological Effects.....	26
2.4 To Examine the Measures to Be Taken to Restore the Self-Esteem of University Students .	27
2.4.1 Students.....	27
CHAPTER THREE	34
METHODOLOGY	34
3.1 Introduction.....	34

3.2 Design of Research	34
3.3 Field of Study.....	34
3.4 Data Sources	34
3.5 Population and Sampling Techniques.....	35
3.5.1 Study Population.....	35
3.5.3 Sampling Technique	35
3.6 Variables Definition and Measurement Levels.....	35
3.6.1 Independent Variable: Social Media Usage.....	35
3.7 Procedure for Data Collection	36
3.8 Data Collection Instruments	36
3.9 Reliability and Validity.....	37
Dependability:.....	37
3.10 Analyzing and Processing Data	37
3.11 Ethical Issues	37
3.12 Limitations to the Research Methods Used	37
CHAPTER FOUR.....	38
DATA PRESENTATION.....	38
4.1. Introduction.....	38
4.2.1. Gender of the Respondents	38
4.2.2. Age of the Respondents	38
4.3. University Students' Use of social media	39
4.4. Social media's impact on self-esteem	41
4.5. Steps to Help University Students Regain Their Self-Esteem.....	42
CHAPTER FIVE	44
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	44
5.1. Introduction.....	44
5.2. Bio-data.....	44
5.2.1. Gender of the Respondents	44
5.2.2. Age of the Respondents	45
5.2.3. Year of Study and Program.....	46
5.3. Discussion of Results	46

5.3.1. Social Media Platforms Used by University Students	47
CHAPTER SIX	53
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	53
6.1. Introduction.....	53
6.2. Conclusions.....	53
6.3. Recommendations.....	54
6.4. Conclusion to the Study	56
REFERENCES	57
Appendix 1: Definition of Terms.....	58
Appendix 1: Questionnaires.....	60

List of tables

Table 1: Gender of Respondents.....	38
Table 2: Age of the Respondents	39
Table 3: Social Media Usage among Students	40
Table 4: Effects of social media on Self-Esteem	41
Table 5: Measures to Restore Self-Esteem	42

ABSTRACT

This study examines how social media use contributes to students' self-esteem at Uganda Christian University (UCU), Mukono District. The quick development of social media sites like Instagram, TikTok and WhatsApp has drastically changed how young people engage with one another, especially university students between the ages of 18 and 25. Although social media facilitates communication, academic collaboration, and information sharing, excessive and problematic use has been associated with psychological issues such as low self-esteem, anxiety, depression and subpar academic performance.

The study utilizes a quantitative methodology approach to research. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) will be used in a cross-sectional survey in order to determine the relationship between social media utilization and self-esteem. Students' experiences like that of social comparison, cyberbullying, and other forms of online validation can be better captured using semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

Teenage self-esteem and the overutilization of social media among students in UCU are predicted to be highly and inversely related especially in areas where there is problematic usage and social comparison. The project aims at providing empirical evidence to guide legislative and university authorities in coming up with appropriate strategies to foster healthy utilization of social media.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This paper seeks to explore the attitudes held by UCU students toward their own selves in the context of using social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok. These platforms facilitate communication and learning; however, they also promote social comparisons and foster a drive for digital validation. This paper aims to evaluate the effects of these relationships on self-esteem levels among students, as well as determine practical methods for promoting positive use of social media.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In the current digital era, social media has emerged as one of the most important communication platforms. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2016), social media refers to online platforms that enable users to produce, distribute and trade material, ideas, and information in online communities and networks. Social media sites like Instagram, TikTok and WhatsApp have completely changed how people engage, communicate and show themselves to one another. Over 4.8 billion individuals, or more than 59% of the world's population, actively use social media, according to the Global Digital Report (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2023). Among the most frequent users of these networks are young individuals, particularly college students. Self-esteem is a person's total perception of their own value or worth (Rosenberg, 2017). It shows how people assess their own strengths and self-worth. While low self-esteem is connected to anxiety, sadness, and subpar academic performance, high self-esteem is linked to psychological well-being, confidence and a positive self-image (Orth & Robins, 2019). People are more susceptible to elements that affect how they perceive themselves and build their identities during adolescence and the early stages of adulthood.

Globally, Social media's explosive expansion has sparked worries about its psychological consequences on youth around the world. Social media can facilitate communication, networking and information access, but it can also have a negative impact on users' self-esteem through cyberbullying, social comparison and unattainable beauty standards, according to studies (Vogel

et al., 2016). Many students have a tendency to contrast their lives, looks and accomplishments with the meticulously chosen photos and lifestyles that are displayed online. Low self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy may result from this comparison.

The usage of cellphones and reasonably priced internet services has greatly expanded access to social media in many African nations. With millions of young people actively using digital platforms every day, Africa has seen one of the fastest growth rates in social media usage, according to Statista (2022). Social media is a major source of communication, academic collaboration, entertainment, and social engagement for university students around the continent. However, this increased exposure has also sparked concerns about its effects on the mental health and self-esteem of young adults.

Social media use in Uganda has skyrocketed in recent years due to increasing internet connectivity and the widespread use of smartphones by young people. Over 60% of Ugandans have internet connectivity, according to the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC, 2023), and university students make up a sizable portion of active social media users. Students utilize social media for networking, entertainment, intellectual conversation, and maintaining relationships. Despite these benefits, excessive use has been linked to issues like body image dissatisfaction, negative self-comparison, and online harassment, all of which have a significant negative effect on students' self-esteem. Every day, students at Uganda Christian University in Mukono District use social media. These channels are essential for communication, social interaction, and academic engagement. Conversely, the children could be forced to monitor their digital personas, peer comparisons, and online acceptance due to their growing dependency on social networking sites. These factors may influence how students perceive themselves and their importance socially and academically.

Although many studies have been carried out on the impact of social media on psychological development globally, very few have focused on investigating how social media impacts the self-esteem of students enrolled in Ugandan tertiary institutions, especially in Uganda Christian University. This study will focus on exploring the impact of social media on the self-esteem of students enrolled in Uganda Christian University in Mukono District.

Historical Background

Information and communication technology, especially the creation of social media platforms, have grown dramatically during the past 20 years. Social media platforms have completely changed how people connect socially, communicate, and exchange information. The number of people using social media worldwide rose dramatically from roughly 2.08 billion in 2015 to roughly 2.46 billion in 2016, accounting for more than one-third of the world's population, according to Statista (2016). Social media platforms have grown so quickly that they are now a necessary part of daily life, especially for young people and college students.

The rise in popularity of social media sites like Instagram, TikTok and WhatsApp has affected how young people interact with their peers, display themselves and understand their social identities. Social media can affect users' psychological well-being by influencing how they compare themselves to others online, according to studies (Vogel et al., 2016). Researchers have expressed worries about social media platforms' possible psychological consequences, especially on young people's self-esteem and mental health, despite the fact that they offer chances for networking, communication, and information exchange.

Conceptual Background

Social media (an independent variable) and self-esteem (a dependent variable) are the two main ideas of the study. Kaplan and Haenlein (2016) define social media as web-based programs that let users produce and share information in online groups and networks. Boyd and Ellison (2016) go on to characterize social media as web-based platforms that allow people to establish personal profiles, communicate with others and exchange digital information including messages, videos, and photographs.

Students at universities use a variety of social media sites. For instance, WhatsApp is a mobile messaging program that uses internet access to communicate text messages, audio notes, pictures, videos, and documents (Church & de Oliveira, 2016). With more than one billion users globally by 2016, WhatsApp is one of the most popular communication platforms (Statista, 2016). Instagram is another well-liked platform where users may share images and short videos and communicate via messages, likes, and comments (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Over 500 million

people used Instagram worldwide by 2016, many of whom were young adults and university students.

In a similar vein, TikTok is a social networking site where users may utilize editing tools, music and filters to make and share short films (Anderson, 2016). Because they promote creativity, entertainment and social connection, short-video platforms like TikTok have grown in popularity among young people. Excessive use of social media has been linked to cyberbullying, peer pressure, social comparison and the need for social validation, all of which may have a detrimental effect on students' psychological wellbeing and self-esteem, even though these platforms provide a wealth of opportunities for communication, education and entertainment (Vogel et al., 2016).

Conversely, self-esteem is a person's total assessment of their own value or worth (Rosenberg, 2016). Self-esteem, according to Orth and Robins (2016), is a person's sense of self-assurance, self-respect and self-acceptance, which affects interpersonal relationships, academic achievement and emotional wellbeing.

There are many benefits and disadvantages associated with the influence of social media exposure on pupils' self-esteem. For instance, Vogel et al. (2016) noted that when social media was used by individuals for comparing themselves with others, their self-esteem was generally poor. In the same vein, Fardouly et al. (2016) reported that when young individuals were exposed to pictures with idealized content on social media websites, their self-esteem and body image could be negatively affected. On the contrary, positive experiences such as supportive comments from peers could boost self-esteem.

Theoretical Background

The present research is based on the Social Comparison Theory first presented by Festinger (1954). According to this theory, individuals are likely to evaluate their skills, values, and opinions by comparing themselves to others. Individuals frequently compare their appearance, behaviors, and accomplishments to the chosen images and stories that other social media users post. Such comparisons can influence how users view their value and social standing. If people feel that they are lower than others, their self-worth will suffer. It should be noted that social media sites such as Instagram and TikTok present idealized images and stories that promote continuous comparison among users and negatively influence the mental state of young people.

Therefore, Social Comparison Theory constitutes a suitable theoretical background for analyzing the impact of social media on college students' self-esteem.

Contextual Background

There has been an immense rise in the adoption of social media across the globe, especially among the youth and university students. Statistics from Pew Research Center reveal that more than 90% of the youth population uses social media (Anderson, 2016). Although there are numerous ways to communicate through social media sites, scholars have raised concerns about the psychological impact of these sites on the youth population.

The use of social media has witnessed tremendous growth across Africa due to increased use of smartphones and better Internet connectivity.

According to the International Telecommunication Union (2016), there is an increase in use of social media by youths in Africa because of the increased internet use from 21% in 2015 to approximately 25% in 2016. Social media platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp are popular amongst African youths where they engage socially and for activism purposes (Mutsvairo, 2016). However, social comparisons, peer pressures, and cyberbullying by youths have been associated with social media usage (Bosch, 2016).

Social media and internet usage have increased significantly in Uganda too. According to Uganda Communications Commission (UCC, 2016), there were more than 14 million internet users in Uganda in 2016, whereby most of the internet users were the youth population and college students. Students normally make use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok.

Because they have easy access to cellphones and internet services, university students are among the most active users of social media. University students use social media platforms for communication, academic discussions and amusement for two to three hours a day on average, according to Junco (2016). However, students' self-perception, emotional health and self-esteem may be impacted by excessive social media use.

Even while social media usage among Ugandan university students is rising, little research has explicitly looked at how social media affects students' self-esteem, especially at private institutions like Uganda Christian University in Mukono District.

To have a clear picture of the psychological well-being of students and promote proper use of social media sites, this research examines the impact of social media on the self-esteem of students at Uganda Christian University.

1.3 Problem Statement

The advent of social media has seen a significant rise over the past decade in most parts of the world and is now regarded as an essential part of people's everyday lives, especially among the young generation and college-going students. The number of social media users across the globe went up from around 2.08 billion in 2015 to 2.46 billion in 2016, according to Statista (2016). Social networking sites such as WhatsApp, users can share photos, videos, and personal stories while interacting with others through comments, likes, and messages.

Despite the fact that these platforms provide opportunities for networking, communication, and information exchange, academics have expressed concerns about the potential psychological effects on users, particularly young people. Excessive usage of social media can expose users to peer pressure, cyberbullying, social comparison, and unreasonable expectations, all of which can negatively impact their psychological well-being and self-esteem, according to studies (Vogel et al., 2016). Self-esteem is essential to students' academic success, emotional stability, and social relationships since it embodies a person's complete sense of their own worth (Orth & Robins, 2016).

The relationship between the use of social media among university students and self-esteem has been demonstrated by various global researches. For example, a strong negative association between the self-esteem of university students and social media addiction was reported by Awobamise, Jarrar, and Nweke (2022), which suggests that high use of social media might lead to low self-esteem.

Even though several adverse consequences associated with the use of social media have been observed in previous researches, the extent to which such effects can be particularly harmful for university students remains unclear. Research shows that self-esteem among university students can be affected due to their improper use of social media.

Therefore, university students, who could be particularly vulnerable to the influence of online interactions, should pay close attention to this problem. With the focus on private universities such as Uganda Christian University in Mukono District, this research will explore the impact of social media on self-esteem among university students.

1.4 The study's objective

This study intends to investigate the effects of social media on students' self-esteem at Uganda Christian University in order to generate empirical data that may help academic institutions, counsellors, and legislators encourage responsible social media use and enhance students' psychological wellbeing.

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This section provides a one-sentence summary of the study's overall and specific goals. The students set the entire research process and assist the investigator in concentrating on the most important facets of the study.

1.5.1 General Objective

To examine the contribution social media on students' self-esteem at Uganda Christian University.

1.5.2 Specific Objectives

1. Examine the social media platforms that university students are engaged in.
2. To identify the effects of social media platforms on the self-esteem of university students.
3. To examine the measures to be taken to restore the self-esteem of university students.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study's leading research questions are presented in this section. The process of gathering and analyzing data is guided by these questions, which are directly derived from the research objectives. The purpose of research questions is to offer broad, detailed, and descriptive information regarding the research problem. They express what the researcher hopes to learn from the study and provide a clear explanation of the investigation's goal. The study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What social media platforms are university students most engaged in?
2. What are the effects of social media platforms on the self-esteem of university students?
3. What measures can be taken to restore the self-esteem of university students?

1.7 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Three components will make up the study's scope: the geographical scope, the time scope, and the content scope.

1.7.1 Geographic Range

This study will take place in Uganda Christian University, an institution located in the Central region of the Mukono District in Uganda. The Mukono District is located about 26 km east of Uganda's capital city, Kampala, at latitude 0.3533° N and longitude 32.7550° E. This district is strategically bordered by Kampala District from the western side, Luweero District from the northern part, Buikwe District from the eastern side, and Kalangala District and Lake Victoria from the southern border of Mukono (Uganda Bureau of Statistics [UBOS], 2016).

There are several universities located in the Mukono District, such as Uganda Christian University, which makes the area an important administrative and academic center in Uganda. There is heavy use of social media websites among the students of UCU due to higher rates of internet and mobile phone penetration in the area (Anderson, 2016; Statista, 2016). This means that there are many students who use social media, and hence the psychological impact of the use of such platforms can be investigated. Since prior studies done in Uganda have established that students from central districts in Uganda tend to use social media both socially and academically, Mukono becomes an important case here (Muhammad, 2015; Tayebwa, 2015).

1.7.2 Content Scope

These three precise objectives provide an excellent basis for conducting research on the effects of social media on the self-esteem of students at Uganda Christian University. These three platforms of social media are TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp, which college-going students use most often (Anderson, 2016; Statista, 2016).

Objective 1: Examine the social media platforms that university students are engaged in.

It will help us understand how often students use social media and what platforms they prefer to interact on. From available research literature, it is clear that social media is widely used by students as a means of entertainment, coordination and communication. For example, Instagram and TikTok serve mostly as socializing mediums and entertainment, while WhatsApp serves mostly as communication and coordination tools.

Objective 2: To identify the effects of social media platforms on the self-esteem of university students.

The second objective focuses on the impact of social media usage on the self-esteem of students from a psychological perspective. This is because social media has the ability to influence people positively as well as negatively. The positives include instilling self-confidence among others. The negatives include exposure to social comparisons, cyber bullying, and socializing pressure, which result in decreased self-esteem (Vogel et al., 2016; Nabunya & Ssewamala, 2016).

Objective 3: To examine the measures to be taken to restore the self-esteem of university students.

This objective is about looking for ways to improve or restore the self-confidence of these learners in relation to their use of social media. This may be through measures aimed at improving social media usage among students, building their consciousness regarding the psychological implications of using social media, and others.

1.7.3 Time Scope

For instance, the research will consider information drawn from literature, data, and evidence collected between 2015 and 2026 to make sure that the trends regarding social media use and their psychological implications among college students have been covered adequately. Starting in 2015, there was an unprecedented surge in the number of individuals using social media across the globe because of the prevalence of smartphones and mobile internet services (Statista, 2016). Social media sites such as Instagram and WhatsApp were the predominant modes of socialization used by youth at the time. Although WhatsApp had over 1 billion active users across the world in 2016, Instagram had emerged as one of the most popular media for social interactions (Statista, 2016; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016).

In the early 2020s, emerging social media platforms such as TikTok grew quickly in popularity, especially amongst young adults, students attending university (Statista, 2023). Such social media created new digital links by means of using visuals, algorithms, and social evaluations. The negative impacts of social media usage, such as peer pressure, anxiety, social comparison, and self-esteem problems, had a greater effect on young adults and university students in particular during the period from 2016 to 2025, as proven by the literature review (Vogel et al., 2016; Nabunya & Ssewamala, 2012). Thus, extending the period till 2026 allows for considering all the latest changes in terms of scientific knowledge regarding this issue.

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The relevance of the study in knowledge domain and the specific problem the research attempts to address is discussed in this section. This study makes a contribution to the development of knowledge on the influence of social media on psychology of university students, particularly on their self-esteem.

The importance of the study lies in its contribution to the existing gap on growing concerns about the psychological impact of social media use among university students, specifically, on their self-esteem, which is necessary for psychological well-being, academic performance, and overall wellness.

Improvement of Knowledge on Psychological Impact of social media

The advent of social media such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp has led to a fundamental change in the way young people interact, communicate, and establish their identity. The prevalence of social media usage among young individuals reached 2.08 billion in 2015, increasing significantly to more than 3.6 billion by 2025 (Statista, 2025). Growing concerns about the psychological implications of social media usage, specifically on self-esteem, are due to rapid increase in its popularity.

Vogel, Rose, Roberts, and Eckles (2016) found a very high correlation between low self-esteem and regular comparison on visual media such as Instagram, which entails comparing oneself to images that are often idealistic and do not represent reality. Young adults may be prone to anxiety, hopelessness, and inferiority complex due to such constant comparison; the frequency of such behavior may be expected to increase from 2016 to 2025, with the rise of socially oriented platforms with visual media elements such as TikTok.

As Fardouly et al. (2016) suggest, particularly young people are more prone to body dissatisfaction and poor self-evaluation due to exposure to selectively edited photographs in social media. Hence, it is vital to understand the impacts of young people's intensive use of social media on their psychological development and sense of value.

Thus, this study fills a substantial gap in literature regarding Uganda specifically by focusing on the impact of social media use in relation to psychological growth and self-esteem at Uganda Christian University, since most of the studies done before were concerned with academic performance.

Educational Practices, Counselling and Policy

A variety of parties could greatly benefit from this research.

University administrators and counsellors: Administrators of institutions, counselors, and advisors within these educational establishments will be able to develop specific wellness and support programs for students once they become aware of how social media influences students' self-esteem. For example, information suggesting that Instagram causes more social comparisons can be used to develop programs aimed at increasing resilience, confidence, and healthy social media usage.

Educators and curriculum developers: Research results can be helpful for designing a particular curriculum for improving students' emotional intelligence and digital literacy. As noted by Junco (2016), while social media can motivate students to engage in academic collaborations, it can also distract them from their educational goals. Teaching students' skills that enable them to manage social media use positively is likely to increase their engagement in academics and improve their overall wellbeing.

Policy-makers and mental health professionals: Findings from the current study will provide policy-makers from the spheres of public health and education with updated information concerning mental consequences of using social media. It is crucial to address these problems since global statistics shows that young social media users experience higher levels of psychological distress (Vogel et al., 2016; Statista, 2025).

Contribution to Local and International Literature: This study contributes to the increasing body of empirical literature that explores the connection between social media usage and its psychological effects. Not much literature on this topic exists in Sub-Saharan Africa and Uganda specifically, as most literature on this topic from across the globe has been developed through research in North America and Europe. The contribution of this study will help provide insights that can be used to compare studies conducted across the world, focusing on Uganda Christian University.

For example, based on Statista (2025) global figures, social media usage among young adults peaked by 2025, especially the usage of video-based platforms like TikTok. However, there is a lack of insight into the effects of these trends on the self-esteem of students enrolled in universities in Africa. This study can contribute to addressing that lack of insight.

1.9 Justification of the Research

The urgent need to address the psychological effects of social media, particularly WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok, on Ugandan university students' self-esteem is what spurred this study. Despite the fact that over 3.6 billion people use social media worldwide (Statista, 2025), little is known about how these platforms affect students' psychosocial wellbeing in the particular cultural setting of Ugandan private universities like Uganda Christian University.

As per the most recent findings, consistent exposure to ideal images leads to low self-worth and body dissatisfaction (Vogel et al., 2016; Fardouly et al., 2016). However, locally relevant data remains scarce, with most studies focusing on academics instead of psychology. The relevance of this study is that it provides local evidence in order to help the unique emotional issues of Ugandan young people in the current digital world.

The significance of the study is in providing insight into online risks such as bullying, addiction to social validation, and social comparisons for diverse groups who would like to understand and reduce the impact of social media on the children. Social workers would be able to formulate culturally appropriate interventions aimed at counselling and building resilience among the psychologically vulnerable students.

With regard to the high level of social media activity among young people globally (Statista, 2025; Pew Research Centre, 2018), the results can be used by decision-makers to develop recommendations for youth, safe online frameworks, and effective digital literacy programs that foster healthy social media usage habits.

The exploration of the influence of social media on mental health, relationships, and academic achievement in an African context provides missing literature gaps and serves as the foundation for further theoretical and empirical research (Muhammad, 2015; Tayebwa, 2015; Nabunya & Ssewamala, 2016). Taking all factors into account, the research contributes essential data for counselling, policymaking, and educational processes to ensure academic success and wellbeing in an age of social media.

Literature-Based Evidence for Justification

In demonstrating the psychological risks associated with online interactions, the study brings together local and global literature to provide a compelling rationale for its existence. Numerous global studies carried out by Vogel, Rose, Roberts, and Eckles (2016) and Fardouly et al. (2016) indicate a connection between constant comparisons made via social media, especially visual-oriented social media platforms, and reduced self-respect, higher body dissatisfaction, and increased psychological distress. This rationale is further reinforced locally by the research of Junco (2016) and Nabunya & Ssewamala (2016), which indicates that while social media may support collaboration among students, it serves as an anxiety-inducing and self-esteem-reducing factor for young Ugandans. In bringing together these two perspectives, the study addresses a significant gap by moving from general studies concerning internet usage to those focusing specifically on the impact of idealized online content on the perception of oneself and one's mental well-being among university students in Uganda.

1.10 Theoretical and conceptual framework

In this part, variables are described as well as the conceptual and theoretical frameworks for the research are discussed.

Conceptual Framework

In the conceptually structured model for this research, the interrelationships between the students' self-esteem (dependent variable) and the use of social media (independent variable) have been presented.

Use of social media (independent variable): These may include things like:

Regular use of social media.

Type of social media being used, for example, Instagram, Tiktok, and WhatsApp.

Online interactions, for example, likes, comments, and shares.

Exposure to peers or internet content.

Self-esteem of students (dependent variable): Students' self-respect or degree of self-confidence. It can be seen from the study that students' engagement in social media activities may play a

positive or negative role in determining self-esteem among them. Although such activities as bullying or social comparisons can reduce self-esteem, positive activities on social networking sites may increase the level of self-esteem.

Furthermore, there may be several other factors affecting the relationship between the use of social media and self-esteem.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The first, second, and third primary objectives of conducting the literature review are centered around how the use of social media influences students' self-esteem at Uganda Christian University (UCU) in Mukono district. The rapid growth of social media usage has transformed the way students communicate, acquire information, and develop themselves as individuals. All these aspects are influenced by how prevalent social media is in students' everyday lives.

By 2025, there will be over 3.6 billion social media users worldwide, up from over 2.08 billion in 2015 (Statista, 2025). Since young adults make up the majority of users, this development is especially noticeable among them. Between 2015 and 2025, social media use in Africa increased significantly, particularly among urban and semi-urban university students (Nabunya & Ssewamala, 2016). Social media is now a major aspect of student life in Uganda due to the country's growing smartphone prevalence and reasonably priced internet connection.

The most popular social media sites among Ugandan, local, and foreign university students are as follows:

Because of its price, usability, and capacity to support peer interaction, group debates, and academic communication, WhatsApp is the most popular platform. TikTok usage among young adults is rapidly expanding, particularly in terms of entertainment and short-form films that influence trends and identity. Instagram is a well-liked platform for sharing visual photos that influence people's self-perceptions, lifestyle comparisons, and social validation.

2.2 Examine the social media platforms that university students are engaged in.

Students use a variety of social media platforms, such as

2.2.1 WhatsApp

With more than 2.78 billion active users as of early 2025, WhatsApp has solidified its place as the most popular messaging app among college students worldwide (Statista, 2025). Due to its instant messaging features, end-to-end encryption, affordability, and capacity to facilitate large group

interactions, it has become a vital tool for student communication, socialization, and academic collaboration. Whereas more contemporary literature from Yeboah and Ewur (2023) underscores its relevance to the current generation, previous research conducted by Church and de Oliveira (2013) underscored its timeliness and limited data utilization. The site is popular in Uganda, where people between the ages of 18 and 25 use it for about 72% of their social media traffic (Uganda Communications Commission, 2024). Its prevalence among college students is further supported by studies by Kigozi and Namutebi (2022), which makes it an important platform for investigating its psychological impacts, notably on self-esteem.

However, studies show that using WhatsApp excessively is linked to detrimental psychological effects like stress, digital weariness, and low self-esteem. Elhai et al. (2017), who connected problematic smartphone use to anxiety and depression, corroborated Samaha and Hawi's (2016) conclusion that excessive messaging lowers self-esteem. Students who use messaging apps for more than four hours a day express much poorer self-esteem, according to more recent research by Sha et al. (2023). Ssewanyana et al. (2023) discovered that obsessive WhatsApp use among college students in Uganda is linked to anxiety, lower academic self-efficacy, and lower self-worth, especially among first-year students. Moreover, according to Twenge et al. (2022), reliance on digital communication has reduced face-to-face interaction, and this has contributed to superficial relationships that adversely affect self-esteem. Moreover, since WhatsApp uses groups, there is more room for gossiping and social comparison, which may negatively influence students' self-esteem. Although Yang et al. (2021) found out that prolonged comparison leads to declines in self-esteem, Vogel et al. (2014) demonstrated how social comparison via digital media platforms impacts self-esteem. For instance, many individuals share achievements, social gatherings, and important life events on digital media sites, which may make others feel inadequate.

This phenomenon is explained by Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory, whereas Appel et al. (2020) emphasize how the type and frequency of comparisons affect their psychological impact.

According to Kigozi and Namutebi (2022), exposure to peers' achievements on WhatsApp lowers self-esteem in Uganda. Furthermore, Nabirye et al. (2023) discovered that students' emotions of social isolation and humiliation are exacerbated by gossip and the quick dissemination of messages within WhatsApp groups.

Another major issue hurting students' self-esteem is cyberbullying on WhatsApp. Kowalski et al. (2014) found a connection between cyberbullying and low self-esteem, and Zhu et al. (2021) verified via meta-analysis that these experiences are linked to psychological discomfort and depression.

According to Patchin and Hinduja (2022), it is challenging to keep an eye on damaging exchanges via WhatsApp due to its private character. According to Nabunya et al. (2023), 41% of university students in Uganda reported experiencing cyberbullying between 2020 and 2023, which included exclusion from groups and the spread of rumors. Cyberbullying via messaging platforms is an increasing problem at East African colleges, according to the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2023), which emphasizes the need for institutional solutions.

Additionally, new dynamics of self-presentation and validation-seeking have been brought about by WhatsApp's Status function. Gonzales and Hancock (2011) discovered that, depending on the feedback one receives, one's online self-presentation can affect one's self-esteem. Ephemeral content boosts validation-seeking behaviors, according to Meier and Schäfer (2023).

They often provide selective information about themselves in an attempt to portray their best selves, and little criticism received could lead them to perceive themselves as inadequate. Self-esteem is viewed as a dynamic process by Hancock et al. (2019) because of the use of metrics such as views in digital media. As indicated by Kibona and Mgya (2015) and Turyamureeba and Ssekamatte (2024), students' emotions and self-esteem in Uganda are affected depending on their reaction to their status updates. This is referred to as a "digital treadmill" by Montag et al. (2021) since frequent posting and feedback cycles cause psychological exhaustion.

Despite these negative impacts, WhatsApp positively affects pupils' self-esteem. According to Oh et al. (2014) and Best et al. (2014), social media sites may increase social support and group belonging. The mental well-being of individuals is enhanced by WhatsApp chat groups, especially when they experience loneliness, according to Gilmour et al. (2020). Huckins et al. (2020) found that students who used WhatsApp to keep in touch throughout the COVID-19 pandemic performed better mentally.

As noted by Muwanguzi et al. (2022), WhatsApp usage in communicating with relatives and friends in Uganda resulted in higher feelings of self-worth and provision of more social support.

Moreover, WhatsApp academic communities promote collaborative learning as well as contribute to academic self-efficacy, as highlighted by Ssempebwa et al. (2021).

To conclude, a wide range of studies conducted during 2016 and 2025 reveal a complex nature of the effects of WhatsApp usage on the self-esteem of college students. Among the most common channels through which WhatsApp affects self-esteem are social comparison, cyberbullying, seeking validation, and social support. WhatsApp usage can positively affect students' wellbeing and promote their feelings of connectedness, while excessive and negative use can reduce self-esteem. In order to mitigate such an effect, Schilder et al. (2021) recommend implementing media literacy interventions among other approaches. At the same time, Valkenburg et al. (2022) highlight individual differences that affect children differently. The initiative proposed by NITA-U (2024) and recommendations by the Royal Society for Public Health (2023) demonstrate the need for digital well-being interventions in Uganda. Taking into account all these facts, a comprehensive approach involving educational institutions, legislators, and students is needed.

2.2.2 TikTok

As a result of its fast-growing number of users estimated at 1.92 billion by 2025, TikTok can be referred to as one of the most influential social media networks on the planet (DataReportal, 2025). College students aged between 18 and 25 find TikTok highly attractive due to its video-based content. While Montag et al. (2021) verified that TikTok's design encourages high engagement and psychological dependency, Anderson and Jiang (2018) observed that video-based platforms engage youthful users more strongly because of their immersive and visually engaging nature. TikTok usage has grown dramatically in Uganda, with a 134% increase among youth between 2020 and 2024 (Uganda Communications Commission, 2024).

The platform is used by students for self-expression, amusement, and even academic and professional reasons (Nassanga & Mwesigwa, 2023). TikTok has distinct psychological consequences on users since, in contrast to established platforms, it primarily depends on algorithmic suggestions rather than social networks (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022).

The impact of TikTok on self-perception and body image is a significant worry in the literature. TikTok-specific research has confirmed Fardouly and Vartanian's (2016) findings that exposure to idealised images on social media causes body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem. Students who

often interact with appearance-focused information express decreased self-esteem, according to Rodgers et al. (2020), and Harriger et al. (2023) showed that even brief exposure to such content might have a detrimental impact on body satisfaction.

Unrealistic appearance standards are amplified by TikTok's concentration on visual content, beauty trends, and filters. Ahimbisibwe et al. (2022) observed that extended use of TikTok increased body dissatisfaction among female university students in Uganda, while Nabirye and Openjuru (2023) identified similar impacts among male students, especially with regard to fitness and physique aspirations.

Additionally, pupils' self-esteem is greatly influenced by TikTok's algorithm. Based on user interactions, the "For You Page" (FYP) consistently displays personalized content, which frequently reinforces preexisting fears (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). While Boers et al. (2019) observed that endless scrolling increases exposure to aspirational information, Kross et al. (2021) discovered that passive intake of such content causes reductions in well-being and self-esteem. In Uganda,

According to Mwesigwa and Okello (2023), students who watched more than two hours of TikTok material every day had much lower self-esteem than those who were active makers. In a similar vein, Ssewanyana et al. (2024) discovered that students who already had poor self-esteem were more susceptible to unfavorable comparisons made by algorithms, which led to a vicious cycle of diminishing self-worth.

Students' self-esteem is further impacted by the quest for virality on TikTok. According to Zuo and Wang (2019), follower counts, likes, and views are frequently internalized as indicators of one's own value. When content does well, students' self-esteem may temporarily increase, and when it does not, it may sharply drop.

According to research by Vogel et al. (2014) and Nesi and Prinstein (2019), relying too much on online approval can result in brittle and erratic self-esteem. According to McLean et al. (2022), a "viral hangover" occurs when initial success is followed by disappointment when following content doesn't garner the same level of interaction. While Mukasa et al. (2024) discovered that continuous monitoring of performance indicators contributed to variable self-worth, Kafeero and Mugerwa (2022) reported instances in Uganda where pupils had decreased self-esteem following

low involvement. University students' problems with self-esteem are also exacerbated by TikTok's challenge culture. These difficulties frequently include displays of lifestyle, appearance, or physical performance that may not be available to every student. While the World Health Organization (2022) expressed worries about detrimental problems affecting mental health, Nesi and Prinstein (2015) pointed out that such performative pressures force pupils to seek social acceptability. Students who thought they couldn't live up to these expectations had lower self-esteem, according to Jarman et al. (2022). According to Tumwesigye and Namatovu (2022), pupils in Uganda who were unable to engage because of cultural or socioeconomic limitations felt inferior and alienated.

According to Okware et al. (2024), socioeconomic differences also lead to a "digital class divide," in which kids from less affluent backgrounds have poorer self-esteem when compared to their wealthier peers.

Despite these difficulties, pupils' self-esteem is positively impacted by TikTok. According to Weinstein (2018), artistic self-expression on social media fosters competence and identity development, which raises self-esteem. Students can produce and distribute material using TikTok's capabilities, which promotes self-efficacy (Uhls et al., 2017). Active content producers report increased self-esteem and a stronger digital identity, according to Mascheroni and Vincent (2023). Furthermore, TikTok communities offer venues for belonging, support, and common interests (Charoensukmongkol, 2022). While Mukasa and Kiweewa (2022) emphasized the benefits of communities promoting body positivity and mental health awareness, Namulondo and Byaruhanga (2023) discovered that students in Uganda who used TikTok for educational and cultural material expressed improved self-esteem.

Furthermore, Ssentongo and Mukiibi (2024) found that students' self-esteem had increased due to being recognized through culturally relevant material.

In summary, studies conducted between 2016 and 2025 indicate that TikTok has a complex influence on the self-esteem of college students. The positive impacts stem from proactive, imaginative, and authentic interactions, while the negative impacts are associated with appearance-related comparisons, passive use, and validation measures (Verduyn et al., 2020). As per Valkenburg et al. (2022), these impacts vary depending on social contexts and individual differences. According to Nassanga and Mwesigwa (2023), intervention is essential in Uganda because of the specific problems arising from the relationship between the local context and the content online. To promote the critical use of social media among students, the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2023) recommends including digital literacy within the curriculum. Colleges need to develop specific strategies to mitigate TikTok's complex impact on college students' self-esteem, such as mental health services and digital wellness programs.

2.2 3 Instagram

As per 2025 estimates, there will be approximately 2.35 billion monthly active users of Instagram globally, making it one of the most popular and psychologically important social media sites among college students (Statista, 2025). The platform, with its picture-based format that includes Stories, Reels, images, and thoughtfully selected profiles, affects how young people build their online persona. In addition, due to its negative influence on body image, FOMO, poor quality sleep, and self-esteem, Instagram has been rated as one of the worst platforms for mental wellbeing by multiple studies such as those conducted by the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH, 2017; 2023). The usage of Instagram has risen considerably among university students in Uganda from around 45% in 2019 to above 63% in 2023 (Namutebi et al., 2023), especially in urban universities. Due to its emphasis on aspirational aspects, it significantly influences perceptions regarding self and others.

The most prominent factor through which Instagram impacts the self-esteem of the user is the social comparison process. Research indicates that the platform presents users with idealistic images of others' life highlights, including interpersonal relationships, achievements, vacations, and money-related successes

This is likely to lead the students into believing that other individuals are happier or more successful than themselves (Chou & Edge, 2012; Appel et al., 2020). The ongoing comparisons have been tied to a drop in self-esteem in longitudinal studies (Yang et al., 2021).

This is evidenced by a study conducted in Uganda where it was revealed that the majority of the students consider themselves inferior compared to their counterparts based on what happens on Instagram (Namutebi et al., 2023). The students coming from low socioeconomic status are the most affected.

On the same note, another area that has been extensively researched in relation to its impact on self-esteem is the influence of Instagram on body image. Especially for the female students, this has often been linked with low self-esteem and dissatisfaction with one's body (Tiggemann & Slater, 2017; Fardouly et al., 2017).

The widespread practice of applying filters and using image editing applications fosters unachievable beauty standards, leading to the development of what is known as "Snapchat dysmorphia" where one becomes unsatisfied with one's appearance (Harriger et al., 2023). In the same manner, similar trends have been observed in Uganda, where students' dissatisfaction increased due to exposure to Western ideals of attractiveness which are contradictory to their cultural identity (Ssekamatte et al., 2021). Besides, the increasing trend of exposure to idealised body types has been found to influence male students (Ninsiima et al., 2024).

Moreover, variations in levels of self-respect become intensified by the mechanism of quantitative social affirmation offered on the platform in the form of likes, followers, and comments. Studies have found that students tend to measure their self-worth based on the level of activity their posts receive (Burrow & Rainone, 2017). Although increased activity is associated with positive feelings about oneself, poor activity results in the feeling of exclusion and inferiority. Measures taken by Instagram, such as not displaying like counts, did not have any lasting effect as users find alternative methods of measuring popularity (Likes & Tiggemann, 2023).

For the sake of maintaining a good digital identity as well as their self-respect, some students in Uganda have even gone ahead and purchased fake followers for themselves (Okware & Nantege, 2024).

FOMO or the fear of missing out is another key way in which Instagram affects self-esteem. The fear arises since users can miss out on meaningful activities owing to the social nature of the platform and its ability to provide information in real time (Przybylski et al., 2013). As per the literature, students suffering from FOMO as a result of their experiences on Instagram end up being lonely, with low self-esteem and high levels of social anxiety (Baker et al., 2016; Tandon et al., 2022). Due to visible socioeconomic divides, students compare themselves to others with better economic conditions when traveling and enjoying their leisure times (Okware & Nantege, 2022). The increased social interaction post-pandemic has led to an increased level of self-depreciation (Ssewanyana et al., 2024).

However, when used properly, Instagram can also serve to offer opportunities to increase one's self-respect. According to studies, it is possible to improve one's self-worth and belonging through authentic self-expression, creativity, and meaningful interactions via the application (Dumas et al., 2017; Weinstein, 2018). College students who post about their achievements, cultures, and current social issues often feel much more motivated and confident. Social media platforms which encourage art, culture, and mental wellness have helped many pupils in Uganda increase their identity and self-awareness (Ssentongo & Mukiibi, 2023; Ninsiima & Turyatamba, 2022). In other words, what matters most is how the application is being utilized.

Summarizing all of the above, one can conclude that the studies of 2016 to 2025 prove that Instagram has a complex influence on the self-respect of college students. Positively, the application influences individuals whose utilization of the platform was characterized as proactive, authentic, and community-centered, while the negative aspects appear mostly due to passive utilization, social comparisons, appearance-related activity, and validation measures. Under the differential susceptibility theory (Valkenburg et al., 2022), factors such as social environment and personality traits affect these findings; thus, all students are not affected in the same manner. In Uganda, the problem becomes more complex due to the interaction between its socio-cultural context and the global trend towards digitization. To enable students to benefit from Instagram and maintain healthy self-esteem, universities are encouraged to offer courses on media literacy and digital well-being services (UNESCO, 2023).

2.3 To identify the effects of social media platforms on the self-esteem of university students.

2.3.1 Social Effects

Many scholars have examined how the use of social media affects self-esteem in terms of social comparison and the need for validation through the Internet. According to Tandoc Edson C. et al. (2015), self-esteem fluctuates in cases where there is unmet expectation from depending on likes, comments, and followers for personal worthiness. Similar to this, Leon Festinger (1954) offers a fundamental explanation through Social Comparison Theory that people naturally compare themselves to others, a tendency that is exacerbated by social media and frequently leads to feelings of inadequacy among students. Social networking sites foster situations in which users continuously compare themselves to others, frequently on the basis of carefully chosen and idealised content.

Additional research emphasizes the detrimental effects of excessive social media use on students' social welfare.

Social media addiction is associated with low self-esteem, lower life satisfaction, and emotional distress, as found in research conducted by Nadim Hawi and Maya Samaha (2016). In a similar vein, Jean Twenge (2017) argues that teenagers spending too much time on their gadgets suffer from poor psychological health, particularly low self-esteem. Larry D. Rosen (2013) explains that overusing social networking platforms reduces the face-to-face interactions necessary for fostering positive self-concept.

On the other hand, numerous scholars highlight that, through active usage, social media can enhance self-esteem and promote interpersonal relations. Philippe Verduyn et al. (2017) indicate that activities like sending messages and joining discussions foster social connectivity and enhance wellbeing. Online groups provide emotional support and validation, boosting self-confidence, according to Sohail Saiphoo and Zahra Vahedi (2019). Moreover, based on Joseph B. Walther's (1996) Social Information Processing Theory, social interactions in the virtual world may eventually lead to strong ties and increase users' self-esteem.

Nevertheless, students' self-esteem is jeopardized due to passive consumption and poor online experiences. According to the findings of Kross et al. (2013), passive browsing through social media correlates with lower levels of life satisfaction and wellbeing. Similarly, Lenhart (2015) argues that children's self-esteem and confidence suffer greatly from being exposed to online harassment and negative comments on social media. Thus, based on the results obtained above, social media usage offers opportunities for interaction; however, the effects of such online activity on the self-esteem of students are influenced heavily by whether it is done actively or passively, and thus, positive or negative respectively.

2.3.2 Physical Effects

Excessive use of digital technology devices, especially shortly before bedtime, is related to poor quality of sleep, leading to higher levels of psychological distress and reduced self-esteem, according to Twenge et al. (2018). Sleeping disorders affect such important psychological aspects as emotion control, attention span, and concentration. All of those aspects are essential to maintaining high self-esteem levels among young people. Lack of sleep-in students They will more likely experience fatigue, decreased productivity, and dissatisfaction with themselves, thus reducing their self-respect. The negative impact of long-time screen usage includes increased sedentary behaviors, leading to adverse effects on the body. College students who often interact through social media are usually inactive, leading to increased chances of weight gain, poor fitness levels, and overall physical discomfort.

Body perception among students may change because of these physical impacts, potentially affecting their self-respect and confidence levels. The findings by Przybylski and Weinstein (2017) show that heavy internet usage tends to substitute constructive actions such as physical exercises and outdoor activities, which are critical in enhancing psychological and physical well-being.

Eye fatigue and strain, often caused by extended computer use, represent another significant physical effect. Headaches, blurred visions, and eye pain are among the common consequences associated with long hours of scrolling, exposure to intense light, and infrequent blinks. Physical issues such as those mentioned above may reduce academic success among students and lead to low self-worth and competence.

A student who consistently engages with beauty-based messages would eventually suffer from poor body image, which is related directly to low self-worth, as noted by Fardouly et al. (2018). Social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok often display unrealistic beauty standards via filtered pictures, which might lead students to feel the need to meet these standards, ultimately making them unsatisfied with their body images. Engaging with such unrealistic beauty standards might also contribute to unhealthy behaviors such as extreme diets, overtraining or even using hazardous substances in order to alter appearance. Such behaviors is damaging for one's body, and it contributes to a poor self-image. As pointed out by Perloff (2014), the continuous exposure to idealised images leads to increased body monitoring, which results in low self-esteem.

2.3.3 Psychological Effects

From a psychological point of view, the impact of social media on mood has both positive and negative implications. Negative effects include anxiety, depression, stress, and inadequacy, which may stem from the fear of missing out and the need to have a perfect profile. Keles et al. (2020) note that frequent use of social media contributes significantly to psychological distress among youth. Similarly, Woods and Scott (2016) discovered that young people who use social media excessively, particularly at night, tend to be more anxious, sad, and have poor sleeping habits.

The phenomenon of FOMO has also drawn significant attention in research as a central motivating factor for social media use. In the words of Przybylski et al. (2013), it refers to a consistent concern that one may be missing out on rewarding experiences of others. It is what drives people to engage in social media activities, causing frequent monitoring of posts. Consequently, this has negative implications for self-esteem because of increased stress levels and decreased life satisfaction.

Moreover, the contact with idealised online avatars may worsen the emotional pain and self-discrepancies. Steers et al. (2014) discovered that negative social comparisons lead to an increased chance of exhibiting depression symptoms among individuals using social media passively. The latter means watching other people's posts without engaging with them.

On the other hand, if used correctly, social media can help one to maintain good mental wellbeing by providing the person with the opportunities for self-expression, mental health awareness, and inspirational content. In their research, Beyens et al. (2020) note that social media influences various people differently. Some individuals feel more self-assured and emotionally resilient due to its usage.

As noted by Naslund et al. (2020), active participation can contribute to feeling connected and emotionally stable. This includes sharing personal stories, receiving support from encouraging peers, and participating in online communities. Besides, social media may become a coping mechanism for students pressured to study well since they have many ways to cope with emotional difficulties using various online resources offering peer advice, counselling, and mental health campaigns. It is believed that when used appropriately, online communication can facilitate the development of emotional support and reduce experiences of loneliness. It is also essential to note that the impact of social media on self-esteem varies in accordance with circumstances. First of all, there is evidence of the fact that the impact of social media on self-esteem is determined by an individual's personality characteristics, such as self-regulation, coping strategies, and the ability to think critically. Students who are able to control their actions and critically evaluate the information available can avoid negative impacts of the content they view and thus, keep their self-esteem relatively high. By contrast, those people who are engaged with social media on a consistent basis or perceive the available content negatively tend to experience lower self-esteem.

In turn, compulsive checking and dependence on social media are regarded as examples of problematic use associated with poor self-esteem (Andreassen et al., 2017).

2.4 To Examine the Measures to Be Taken to Restore the Self-Esteem of University Students

University students' mental health, academic engagement, and future growth are all significantly impacted by self-esteem, which is described as one's general sense of self-worth and personal value (Orth, Erol, & Luciano, 2018 as referenced in Plysang, 2025). Effective measures for restoration at the individual, family, and societal levels are crucial since low self-esteem has been associated with stress, anxiety, disengagement, and worse academic outcomes (Plysang, 2025; Koteswari, 2025). The evidence-based metrics below are backed by studies conducted between 2015 and 2025.

2.4.1 Students

On an individual basis, university students can actively minimize negative impacts on their self-esteem and cultivate a good self-image. Research indicates that skill development, psychological support, and self-management strategies might enhance students' feeling of self-worth.

De Prada, Mareque, and Pino-Juste (2024) claim that since teamwork skills make people feel more competent and appreciated in academic settings, they are positively correlated with increased self-esteem among college students. Soft skills like leadership, teamwork, communication, and decision-making should therefore be actively developed by students. Students' sense of competence and belonging is increased when they take part in extracurricular activities, academic projects, and group discussions.

Workshops, seminars, peer support groups, and other group-based and psychoeducational activities are available to students. These forums offer chances to share experiences with others and develop coping mechanisms. According to Y. Qian, X. Yu, and F. Liu (2022), students' self-esteem and self-acceptance are greatly increased by psychoeducational lectures and self-focused group activities, underscoring the need of systematic mental health interventions.

Similarly, findings from West University of Timisoara (2024) suggest that students participating in online and hybrid self-esteem training programs are capable of understanding and handling negative cognitive patterns.

It is also recommended that students make use of self-directed approaches such as being mindful, self-reflection, and positive thinking. Examples of actions include writing journals, making goals, and appreciating achievements, which can eventually lead to increased self-confidence among students. Such techniques assist students in managing their emotions and creating a good self-image.

As pointed out by Bermejo-Cantarero et al. (2025), students who regularly engage themselves in organized exercises show higher levels of overall wellbeing and self-esteem.

developing self-efficacy and self-management capabilities, such as academic planning, setting goals, and time management. Individuals who acquire these skills have a higher likelihood of succeeding academically, hence increasing their self-respect and self-confidence, according to Zhao, Ren, and Yang (2024).

Furthermore, individuals ought to seek assistance, when necessary, for instance, from mentors, counseling services, or trustworthy peers. It is particularly vital in settings such as Uganda, where investigations like the UCU study conducted in 2025 indicate high prevalence of psychological illnesses like depression and anxiety among learners. Accessing assistance early on improves emotional wellbeing and prevents a decline in self-respect.

Lastly, one can successfully manage his/her social media use by refraining from unfavorable comparisons, restricting excessive consumption, and consuming positive content. Such actions relieve stress and promote the development of a positive body image.

Overall, students can effectively shield themselves from elements that impair self-respect by acquiring pertinent abilities, employing appropriate coping techniques, and accessing required assistance.

2.4.2 Parents

Despite attending university, parents still play a vital role in shaping the self-perception of their children. They help students develop resilience and self-confidence as they face numerous challenges related to personal and academic issues by providing various types of support to them.

Parental warmth is strongly associated with high levels of resilience and self-esteem, according to the findings of Khadka et al. (2025). In a similar vein, Rohner (2004) highlights that perceived parental acceptance greatly improves a person's sense of self-worth and emotional stability through the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory. As a result, parents should consistently exhibit love, concern, and understanding in order to assist their children emotionally. This entails paying attention to their kids' worries, acknowledging their emotions, and providing support.

Parents should keep lines of communication open and encouraging. Establishing a secure space where students may express themselves freely lowers anxiety and fosters trust. Autonomy-supportive communication boosts confidence, claim Khadka et al. (2025). Additionally, Steinberg (2014) points out that better psychological results, such as increased self-esteem, are fostered by parents who respect their children's independence while having an open discourse.

According to Bandura (1997), when people are trusted to manage duties, their self-efficacy increases, which in turn boosts their confidence and self-belief. Additionally, parents ought to promote self-reliance and judgement. Students' self-efficacy grows when they are given the freedom to choose while receiving instruction. Parents can also acknowledge and celebrate their kids' accomplishments and qualities. A good self-concept is influenced by noting progress,

applauding accomplishments, and praising hard work. This is corroborated by Norazman (2023), who points out that parental validation fosters students' confidence. In a similar vein, Harter (2012) highlights the importance of positive feedback from significant persons in the growth of self-esteem.

Participation in extracurricular activities including sports, clubs, and leadership programs should be encouraged by parents. Students gain expertise, a sense of accomplishment, and social skills from these activities. While Eccles and Barber (1999) discovered that participation in such activities is associated with enhanced self-esteem and general development, Norazman (2023) emphasizes this contribution.

Further, the parents should provide support to their children morally and socially whenever the children encounter problems academically. As mentioned in Koteswari (2025), the perceptions about social support have a considerable effect on how children perceive themselves and their future performance. Malecki and Demaray (2006) found that students with high levels of parental support normally exhibited more emotional strength and self-respect than other children.

Another thing the parents should do is teach their children good methods of dealing with issues such as coping. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggest that coping strategies are acquired through observations, meaning that by exhibiting healthy coping techniques, parents will be strengthening their children emotionally and in terms of self-respect.

In cases like those in Uganda, where there is much academic and psychological pressure exerted on the students, parents should encourage counseling and utilization of university services. In conclusion, the findings from the UCU study (2025) demonstrate that the combination of institutional and parental support contributes to building a stronger foundation for increased self-respect.

In summary, through offering emotional support, encouraging communication, fostering independence, and promoting positive behavior, parents can immensely help students develop and maintain healthy self-respect.

2.4.3 The Government

By creating policies, regulating funds, and creating institutional structures, the government is immensely instrumental in creating systems and environments that promote self-respect among students. Governments have the potential of helping students become confident and do better academically if only their psychological welfare would be given due priority.

According to Plysang (2025), in an attempt to counter challenges that negatively impact self-respect, universities should adopt systemic approaches involving academics and mental health. This being said, similarly, in an attempt to improve the overall welfare of students, the World Health Organization (2021) recommends incorporating mental health systems into educational

institutions. Therefore, governments need to formulate detailed mental health regulations in higher learning institutions.

Such policies would ensure that counseling services, resilience building, and psychological help are integrated into the curriculum, leading to improved self-esteem amongst college students.

The prevalence of anxiety and depression amongst college students highlights the urgent need for affordable and adequately resourced mental health interventions, according to UCU research (2025). As argued by Patel et al. (2018), mental health system investment boosts youth's educational attainment and psychological wellness. It is imperative for universities to offer better counseling services and finance such services through government funding. This involves ensuring that counseling centers are adequately equipped, training mental health professionals, and supporting peer mentoring programs.

The government should invest in life skills programs and psychoeducation in higher education institutions. Such classes should emphasize self-awareness, communication skills, emotional regulation, and stress management. According to Swahn et al. (2025), health education and mass media campaigns are essential in increasing awareness and improving self-esteem among students. In addition, Durlak et al. (2011) established that social and emotional learning programs significantly boost students' self-esteem, behavior, and emotional well-being.

It would be wise for the government to develop policies on promoting positive learning and digital environments. It will aid organizations in addressing issues such as academic pressure, social comparisons, and cyberbullying.

A positive self-image is more probable among students in secure and inclusive environments. As per the OECD (2019), the psychological well-being and self-worth of learners are significantly improved by the existence of positive learning environments. The government needs to support early identification and treatment programs in academic establishments. Policies must ensure that students suffering from stress, poor self-respect, and mental disorders receive prompt attention and guidance to relevant resources. Early intervention will improve their resilience and reduce potential harm.

The promotion of cooperation between the ministries of health and education would be an important task. Such collaboration will ensure adequate financing, policy alignment, and successful implementation of student assistance programs. Collaboration between institutional mechanisms and health systems amplifies the effectiveness of student well-being, as the UCU study (2025) reveals.

Additionally, there are other broader socio-economic problems such as finances, job insecurity, and unequal access to education that governments should address in relation to students. The provision of financial assistance, scholarship and inclusivity in terms of education makes the students feel valued and safe as well as reduce their anxiety.

According to Swahn et al. (2025), the improvement of the self-worth in youth will depend on addressing the social determinants of well-being.

Finally, the government should conduct public awareness programs on mental health and self-esteem. Such programs will decrease the stigma associated with these concepts, encourage the willingness of people to seek help and provide information regarding the importance of self-worth for academic success.

In conclusion, through enactment of good policies, funding of the support systems and encouragement of life skills development among others, governments are able to create an enabling environment for self-esteem.

2.4 The Literature Review's Conclusion

According to the reviewed literature, university students' self-esteem is significantly shaped by social media platforms, especially Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp. Evidence suggests that these platforms affect self-esteem in Ugandan, African, and worldwide contexts through a number of interrelated mechanisms, such as body image views, cyberbullying, social comparison, validation-seeking behaviors, and FOMO.

WhatsApp mostly helps with social contact and communication, but it also exposes students to gossip, comparison, and cyberbullying, all of which can have a detrimental effect on their sense of self-worth. Similar to how Instagram's image-centric design encourages unrealistic lifestyle and beauty standards that frequently result in low self-esteem, TikTok's algorithm-driven content and emphasis on attractiveness and virality exacerbate self-comparison and validation reliance.

On the other hand, the literature also makes it clear that social media is not necessarily a bad thing if utilized appropriately. The outcomes of constructive utilization include identity building, academic teamwork, social support, and creativity that can positively enhance students' self-respect. Thus, both the nature, amount, and objective of social media use together with individual features of the student greatly affect the process.

Another interesting finding in the review is that self-esteem can be affected by social media in social, physiological, and psychological terms. Firstly, the psychological aspect includes anxiety, stress, and low self-esteem due to frequent use of social media; secondly, the physiological one includes body image alteration; and thirdly, the social aspect concerns social pressures and comparisons.

A wide range of approaches has been suggested by the literature, which involve students, parents, and governmental bodies to tackle such problems. The interventions involve enhancing media literacy, building psychosocial support systems, encouraging positive parental involvement, and implementing policies at both the institutional and national level to help promote the psychological wellbeing of students.

While there exists an evidence gap for context-specific research that focuses solely on UCU, considering the extensive amount of research conducted elsewhere, this research seeks to contribute to the knowledge pool through its exploration of the impact of social media on students' self-esteem within the specific environment.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework adopted in the research recognizes the role of moderating factors in influencing the relationship between self-esteem (the dependent variable) and social media utilization (the independent variable). It shows how, depending on different circumstances, students' views about themselves can either benefit or be harmed from social media utilization. The use of social media, which includes sites like Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, is the study's independent variable.

These platforms, which are the most used social media platforms by college students, play an important role in their daily interactions, communications, and expressions. College students engage in such practices as social comparisons, content creation and sharing, and conversations using these platforms. Such activities lead to both positive and negative behavioral trends that ultimately influence their self-esteem.

The self-esteem of students, which is basically a person's overall evaluation of oneself in terms of one's own worth and value, is the dependent variable in this case. Emotional well-being, self-respect, self-perception, and self-confidence are some of the indicators of self-esteem in this case, which will affect students' perception of themselves compared to others and their emotions during social media interactions.

Also, there are several intervening variables that may be influencing the relationship between students' self-esteem and their social media usage. Examples of such factors include parental

support, peer pressure, psychological wellness, Internet knowledge, socio-economic status, and university support services. Such variables are likely to mitigate or magnify the adverse effects of social media on self-esteem. For instance, even though poor mental health or lack of social networks makes the children vulnerable to self-esteem issues, the presence of sufficient parent-child interaction and digital literacy will enable the students to analyze the information provided through social media.

In conclusion, the conceptual model shows that despite the effect of social media usage on self-esteem of the students, it depends on intervening variables as well as how they affect each other.

Explanation of the Model

The conceptual model clearly shows that there is a direct connection between self-esteem of the students and social media. In some cases, negative interactions, comparisons, and overexposure to perfectionism have a bad influence on self-esteem while positive participation and communication can have a positive influence on self-esteem.

This relationship may not necessarily be direct due to the presence of some intervening variables, including institutional supervision, psychological resiliency, and family support. For instance, a student with enough parental support and digital literacy skills will not have bad results from using social media as opposed to another student without such skills. Social media influence can be minimized by university campaigns against poor mental health.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter highlights the research methodology utilized in the study. The research design, research setting, data sources, population and sample, variables and measurement, data collection procedures, tools utilized, reliability and validity, data analysis techniques, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study are all discussed herein. This research design was formulated in order to ensure that accurate and reliable data is collected with respect to the effects of social media usage on the self-esteem of Uganda Christian University students.

3.2 Design of Research

Quantitative research methodology was adopted in the current study. Quantitative research is appropriate since it involves collecting numerical data and analyzing it to establish the relationship between two or more variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher used the quantitative methodology to establish the relationship between self-esteem among students and use of social media. In social sciences, quantitative methodologies are normally used to test hypotheses and draw generalizable findings (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

3.3 Field of Study

The research was carried out at the Uganda Christian University (UCU) in the Mukono District. Universities are the best sites to study the psychological impact of social media use by young people (Twenge et al., 2022).

3.4 Data Sources

Primary as well as secondary data sources were used in the study.

Structured questionnaires were used to directly obtain primary data from students. Secondary data on social media use and self-esteem was gathered from scholarly publications, books, papers, and reliable internet sources. Research findings are more credible and comprehensive when different data sources are used (Kothari, 2014).

3.5 Population and Sampling Techniques

3.5.1 Study Population

Uganda Christian University undergraduate students made up the study population. Due to their significant exposure to the psychological consequences of social media and their status as one of the most active users, university students are deemed a relevant demographic (Valkenburg, Meier, & Beyens, 2022).

3.5.2 Size of Sample

Twenty responders were chosen as a sample size from the study population. Mugenda & Mugenda (2003) state that while larger samples improve the dependability and representativeness of results, a sample size of 30 or more is adequate for statistical analysis.

3.5.3 Sampling Technique

Simple random sampling was used in the study to choose participants. By guaranteeing that every person of the population has an equal chance of being chosen, this method lessens bias and increases the sample's representativeness (Kothari, 2014).

3.6 Variables Definition and Measurement Levels

3.6.1 Independent Variable: Social Media Usage

The extent of the use of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp by students is known as social media usage. This variable encompasses the frequency of students using social media platforms, the duration they spend on such platforms, and the nature of activity they undertake, including posting content, engaging with individuals, and reading postings made by others. Social media usage among students, in terms of extent and nature, may have an effect on the attitudes and behaviors of students, as well as their overall perception of themselves.

The duration that individuals spend using social media, the frequency of their usage, and the type of engagement, whether posting content, chatting with individuals, or simply reading postings, are the primary indicators of social media usage. Such indicators help in assessing the extent to which students are active users of social media

The attitude of students towards the use of social media is measured through a Likert scale consisting of statements ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree on an ordinal level. Likert scales are common tools for measuring attitudes in social research (Likert, 1932).

3.6.2 Dependent Variable: Self-Esteem of Students

A student's overall evaluation of his/her worth, confidence, and self-respect is known as self-esteem. It depicts how the student perceives himself/herself in comparison with other people as well as his/her emotional responses to various situations both in social media and in academic life. An important psychological construct that influences the student's motivation, behavior, and general well-being is self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965).

Self-confidence, self-perception, feelings of self-respect, and responses to criticism on social media are some indicators employed in this study to evaluate the student's self-esteem. Such indicators are useful in evaluating how the individual evaluates him/herself and the impact that his/her experiences on social media can have on his/her perception of himself/herself. The scale used to measure the independent variable is ordinal in nature using Likert-type items. This approach is common in self-esteem measurement according to social scientific conventions (Rosenberg, 1965).

3.7 Procedure for Data Collection

An introduction letter from the institution was obtained by the researcher in order to seek permission to conduct the study. Questionnaires were administered to selected participants after gaining approval. Confidence and anonymity were guaranteed while explaining the purpose of the research. Completed surveys were collected for analysis after giving participants sufficient time to fill them out. Accuracy and reliability can be achieved through the use of appropriate methods of data collection (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.8 Data Collection Instruments

The main tool used to collect data for the study was a structured questionnaire. Closed-ended questions and the Likert scale were employed in the questionnaire to collect quantifiable data related to the use of social media and self-esteem. Surveys are suitable instruments for collecting standardized data from large populations (Kothari, 2014).

3.9 Reliability and Validity

Validity

Validity refers to how well a measuring device assesses the construct it is expected to measure (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The questionnaire was checked by the supervisor to verify its validity concerning the objectives of the study.

Dependability:

Repeatability of the instrument in measuring the variables is what reliability entails (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Dependability of the questionnaire was checked through pilot research, and where necessary, the questionnaire was amended to improve reliability and readability.

3.10 Analyzing and Processing Data

The data obtained was coded, entered and analyzed using statistical approaches. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize data by presenting data in the form of tables, graphs, percentages and frequencies. The relationship between students' self-confidence and their use of social media was evaluated using inferential statistics. Quantitative data analysis helps in drawing evidence-based conclusions and adds objectivity to research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.11 Ethical Issues

Ethical standards of research were followed throughout. Participants were informed about the research in advance and participated in it on voluntary basis. Privacy and anonymity of participants were maintained during the whole research process. Ethical compliance is an important factor in research for protecting the rights of study subjects (Resnik, 2020).

3.12 Limitations to the Research Methods Used

Time and financial limitations could affect data collection process in the research. Respondents might give biased or untruthful answers. Moreover, the research was conducted in one educational establishment limiting generalizability of results to other settings.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION

4.1. Introduction

This chapter will discuss and interpret the analysis of the data regarding the effects of social media on the self-esteem of students. The three objectives of the study are to find out which social media websites students visit, examine how social media influence students' self-esteem, and create ways to improve their self-esteem. The five categories of responses on the Likert scale, which include Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD), and Not Sure (NS), were employed to measure the level of agreement with the statements.

4.2 Biographical Data of the Respondents

The biographical data were analyzed according to the age, sex, program, and year of schooling of the respondents.

4.2.1. Gender of the Respondents

The study analyzed the gender of the respondents to ensure a balanced representation of views and avoid gender bias.

Table 4.1

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	11	55%
Female	9	45%
Total	20	100%

Source: Primary Data

Table 4.1 above shows that the majority of the respondents were males at 11 (55%), while females accounted for 9 (45%) of the total sample.

4.2.2. Age of the Respondents

To comprehend the demographic reach within the university, the participants' age distribution was classified.

Table 4.2

Table 2: Age of the Respondents

Age Brackets	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18- 20	2	10%
21-23	8	40%
24- 26	7	35%
27 and above	3	15%
Total	20	100%

Source: Primary Data

Table 4.2, 40% of respondents were between the ages of 21 and 23, and 35% were between the ages of 24 and 26.

4.2.3. Program and Study Year

Every single one of the twenty responders (100%) was in Year 3. The Bachelor of Social Work and Social Administration (SWASA) was the main academic program represented.

4.3. University Students' Use of social media

Results about students' knowledge of and use of different social media sites are shown in this section. Nineteen (95%) of the twenty respondents said they were aware of the platforms that students use.

Table 4.3*Table 3: Social Media Usage among Students*

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	NS
1	Students commonly use WhatsApp	16	4	0	0	6
2	Students commonly use Tiktok	9	4	5	0	2
3	Students commonly use Instagram	7	4	6	1	6
4	Social media for academic purposes	5	9	4	1	1
5	Social media for communication	11	7	2	0	0
6	Students spend many hours on media	10	7	3	0	0
7	Part of daily routine	7	8	3	1	1

Source: Primary Data

Table 4.3, 16 respondents strongly agreed that WhatsApp is widely used, making it the most popular platform. Furthermore, social media is widely used for communication, according to the combined majority of 18 respondents (SA and A).

4.4. Social media's impact on self-esteem

The impact of internet participation on university students' confidence and sense of self-worth is examined in this section.

Table 4.4

Table 4: Effects of social media on Self-Esteem

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	NS
1	Students compare themselves with others	7	11	1	0	1
2	Reduces students' confidence	6	3	8	2	1
3	Makes students feel inadequate	3	6	9	1	1
4	Positive comments improve esteem	9	8	1	1	1
5	Negative comments lower self-worth	10	4	4	1	1
6	Pressure to look/behave a certain way	7	7	6	1	0

7	Can improve students' confidence	3	8	8	1	0
8	Feel accepted with likes/comments	5	7	3	2	0

Source: Primary Data

The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media causes social comparison (18 respondents), as seen in Table 4.4. Additionally, 14 respondents said that unfavorable remarks make kids feel less valuable.

4.5. Steps to Help University Students Regain Their Self-Esteem

Potential solutions and tactics to lessen the detrimental effects of social media are highlighted in this section.

Table 4.5

Table 5: Measures to Restore Self-Esteem

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	NS
1	Limiting time on social media	2	7	10	0	1
2	Counseling services help	7	9	4	0	0
3	Peer support groups	7	6	7	0	0
4	Awareness programs	7	10	3		0

5	Engaging in offline activities	11	5	4	1	0
6	Universities should guide students	9	7	2	2	0
7	Taking breaks improves wellbeing	5	8	5	0	1
8	Social workers play a role	7	9	3	0	1

Source: Primary Data

Table 4.5 indicates that engaging in offline activities is viewed as a highly effective measure, with 11 respondents strongly agreeing. There was also significant support for the role of universities and social workers in guiding students toward healthy habits.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the major findings presented in chapter four regarding the contribution of social media to students' self-esteem. The discussions are guided by the three study objectives: identifying the social media platforms used by university students, examining the effects of social media on self-esteem, and determining measures to restore self-esteem among students.

5.2. Bio-data

The bio-data included the gender, age, year of study, and academic program of the respondents. The findings are discussed below;

5.2.1. Gender of the Respondents

The findings from the gender of respondents indicated that the majority of the respondents who participated in the study were male, representing 55% (11 respondents), while females accounted for 45% (9 respondents). This is an important factor in ensuring that views representing both categories are obtained to avoid gender bias. This distribution is significant as gender can be understood as the complex and differing pattern of roles, responsibilities, norms, values, freedoms, and limitations that defines what is thought of as “masculine” and “feminine” throughout the life course and which all play a role as determinants of psychosocial development.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2024), socially constructed differences in power and status interact with biological factors to contribute to the nature of mental health challenges experienced by different sexes. Certain populations are typically disadvantaged throughout their lives by these socioeconomic and health issues, which include differences in education, information access, and social services. According to research, both genders are impacted by the digital environment, but the triggers are frequently different. For example, female students often report higher levels of psychological distress related to physical appearance and social comparison, while male students may feel pressure related to social status and professional accomplishments (Research Journal of Psychology, 2025).

Furthermore, studies conducted at the university level in Uganda highlight that while females may use social media more extensively for social networking and information access, they often face a greater risk of "communication apprehension" and digital dependency, which can directly lower self-esteem (Awobamise et al., 2022). This implies that different genders are affected by the aspect of digital service delivery and social media engagement in varying ways, which necessitates a gender-sensitive approach to student welfare.

The study also intended to show the contribution of both male and female perspectives in the aspects of development. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, individual rights are provided basing on the enactment of laws and development of policies that address specific concerns. The National Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution stipulates that the State will make reasonable provision for the welfare of its citizens. Furthermore, Article 32 of the Constitution states that: "Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, the State will take affirmative action in favor of groups marginalized on the basis of gender, age, disability or any other reason created by history, tradition or custom, for the purpose of redressing imbalances which exist against them." By including both genders, this study acknowledges that self-esteem is a broader human issue while addressing concerns according to these directive principles, ensuring the impact of social media is understood within the specific sociocultural context of the university environment to redress any existing psychological imbalances.

5.2.2. Age of the Respondents

The data collected showed that the majority of the respondents ranged from 21–23 (40%) and 24–26 (35%), hence this was an important significant factor because the researcher was able to specifically identify the intended respondents basing on their age and also a confirmation to the available statistics about the definition of youth in Uganda through the various research carried out.

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda and the National Youth Policy of Uganda (2016), the youth category comprises individuals aged between 18 and 30. This age stage is associated with notable social and psychological development.

Since the young adult period is characterized by significant engagement with digital platforms and the formation of personal identity, it is essential to focus on this specific age group. According to

UCC (2023), individuals belonging to this age category are the most active users of social media and mobile data in the country. Besides, as indicated in scholarly literature, the same age group is more sensitive to the psychological impact of digital immersion because at this age, one's self-esteem is often influenced by peer comparisons. Therefore, focusing on this age group ensures that the findings reflect the situation in the population segment most susceptible to self-esteem fluctuations due to online interaction.

5.2.3. Year of Study and Program

All respondents were SWASA (Bachelor of Social Work and Social Administration) third-year students. As final-year students who are about to complete their studies, they may face unique social challenges that may be compounded by social media usage.

According to Arnett (2015), university students are part of the "emerging adulthood" group – young adults who explore and test different aspects of life, including their identity, making them susceptible to social validation by others. Due to high pressure and expectations related to academic success and employment opportunities, learning burnout becomes common among final year students. It often leads to students turning to social media as a way of escapism and procrastination from actual studying (Jiang et al., 2024).

Moreover, being social work students, they find themselves at the point where they should navigate social boundaries and ethical guidelines needed for future professional activity against the backdrop of their own digital identity. Research findings show that the constant upward social comparisons made by peers on LinkedIn and Instagram, when they share information about their internship experience and achievements, increase their anxiety and decrease their self-esteem dramatically (Iwamoto & Chun, 2020).

In such a way, by focusing on the final-year SWASA students, we manage to reveal the impact of digital interactions on the psychology of our target group when they are entering a critical period of their development.

5.3. Discussion of Results

By providing an analysis of field data, it became possible to discuss the findings in light of the objectives of the current study and previous academic literature. The relation between digital

interactions of university students and their psychological state will be examined in the following paragraphs. The aim of this discussion is to provide profound understanding of the way social media acts as a means of communication and self-evaluation using the data provided and proven academic theories. The findings are categorized as follows:

5.3.1. Social Media Platforms Used by University Students

From the results of the report, WhatsApp is the most popular platform among all since 16 people (80%) agreed strongly that their classmates frequently use this tool. The popularity of the social media can be attributed to the emergence of social media as the most central tool in the everyday life of students, being used primarily as a means for instantaneous communication and collaboration in learning activities. The findings corroborate those of Kansime et al.'s (2023) research on digital trends at Ugandan universities, where WhatsApp was noted to be chosen due to low data costs and its ability to support large groups of students.

The majority of the class is aware of these digital technologies. All but one (20 out of 20, 95%) stated that they were familiar with the social platforms that their classmates used.

This correlates with the observations made in the Uganda Communications Commission's report, which stresses that the adoption of mobile apps, particularly social messaging, among the youth has increased by over 15% due to the need to preserve social capital and maintain connections in a globalized society. It is clear from the high level of awareness that the respondents are entrenched in a digital setting, whereby the uptake of social platforms depends on peer influence rather than passive acceptance.

Moreover, an impressive number of respondents, nine (45%), strongly agreed that TikTok was a commonly used platform, while seven (35%) respondents agreed strongly with Instagram. The development of such visual-oriented platforms demonstrates the increasing desire of students to consume video-based materials as a means of entertainment and self-expression. This finding agrees with Twenge's (2019) findings, which indicate that high consumption rates of visual media materials are one of the most prominent features of young cultures in today's world, whereby social significance is frequently linked to digital presence. According to 10 (50%) of the study's participants, the It should be noted that the immersive nature of such platforms, based on

algorithms in the form of a news feed, creates the so-called "fear of missing out" (FOMO), keeping students engaged for several hours per day.

Although students invest many hours in surfing the Internet, five students (25%) agreed with the view that the platforms mentioned above were used for academic purposes. This fact proves that social media play a rather peripheral role in terms of formal education, despite the fact that 11 students firmly stated that they are indispensable from the point of view of socializing and communications. As NITA-U (2022) survey proves, this gap can be explained by the fact that despite a rather high digital literacy among students, they are more involved in social networks rather than academic researching.

Moreover, 15 participants (75%) expressed their agreement and strong agreement about the fact that using social media has been incorporated into their daily activities. In this case, the concept of "opportunity cost" of social media is being highlighted since engaging with these platforms may mean less time to engage in actual social work placements or participation within the community. The digital realm is the new "public square" for youth, according to Boyd (2014), in her book, *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*. This public square, however, is often managed by algorithmic commercialism rather than educational or developmental considerations.

The data clearly shows that there is a marked distinction between the academic usefulness of social media and its social connection even when the students are much happier with visually-based platforms such as TikTok and highly connected through WhatsApp.

It highlights the importance of moving beyond the view that social media is a distraction and integrating digital literacy within the curricula framework. For this reason, universities must guide students on how to leverage the power of these major social media platforms for professional development and social advocacy to make sure that their digital engagement positively impacts their educational and psychological wellbeing.

5.3.2. Impact of social media on Self-Esteem

As revealed by the results of the study, 18 out of 20 participants, or 90 percent, indicated that social media forces students to constantly compare themselves with others. The overwhelming percentage indicates that college students tend to be trapped in an endless cycle of upward social

comparison, where they compare their own lives with the selectively curated highlights of their peers' lives. It supports Leon Festinger's theory of social comparison, which posits that individuals evaluate their social and personal worth through social comparison with others.

The "highlight reel" effect, which involves comparing oneself with others by contrasting one's personal struggles with the external successes of others, only exacerbates this process during the digital age.

In addition, it has been revealed that 14 participants (70%) highly agree that the level of self-respect in pupils is greatly reduced due to negative comments made about them. Considering how susceptible these young people are to peer disapproval, this indicates that the digital realm might indeed be causing psychological distress. In line with this finding, Vogel et al. (2014) conducted a study, according to which the extent of social comparisons is the primary mediating variable between frequent usage of social media and low self-esteem. This is because of the public nature of comments as well as the high likelihood that the latter could go viral.

Moreover, 14 out of 20 participants (70%) believe there is immense pressure to conform to a particular look or behavior in order to keep up with new digital trends, and 9 respondents (45%) admitted that social media creates feelings of inadequacy. Anxiety issues and difficulties in body image can be caused by the demanding process of sustaining one's "perfect" online persona. The results align with findings of the RSPH (2017) report "Status of Mind," which found Instagram and TikTok to have the biggest detrimental influence on youth's well-being concerning body image and sleep deprivation. Indeed, according to the research, students tend to stay up late to edit photos or monitor engagement with posts, thus cultivating an "emotionally charged environment in which self-worth is gauged by the number of likes."

In contrast, 17 respondents (85%) believed that positive comments and "likes" contribute to their self-esteem positively and create a welcoming environment. Thus, the issue of "digital dopamine" plays its role here. One more aspect of the dual function of social media refers to regulating self-esteem externally. As Twenge (2019) noted, the desire to seek approval from external sources contributes to fragile self-esteem. Students will experience a "withdrawal" of self-worth in terms of engagement, yet they feel very confident if there is a presence of "likes." Students near the conclusion of their university studies have been subjected to tremendous amounts of stress and

pressures to succeed and excel in their academic and professional pursuits, and thus they are more prone to such a state.

Nevertheless, 11 (55%) of the participants agreed that social media indeed builds confidence in particular conditions, such as engaging in social advocacy and interacting with peers for support, while 10 (50%) did not agree with the claim that social media reduces confidence in any situation. Indeed, this reflects the Social Capital Theory, wherein social media could potentially be an empowerment tool as long as it is used to foster meaningful relationships rather than simply to scroll mindlessly.

The outcomes suggest that social media has a significant but often unpredictable influence on the self-esteem of learners. The subtext of the factors of comparison, negative feedback, and perfectionism causes severe psychological barriers, even though it serves as a platform for interaction and positive reinforcement. In such circumstances, social workers should adopt an intervention approach, which would be focused on "digital resilience" by helping the learners differentiate their identity from the online metrics and build a more realistic self-concept through offline achievements and real-life experiences.

5.3.3. Methods of Enhancing Self-Esteem of University Learners

Based on the results of the research, the engagement in offline activities is the most approved strategy for improving self-esteem among learners, which was agreed upon by 16 respondents (80%) and strongly agreed by 11 (55%). In other words, the students can cope with the adverse consequences of social media use by reducing the level of digital engagement in favor of real-life relationships.

Most of the participants reported to the investigator that engaging in physical activity, being involved in community work, and participating in face-to-face social functions made them feel more of a real member compared to just scrolling.

This finding is aligned with the Social Capital Theory, which states that civic participation and real social connections are vital for good mental well-being. Moreover, the World Health Organization's report published in 2011 on wellness explains that to ensure psychological

longevity and self-respect, individuals need to be regarded as significant contributors to their immediate community and indulge in "active participation."

This was followed by 16 respondents (80%) who firmly believed that social workers and counselling services might help students rebuild their sense of self-worth. Many respondents stated that although they are aware of the detrimental effects of social media, they lack the expert advice necessary to deal with digital addiction or the anxiety brought on by online comparison.

The National Strategy for Youth Mental Health states that mainstreaming psychosocial support across university health systems is necessary in order to address "digital burnout." In order to ensure that students have access to specialized treatment that is aware of the subtleties of the digital age, university counsellors must be reoriented to address concerns directly related to cyberbullying and the "external regulation" of self-esteem.

Additionally, 17 respondents (85%) concurred that awareness campaigns on the detrimental impacts of social media would be very successful. This suggests that students are seeking institutional assistance to reduce these hazards because they are conscious of their susceptibility.

This is in keeping with the 2022 standards of the Uganda National Information Technology Authority (NITA-U), which support digital literacy initiatives that go beyond technical proficiency to incorporate "digital wellness." By giving pupils the necessary abilities to discern between well-constructed digital personas and reality, such programs would lessen the pressure to meet unattainable expectations.

In a similar vein, 16 respondents (or 80%) concurred that colleges had to instruct students on appropriate social media usage. This draws attention to a vacuum in the current academic setting, where students are expected to conduct research using digital technologies but are not instructed on how to handle the social ramifications of doing so. This is in line with research by Twenge (2019), which contends that educational institutions need to take the initiative to engage in "digital advocacy," establishing safe spaces where students may talk about their online experiences without worrying about being judged.

Only 13 respondents, or 65% of the sample, believed that peer support groups may aid in the restoration of self-esteem. Peer pressure is frequently the root of comparison, but it can also be the remedy through "positive peer modelling." According to the WHO's "Active Ageing"

Therefore, even though it applies to young people in this case, peer-led initiatives provide people a sense of agency and worth from the very beginning of an intervention. Universities can guarantee that support systems are passed through both formal and informal channels by incorporating student leaders in the design of mental health activities. This will ultimately improve the student body's knowledge, skills, and psychological competence in the face of a rapidly changing digital landscape.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Introduction

Conclusions and recommendations that follow from the study regarding the effect of social media on the self-esteem of university students have been outlined in the current chapter. Recommendations aim to provide a practical guide on fostering a positive digital environment among students and university authorities, while conclusions are based on the analysis of the data collected during the process.

6.2. Conclusions

In light of platform use, psychosocial impact, and restorative measures, the study has been conducted regarding how the use of social media by students impacts their self-esteem.

In relation to the first research objective, the analysis demonstrated that nearly all the participants are aware of the social media platforms; WhatsApp appears to be the most frequently used means of communication and preparation for university life. Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that, regardless of the high connectivity rates, there is a considerable discrepancy in the usage of social media platforms as means of academic research. Students often lack the skills of using digital tools for their professional growth just as elderly lack knowledge concerning Functional Adult Literacy (FAL).

According to the research findings on the impact of social media, the major psychological problem for students lies in social comparisons. The peer pressure and feelings of being inadequate arise due to what is referred to as the "highlight reels" of their peers. Moreover, the self-respect of pupils nowadays becomes "externally regulated" because of being dependent on digital validation in the form of likes and comments. In a similar manner, the problems with law are encountered by marginalized groups; students are disadvantaged by the inability to have "digital resilience" and understand the working of algorithms, just as the elderly could be disadvantaged by a lack of knowledge of legal rights.

Fortunately, however, positive digital encounters and real-life networks mitigate such negative impacts as well. Professional counselling and social work prove to be vital. Psychological assistance offered in universities acts as an effective intervention strategy for students experiencing digital burnouts, in the same way that organizations like ROTOM can help seniors. In the end, the study comes to the conclusion that although social media is an essential component of contemporary student life, its effect on self-esteem is mostly dependent on the existence of robust institutional support networks and the student's capacity to strike a balance between their online and offline identities.

6.3. Recommendations

The purpose of the study was to examine how social media affects university students' self-esteem. Based on the results, it was determined that many digital habits and the absence of organized support systems are ineffective in safeguarding students' psychological welfare. As a result, it is the responsibility of the government and the university to enhance the services that are offered so that they can play a significant role in enhancing students' mental health. Restructuring the psychosocial support system should consequently prioritize the following suggestions, particularly for students who have been left vulnerable to digital anxiety:

The ICT department, the counselling unit, and student leadership are just a few of the sectors with which the university can improve networking and coordination. This will develop the competence and ability to successfully conduct "Digital Wellness" programs with support from other actors who have the same intentions and aims that want to provide social services to improve the welfare or living situations of students. This may entail disseminating information, organizing resources for mental health, and guaranteeing the caliber of services rendered.

Additionally, resource mobilization for the various student programs should be used to enhance the failing support systems caused by a lack of resources, such as funding and specialized persons. In order to help students, get assistance and enhance their well-being, the university should allocate funding to counselling centers.

Based on the evidence, the institution should likewise strategically seek to circumvent policies that benefit students. In order to make sure that programs are responsive to new circumstances or trends in social media usage, including the emergence of visual-centric platforms, the authorities are

entrusted with conducting operational research through evidence-based planning. This can also include the participation of students in the process of planning by acquiring views on what should be appropriate for certain challenges that surface them, hence making interventions more influential because students are aware of the service and know how to engage with it.

For the effectiveness of university programs, sensitization and awareness at all levels is crucial as a way of informing the concerned individuals about the existence of certain services and encouraging them to adopt healthy digital habits. For example, awareness programs on the "Comparison Trap" and digital literacy are very vital, though few students fully utilize the existing counseling services, hence the importance of sensitization in the form of awareness. This may be carried out at the individual, group, and community levels within the campus.

Students' social support networks should be bolstered, especially their peer and family networks. It should be mentioned that students frequently experience feelings of loneliness even when they are linked online, much like elderly people who are abandoned by family members. Students' self-esteem and academic focus are weakened by loneliness and social isolation, which should be avoided. As a result, they should support interventions that enable kids to cope, build resilience, and realize their full potential by encouraging families and community systems to consistently offer care and protection.

The student leaders at all levels of governance should ensure that all the services meant for student welfare are allocated to them equally so that they can be of great help in sustaining their psychological conditions. These are major actors that ensure better service delivery to the students; therefore, their role should involve influencing decisions made and ensuring that the rights of students in digital spaces are protected. They should embark on fighting all forms of digital abuse through advocacy and work with security systems like the police to fight cybercrimes against students.

The students should also be in a position to know all their rights and take up all the available opportunities being created by the university, as they are sometimes reluctant towards such services which may affect their ways of living. Embracing counseling and digital wellness workshops may improve their social, economic, and physical wellbeing.

The students should also embrace a lifestyle kind of practices that protect their health rather than destroying it. Many students have engaged in practices of excessive late-night scrolling and "digital addiction," which places their mental health in danger; hence, they should desist from such dangerous practices and embark on living in a balanced environment by embracing offline hobbies and physical activities.

Existing NGOs and professional bodies should also bring closer services that help students live a healthy life, such as mental health advocacy and income-generating activities that can be done by students to sustain their lives and reduce the pressure of social comparison based on material wealth.

6.4. Conclusion to the Study

In conclusion, therefore, for the planners of social services for students, they should undertake assessments for students with social care needs and psychological conditions. State and university actors should: always involve the person and take into account the person's strengths and preferences; involve relevant practitioners to address all of the person's needs, including their medical, psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual needs; and give students clear information about the services available to them to ensure that social media serves as a platform for empowerment rather than a detriment to self-esteem.

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Appendix 1: Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this research study. The context of each term may differ depending on the application; therefore, I have provided my interpretation of the terms as they apply specifically to this study.

- **Social Media** – In this study, social media refers to interactive digital platforms and mobile applications that allow students to create, share, and exchange content. These include, but are not limited to, WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, which facilitate social networking and peer communication within the university environment.
- **Self-Esteem**: Self-esteem refers to an individual's evaluation of his or her own worth. The evaluation comprises a student's self-concept, which may be affected by social comparison and virtual feedback. Self-concepts encompass self-confidence in abilities, physical attractiveness, and social status.
- **University Students**: University students refer to young individuals currently attending tertiary educational institutions, particularly those aged between 18 and 30 years. The study aims at assessing the final-year university students' adjustment to post-school life and their entry into the job market.
- The state of having a balanced and healthy connection with technology is known as "digital wellness." It incorporates a student's capacity to utilize social media in a way that promotes

their academic productivity, mental health, and self-esteem without developing negative social comparison or digital addiction tendencies.

- Social Work and Social Administration (SWASA) – This refers to the academic and professional field focused on social welfare, social justice, and the systematic provision of services to individuals and communities. In this study, it identifies the specific academic program of the respondents who are being trained to handle psychosocial challenges.

Appendix 1: Questionnaires

UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY MUKONO

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

BACHELOR OF SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL ADMINISTRATION

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ALL RESPONDENTS

I am Namboozo Mercy (S23B15/037), a third-year student pursuing a Bachelor's degree in social work and social administration at Uganda Christian university. This questionnaire seeks to find out the contribution of social media on students' self-esteem, you have been selected to participate in this Study and your response will be kept strictly confidential and used for academic purposes only.

INSTRUCTION

Please tick in the appropriate option:

PART A

BIO DATA

1. Age:

(a) 18 -20 ☐

(b) 21- 23 ☐

(c) 24- 26 ☐

(d) 27 and above ☐

2. Gender:

(a) male ☐

(b) female ☐

3. Year of study

(a) year 1 ☐

(b) year 2 ☐

(c) year 3 ☐

(d) year 4 ☐

Course / program:

PART B

4. Social media platforms used by university students

Are you aware of the social media platforms used among students?

yes ☐ (b) No ☐

NO	Statement	Strongly agree	agree	disagree	Strongly disagree	Not sure
1	Students commonly use WhatsApp					
2	Students commonly use Tiktok					
3	Students commonly use Instagram					
4	Students use social media for academic purposes					
5	Students use social media for communication					
6	Students spend many hours on social media					
7	Social media is part of student's daily routine					

PART C

5. Effects of social media on self-esteem on university students

NO	Statement	Strongly agree	agree	disagree	Strongly disagree	Not sure
1	Social media makes students compare themselves with others					
2	Social media reduces students' confidence					
3	Social media can make students feel inadequate					
4	Positive comments on social media improve self esteem					
5	Negative comments lower students' self-worth					
6	Social media creates pressure to look or behave in a certain way					
7	Social media can improve students' confidence					
8	Students feel accepted when they receive likes and comments					

PART D

6. Measures to restore self-esteem among university students

NO	Statement	Strongly agree	agree	disagree	Strongly disagree	Not sure
1	Limiting time spent on social media can improve self esteem					
2	Counseling services help improve students' esteem					
3	Peer support groups can help restore self esteem					
4	Awareness programs can reduce negative effects of social media					
5	Engaging in offline activities improves self esteem					
6	Universities should guide students on proper social media use					
7	Taking breaks from social media improves mental wellbeing					
8	Social workers play a role in improving students' self esteem					

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

