



The usage of social media platforms on students' literacy in higher learning institutions in Tanzania: A case of a selected higher learning institution in Arusha region

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Recommended References: Tesha, J. J. (2025). The usage of social media platforms on students' literacy in higher learning institutions in Tanzania: A case of a selected higher learning institution in Arusha region. *African Quarterly Social Science Review*, 2(3), 53–64. <https://doi.org/10.51867/AQSSR.2.4.6>

ABSTRACT

The integration of social media platforms has been a subject of global discourse. The students' desire for social interaction and connection, along with their extensive use of social media, has come to define their everyday lives. The study examined the impact of social media platform use in Tanzania's Arusha Region on students' literacy skills in higher education institutions (HEIs). The study's primary goals were to evaluate the degree of social media platform utilization among HEIs and look into how social media use helps HLIs improve their literacy. The investigation was guided by the positivist philosophy and the diffusion of innovation theory. A mixed techniques approach and a cross-sectional descriptive study methodology were used. Thematic analysis and descriptive statistics were employed. Using stratified, basic, and purposive sampling approaches, 98 respondents in all were recruited from a population of 427 instructors and 4573 undergraduate students from four HLIs. The Cronbach's alpha value of $r = 0.875$ was achieved after the reliability of the questionnaires given to students and instructors was examined using SPSS Version 23. Peer debriefing was used to assess the instrument's reliability for gathering qualitative data. According to the survey, the increasing tendency of incorporating social media into educational activities is shown in the usage of several platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp. Nonetheless, it is important to stress the importance of using these platforms responsibly. In conclusion, the predominant usage of social media platforms is still social rather than educational, even if the majority of students utilize them extensively for social contact and certain instructional purposes. HLIs were advised to produce and distribute instructional films on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp. Students' literacy skills will improve if they have access to this pertinent academic knowledge.

Keywords: Arusha Region, Information Literacy, Platform, Social Media

I. INTRODUCTION

The integration of social media into educational settings has been a subject of global discourse. In Europe, a significant percentage of young individuals engage with social networks, influencing their learning experiences and information consumption patterns (Snelson et al., 2022). Similarly, in the United States, studies have highlighted the dual role of social media in enhancing communication while also presenting challenges related to information accuracy and critical thinking among students. A study by Ahmad (2024) in Asia found that higher education institutions have leveraged social media platforms to foster communication and information dissemination, thereby enhancing the learning environment. However, concerns regarding the impact of these platforms on students' literacy skills have been raised, emphasizing the need for balanced integration. Africa has witnessed a surge in social media usage among students, with platforms serving as tools for knowledge exchange and academic collaboration (Mbodila et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the implications of this usage on literacy development remain underexplored, warranting empirical investigation. Research by Baynit et al, (2025) in East Africa, including Tanzania, the adoption of social media in educational contexts has been growing. Studies have indicated that students utilize these platforms for academic purposes, yet the extent to which Social media platforms are widely utilised by Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in developed countries.

Across the globe, students are actively engaging with various platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs, to connect with peers, share experiences, and express themselves (Boon et al, 2020). In Europe, developed countries such as Norway and the Netherlands have a strong tradition of utilising online learning. For instance, in Norway, HEIs such as the University of Oslo and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology utilise online learning platforms such as Canvas to deliver courses and facilitate communication between students and course instructors (Torris et al., 2022). African countries are increasingly adopting online learning platforms to provide higher education. South Africa and Botswana have adopted the use of computers and other technological devices to promote learning (West et al., 2023). In Kenya, higher education institutions have adopted online learning platforms (Mwende, 2022). The adoption



of technology in the teaching and learning processes across countries signifies a paradigm shift from face-to-face teaching to online learning through social media platforms.

The rising integration of social media into global education, marked by its role in communication and improved access to educational materials, prompts apprehension among education stakeholders in Tanzania. Notably, stakeholders have expressed concerns about disturbances in the learning environment attributed to social media use (Van den Beemt et al., 2020). This hesitancy among educators raises pertinent questions about the potential consequences for the quality of education. Existing literature, although illuminating global trends, falls short in providing a comprehensive understanding of the specific challenges and benefits associated with social media in HLIs in Tanzania. Furthermore, studies by Laizer (2024) and Ponera (2022). Ncheke et al., (2021), and Van den Beemt et al. (2020) indicate a gap in the current understanding of the dynamics of social media in Tanzanian education. Therefore, the present study aimed to bridge this knowledge gap by comprehensively assessing the usage of social media platforms in HLIs and their influence on students' literacy skills in Tanzania, with a specific focus on Arusha Region.

1.2 Research Objectives

The study aimed to investigate how students' literacy skills in Tanzania's Arusha Region were affected by the use of social media platforms in higher education institutions (HEIs)

1.2.1 Specific Objectives

1. To assess the extent of social media usage among students in a selected higher learning institution in Arusha Region.
2. To examine the influence of social media usage on students' literacy skills, focusing on reading and writing proficiency.
3. To identify factors that affect students' engagement with social media for educational purposes.
4. To propose strategies for optimizing the use of social media to enhance students' literacy skills in higher learning institutions

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Everett Rogers created the Diffusion of Innovation Theory in 1962, and it provides information on how novel concepts, goods, or technology proliferate and gain acceptance over time in a social system (Rogers, 2003). According to this idea, innovators and early adopters embrace innovations first, followed by the early majority, late majority, and laggards. The adoption process is said to follow a bell-shaped curve (Head & Eisenberg, 2010). The theory also pinpoints important elements that impact the pace and scope of adoption, such as the perceived qualities of the innovation (complexity, compatibility, and relative advantage), social networks, communication channels, and adopters' traits (socioeconomic status, innovativeness).

The Diffusion of Innovation Theory is predicated on the notion that people consider the benefits and drawbacks of embracing an innovation before deciding to do so, and that social networks have a significant impact on adoption choices. A useful framework for comprehending and forecasting the uptake of social media platforms in higher education institutions is provided by the diffusion of innovation theory. Institutions can speed up the adoption process and maximize the benefits of technology-enhanced learning in influencing students' information literacy skills by, for example, focusing on early adopters and opinion leaders, highlighting the communication channels that the target audience prefers, and highlighting the relative advantages and compatibility of online learning platforms with current practices.

2.2 Empirical Review

The reviewed studies highlight diverse perspectives on technology, social media, and e-learning in education across different contexts. West et al. (2023) in Australia showed that social media influences adolescents' competence development, though reliance on self-reported data limits objectivity. Kelly et al. (2015) found that most Australian university students lacked confidence and understanding of generative AI, but the extent of its use on social media remained unclear. Ventayen (2023) and Baynit et al. (2025) revealed that while students viewed ChatGPT as useful, it posed risks to academic integrity, though the qualitative focus limited generalizability. Oloyede (2022) emphasized the need for regulatory reforms and infrastructure to promote gender-inclusive online learning in Africa, while Maune et al. (2023) identified cost, poor infrastructure, and limited ICT resources as major barriers to e-learning in Zimbabwe. Mwende (2022) reported that University of Nairobi students valued online education but doubted its legitimacy and engagement. Similarly, Mohammed & Ali (2022) found e-learning adoption in Tanzania constrained by poor ICT infrastructure, low skills, and negative attitudes, with findings limited to public universities. Mwanakatwe (2021)



showed social media shaped identity and academic life in Tanzanian higher education, though its relevance to secondary education was uncertain.

To address these limitations and contextual differences, the current study in Arusha focused on how social media supports information literacy development in secondary schools, applying a mixed-methods approach to generate more generalizable insights.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Philosophy

The study assumed Positivist philosophy. Positivism is a widely adopted research philosophy in studies that aim to explore cause-and-effect relationships using observable, measurable, and quantifiable data. Given that the research title focuses on how the usage of social media platforms in HLIs influences students' information literacy skills, a positivist approach is appropriate, especially if the researcher aims to generalize findings from a sample to a wider population. This philosophy is especially relevant in contexts like Tanzania or other developing countries, where students are actively engaging with various social media platforms to connect with peers, share experiences, and express themselves.

3.2 Study Area

The area of this study was Arusha Region, which comprises the seven administrative districts of Arusha Region. This region consists of five universities in total, which offer courses for undergraduates. The choice of this study area is due to the extensive usage of social media platforms among students in higher learning institutions. Therefore, the researcher gathered relevant data for this study.

3.3 Research Design

This study employed the cross-sectional descriptive research design. The design aimed to investigate a research problem by describing a pattern of phenomenon at a particular point in time (Cohen et al. 2018). The cross-sectional design was suitable for this study for two reasons. First, the cross-sectional aspect of the design allowed assessment of the research problem at a particular point in time, in line with the time requirements of conducting this study. Secondly, the descriptive nature of the design allowed the research to assess the opinions of students in HLIs in Arusha Region regarding the extent of usage of social media platforms and their contribution to the development of information literacy skills, hence generalizing findings in the studied area.

3.4 Research Approach

In this study, the researcher adopted a mixed methods approach to collect both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time concerning the usage of social media and its influence on students' information literacy skills in Arusha Region, Tanzania. Wium and Louw (2018) argue that a mixed methods approach involves collecting, analysing, and integrating both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study. The use of qualitative and quantitative data was necessary for complementary purposes.

3.5 Targeted Population

The targeted population was 4573 undergraduate students and 427 lecturers from four HLIs located in the Arusha Region (TCU, 2024). The study targets students because they are the beneficiaries of social media usage. Therefore, assessing students' opinions on the usage of social media provided first-hand and reliable perspectives about its influence on students' information literacy skills. The lecturers gave more insight into how the usage of social media contributes to the development of information literacy skills in HLIs.

3.6 Sample size

According to Oribhabor and Anyanwu (2019) sample size refers to the number of items to be selected from the population to constitute a sample. This study's sample size was derived using the Yamane formula for sample size determination. The formula was appropriate for this research because it helped to calculate the sample size from a large population of higher education students in the Arusha Region. The formula helped to ensure that the research results represent the target population (Yamen et al., 2017). The formula was presented as follows.

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

Where;

n = Sample Size

N = Target population, which is 5000 students and lecturers



Margin error, which is 0.1

Therefore,

$$n = \frac{5000}{1 + 5000 (0.1^2)}$$

$$n = 98$$

Therefore, the sample size of this study was 98 respondents, comprising 82 students and 16 lecturers, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Sample Size Grid and Sampling Techniques

S no.	Category	Sample	Sampling procedures
1.	University students	82	Stratified & Simple random
2.	Lecturers	16	Simple random
	Total	98	

3.7 Sampling Techniques

Stratified and Simple random sampling were applied to select the sample size of 82 students from the sampling frame. Simple random sampling is a type of probability sampling in which each member of the target population has an equal chance of being selected in a study (Thomposon, 2012). For the case of lecturers, simple sampling was used to select 4 lecturers from each of the sampled universities. In particular, using stratified random sampling, students were grouped based on their gender. Therefore, 41 students from every university were selected based on their gender. Consequently, 20 male and 21 female students were selected from four universities in the Arusha region. Simple random sampling was employed to select the students in their strata. Similarly, simple random sampling was used to select 16 lecturers. Therefore, through stratified sampling and simple random sampling techniques, 98 respondents were sampled for this study.

3.8 Data Collection Methods

Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from 82 university students and 16 lecturers. The questionnaire was structured into 5 Likert scale responses. For the first theme, 10 statements were developed to investigate the research objective, while for the second theme, 11 statements were developed to investigate the research objectives. In addition, structured interviews were conducted with 16 lecturers. These instruments enabled the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data that provided in-depth insights into the usage of social media platforms in higher learning institutions and their influence on students' information literacy skills in Arusha Region, Tanzania

3.9 Validity and Reliability

Validity is a measure of the quality of research, which examines whether research instruments measure the concepts intended to be measured (Cohen et al., 2018). Face and content validity were ensured to ensure that the questionnaire instruments are clear and include items related to the research questions' concepts. For the interview guides, the peer debriefing process was employed to enhance the credibility of the questions. The questionnaires were validated by consulting two education experts from HLIs. The experts reviewed the data collection instruments. The researcher improved the instrument based on the recommendations from the experts. A reliability test was conducted by administering the questionnaire instruments to 30 undergraduate students from one HLI that was not included in the actual study. The data were entered in SPSS version 23 after the pilot study. The Cronbach Alpha reliability test results produce a reliability score of 0.875, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Reliability Test for Students' and Lecturers' Questionnaire (SQ)

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.875	21

According to George and Malley (2003), a reliability of 0.6 is minimally accepted, and a reliability of above 0.70 is regarded as outstanding; hence, the research instruments were regarded as reliable. To enhance the credibility and transferability of the interview guide, the researcher applied triangulation techniques, combining multiple sources of data to strengthen the trustworthiness of qualitative findings. Questionnaires were then issued to the respondents and collected on the agreed date, while a personal interview was conducted on the same day of the visit. The researcher audio-recorded the conversation for later transcription with the consent of the interviewee.

3.10 Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS Version 23, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. These analysis approaches facilitated a comprehensive interpretation of findings, allowing for a clearer understanding of patterns and themes.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

All the ethical principles in research were followed across all the stages of this study. In so doing, the researcher informed the respondents of the aim of the study and asked for their voluntary participation. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity of whatever information they provided. This means that the information collected was used for this study only and was not linked to any person. Finally, in order to address the issue of plagiarism, all the sources of information were duly acknowledged.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Response Rate

The findings are presented starting with the return rate of instruments to justify the adequacy of the collected data, followed by demographic information of respondents, and finally, a discussion and interpretation of the findings according to themes derived from research questions.

4.1.1 Return Rate of Instruments

The researcher administered questionnaires to 82 students and 16 lecturers. During data collection, all the filled questionnaires were collected. Table 3 gives a summary as follows:

Table 3

Distribution of Research Instruments and Instruments' Return Rate

Instruments Distributed	Sample Size	Instruments' Return Rate	(%)
Questionnaires for students	82	82	83.67
Questionnaires for Lecturers	16	16	16.3
Total	98	98	100

The data in Table 3 shows a return rate of 100% for both the lecturers' and students' Questionnaires. These high rates of return suggest that the respondents were willing to participate in the study, and they filled out and returned all the questionnaires. Equally, all face-to-face interviews were successfully conducted with lecturers. This is an indication that the items in the questionnaires were also understood by the respondents and that the study was of interest to them. The obtained high rate of return, therefore, allowed the researcher to proceed with further analysis of the data.

4.1.2 Demographic Information of Students

Students' background information sought in this study included their gender, age, year of study, laptop ownership, and smartphone ownership. Table 4 shows the demographic information of students.

Table 4

Students' Demographic Information (n=82)

Information		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	41	50.00
	Female	41	50.00
Age	18 - 24 years	48	58.54
	25 - 35 years	22	26.83
	36 - 50 years	12	14.63
Year of study	First year	26	31.71
	Second year	26	31.71
	Third year	30	36.58
Laptop ownership	Yes	26	31.71
	No	56	68.29
Smartphone ownership	Yes	74	90.24
	No	8	9.76

The data in Table 4 show that 50% of the students were male and 50% were female. This balanced representation was crucial for obtaining views about the usage of social media platforms in higher learning institutions and their influence on students' information literacy skills in Arusha Region, Tanzania

The data also show that the majority of the students were aged 18-24 years (58.54%). This generation is highly involved in technology and well-positioned to provide relevant information about the use of social media platforms while at universities. Additionally, the data show that 26.83% of participants were aged 25-35 years, and 14.63% were aged 36-50 years, offering a diverse age range for a more comprehensive feedback.

The data in Table 4 also show that 36.58% of the students were in the third year, while 31.71% were in the first year and 31.71% were in the second year. The researcher selected more students from the third year with the assumption that they have stayed in the university for at least three years and therefore have more experience with aspects related to social media usage. Including students from the first and second years ensured a well-balanced perspective on online learning adoption across different stages of university education.

The data show that the majority of participants do not own laptops (68.29%), a situation that could imply a significant barrier to the application of social media platforms. Without access to laptops, students might face challenges in engaging fully with online education. However, the data show that the majority of participants own smartphones (90.24%), suggesting that smartphones could be a viable tool for online learning. Students can use their phones to access educational content and participate in online classes. This widespread smartphone ownership presents an opportunity for students to use mobile technology to enhance social media experiences.

4.1.3 Demographic Information of Lecturers

Demographic information of lecturers sought in this study included gender, professional qualifications, and experience. Their information on these variables has been presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Lecturers' Demographic Information (n=16)

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	12	75
	Female	4	25
Professional qualification	Tutorial assistant	2	12.5
	Assistant lecturer	8	50
	Lecturer	4	25
	Senior lecturer	2	12.5
Experience	1 -3 years	3	18.75
	4 – 6 years	7	43.75
	7 – 9 years	4	25
	10 years and above	2	12.5

The data show that 75% of the respondents are male, while 25% are female. This indicates a gender disparity among respondents, with a predominance of males. In the context of online learning applications, this gender distribution might reflect a broader trend in higher learning institutions in the Arusha Region, where male lecturers may have more opportunities or inclination to participate in such studies. The data show that 12.5% of the participants are Tutorial Assistants, 50% are Assistant Lecturers, 25% are Lecturers, and 12.5% are Senior Lecturers. This distribution suggests that most respondents hold positions as Assistant Lecturers, indicating a large proportion of early-career academics involved in the study. The relatively lower percentage of Senior Lecturers might imply that more experienced staff may have different engagement levels with online learning platforms.

The data also show that 18.75% of respondents have 1-3 years of experience, 43.75% have 4-6 years of experience, 25% have 7-9 years of experience, and 12.5% have over 10 years of experience. The majority of respondents fall within the 4-6 years of experience. This range of experience is indicative of a dynamic and potentially adaptable group, which could positively impact the adoption and implementation of online learning platforms in higher learning institutions.

4.1.4 The Extent of Usage of Social Media Platforms in HLIs in Arusha Region

The theme derived from objective one and question one of the research question of this study assessed the extent of usage of social media platforms in HLIs in Arusha Region. In their respective questionnaires, students and lecturers were provided with a Likert scale having 10 statements and requested to indicate their extent of agreement or disagreement with each. Their responses were quantified to generate percentages. During the discussion, the percentage of those who agreed and those who strongly agreed was added up. The same was done to the percentage of those who

disagreed and those who strongly disagreed. The response percentages of students and lecturers to the items in the Likert scale are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Percentage Responses of Students (n = 82) and Lecturers (n = 16) on the Extent of Social Media Platforms Usage

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Unsure		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	SS	LS	SS	LS	SS	LS	SS	LS	SS	LS
Students learns via Moodle	40.2	50	18.3	37.5	11	0	15.9	6.3	14.6	6.3
Students learn via Zoom	58.5	31.3	28	25	1.2	0	9.8	31.3	2.4	12.5
Students can access internet in the classrooms	72	62.5	23.2	37.5	1.2	0	2.4	0	1.2	0
Students can access internet in the computer laboratory	62.2	50	22	12.5	3.7	12.5	7.3	18.8	4.9	6.3
Students can access internet in the library	63.4	43.8	24.4	31.3	1.2	0	6.1	0	4.9	25
Students can access internet in dorm/ room	58.5	31.3	20.7	37.5	6.1	6.3	12.2	12.5	2.4	12.5
Students can access internet at high speed	65.9	37.5	23.2	43.8	3.7	0	3.7	0	3.7	18.8
Students can access internet on daily basis at the university campus	64.6	68.8	19.5	31.3	0	0	8.5	0	7.3	0
Students can access online platforms for searching academic materials	61	56.3	18.3	37.5	0	0	15.9	0	4.9	6.3
Students can get support services from IT department when encounter challenges in accessing internet services	59.8	62.5	18.3	37.5	3.7	0	12.2	0	6.1	0

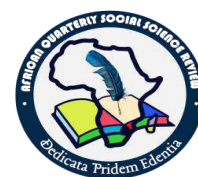
Key; SS = students' percentage response; LS = lecturers' percentage response

Concerning the learning through Moodle, the data show that 58.5% of students agreed that they learn via Moodle, while 30.5% disagreed, and 11.0% were neutral. Among lecturers, 87.5% agreed, 12.5% disagreed, and none was neutral. Regarding the learning via Zoom, the data show that 86.6% of students agreed they learn via Zoom, 12.2% disagreed, and 1.2% were neutral. For lecturers, 56.3% agreed, 43.8% disagreed, and none were neutral. Focusing on students' access to the internet in the classrooms, the data shows that 95.1% of students agreed that they can access the internet in classrooms, 3.7% disagreed, and 1.2% were neutral. All lecturers (100%) agreed with this statement. Regarding the accessibility of the internet in the computer laboratory, the data show that 84.1% of students agreed they can access the internet in computer laboratories, 12.2% disagreed, and 3.7% were neutral. Among lecturers, 62.5% agreed, 25.0% disagreed, and 12.5% were neutral. In addition, concerning the accessibility of the internet in the library, the data show that 87.8% of students agreed they can access the internet in the library, 11.0% disagreed, and 1.2% were neutral. For lecturers, 75.0% agreed, 25.0% disagreed, and none were neutral. On the aspects of the accessibility of the internet in the students' dormitories or rooms, the data show that 79.3% of students agreed they can access the internet in their dorms/rooms, 14.6% disagreed, and 6.1% were neutral. Among lecturers, 68.8% agreed, 25.0% disagreed, and 6.3% were neutral. Concerning the speed of the internet, the data show that 89.0% of students agreed they can access the internet at high speed, 7.3% disagreed, and 3.7% were neutral. For lecturers, 81.3% agreed, 18.8% disagreed, and none was neutral. Moreover, concerning the accessibility of the internet on a daily basis, the data show that 84.1% of students agreed they can access the internet daily at the university campus, 15.9% disagreed, and none were neutral. All lecturers (100%) agreed with this statement. Regarding the accessibility of online platforms for searching academic materials, the data show that 79.3% of students agreed that they can access online platforms for searching academic materials, 20.7% disagreed, and none were neutral. Among lecturers, 93.8% agreed, 6.3% disagreed, and none were neutral. The data indicate that 78.0% of students agreed that they can get support services from the IT department when encountering challenges in accessing internet services, 18.3% disagreed, and 3.7% were neutral. All lecturers (100%) agreed with this statement.

4.2 Quantitative Findings

4.2.1 The Contribution of Social Media Platforms to the Development of Information Literacy Skills among Students in HLIs in Arusha Region

The second objective of the study sought to explore how social media contributes to the development of information literacy skills among students in HLIs in Arusha Region. To fulfil this objective, the study prepared items 1 – 8 in the questionnaire for lecturers and students. During data collection, a five-point Likert scale of 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3= Neutral, 2= Disagree, and 1=Strongly Disagree. Data collected from students are presented in Table 7.



From the table, Facebook, as a social media platform commonly used by adolescents to access information on literacy skills, recorded a mean score of 4.10. The data shows that 50% of students strongly agreed and 10.8% agreed, while 38.3% were undecided, yet 1.2% disagreed. Using contracted words in social media interactions contributes to poor mastery of spelling, as seen in the mean score of 3.99, which was higher than the grand mean score of 3.09. Similarly, academic discussions online enable students to develop an interest in reading, and they also recorded a mean score of 3.99. In terms of percentage, the data shows that 42.1% of students strongly agreed and 42.5% agreed, while 1.7% were undecided, yet 13.8% strongly disagreed. Use of YouTube as a social media platform was found to negatively affect the ability of adolescents to develop effective literacy skills. This aspect recorded a mean score of 3.99.

Table 7

Responses from Students on the Contribution of Social Media to the Development of Information Literacy Skills among Students in HLIs (n=82)

Contribution of Social Media	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	F	%	
Facebook is a social media platform commonly used by students to access information on literacy skills	41	50.0	9	10.8	31	38.3	0	0.0	1	1.2	4.10
Using contracted words in social media interactions contributes towards poor mastery of spelling	60	72.9	1	1.3	0	0.0	3	3.3	18	22.5	3.99
Online academic discussions enables students to develop interest in reading.	38	47.1	9	10.4	32	39.6	0	0.0	3	2.9	3.99
Use of YouTube negatively affects the ability of students to develop effective literacy skills	35	42.1	35	42.5	1	1.7	0	0.0	11	13.8	3.99
Use of text messages in social media enables students to improve in writing skills	44	54.2	0	0.0	1	0.8	4	5.0	33	40.0	3.23
Frequent use of Snapchat enables students to develop interest in literacy skills	13	15.8	0	0.0	59	72.1	2	2.1	8	9.6	3.11
Social media such as Snapchat boosts my critical thinking skills	4	4.6	38	45.8	7	8.8	2	2.5	31	38.3	2.76
Posts from Twitter helps in enhancing reading interest	2	2.5	29	35.8	2	2.5	39	47.1	10	12.1	2.70
Students rely on Instagram as their social media platform yet it negatively affects their acquisition of literacy skills	12	15.0	1	1.3	0	0.0	59	72.5	9	11.3	2.36
Use of WhatsApp chats improves my interest in reading and writing	34	41.5	1	1.7	1	1.3	8	10.0	38	46.3	3.02
students can access reliable information literacy skills on YouTube	12	14.2	0	0.0	9	10.4	1	2.1	60	73.3	1.80
Grand mean score											3.09

Table 8 below illustrates the extent to which different social media platforms shape students' literacy skills within higher learning institutions. Facebook, for instance, is extensively used for social purposes but also serves an emerging academic role by enhancing reading and information literacy through the sharing of articles and participation in online discussions. However, its predominant social orientation often distracts students from engaging meaningfully with academic materials. WhatsApp emerges as the most widely utilized platform, particularly for group communication and peer collaboration, which positively fosters writing and communication literacy. Nevertheless, its dominance in informal exchanges may inadvertently encourage non-standard language use, thereby weakening students' formal academic writing skills.

Instagram, while primarily associated with social interaction, contributes to the development of visual and media literacy. Its use of infographics and visual explanations supports students' understanding of complex ideas, although the overemphasis on images tends to discourage deep reading and critical analysis. Similarly, Twitter (X), though less commonly used, plays an important role in strengthening critical and digital literacy by exposing students to concise information, global academic debates, and summarization practices. Yet, the platform's character limitations often result in superficial engagement rather than in-depth learning. YouTube is increasingly significant in supporting listening and comprehension literacy by providing access to academic tutorials, recorded lectures, and explanatory videos. Despite

these advantages, its unregulated use exposes students to misinformation and the risk of spending excessive time on entertainment content rather than academic resources.

Overall, the evidence suggests that social media platforms have a dual influence on students' literacy skills. On the one hand, they provide valuable opportunities for enhancing reading, writing, critical thinking, and comprehension when utilized for academic purposes. On the other hand, their dominance as tools for informal interaction poses risks to formal literacy development and deeper intellectual engagement. This underscores the importance of guided and responsible use of social media within higher learning institutions to maximize educational benefits while minimizing potential drawbacks.

Table 8

Influence of Social Media Platforms on Students' Literacy Skills in Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs)

Social Media Platform	Extent of Use among Students	Type of Literacy Skill Influenced	Positive Influence	Negative Influence
Facebook	High (for social and limited academic use)	Reading & Information Literacy	Enhances access to academic discussions, sharing of articles, and collaborative reading	Distracts students through excessive social interaction
WhatsApp	Very High (most commonly used for communication)	Writing & Communication Literacy	Encourages group discussions, peer-to-peer writing, and instant sharing of academic materials	Promotes informal writing styles that may erode formal academic writing standards
Instagram	Moderate (mostly for social purposes, limited academic use)	Visual & Media Literacy	Supports visual communication skills, aids in accessing infographics/academic visuals	Overemphasis on images may reduce focus on deep reading and critical analysis
Twitter (X)	Low-Moderate (emerging educational tool)	Critical & Digital Literacy	Encourages summarization skills, critical engagement with concise information, and following academic debates	Risk of superficial learning due to limited character space and trending distractions
YouTube	Moderate (increasing educational use)	Listening, Viewing & Comprehension Literacy	Provides access to tutorials, academic lectures, and explanatory videos that enhance comprehension	May expose students to misinformation and time-wasting entertainment content

While explaining how social media contributes to the development of information literacy skills among students in HLIs, one of the lecturers remarked that;

“Social media platforms provide collaborative learning opportunities and access to educational content, which can enhance learning experiences among students in HLIs in the Arusha region. For instance, the use of various platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp reflects the growing trend of integrating social media into educational activities. However, responsible use of these platforms should be emphasized” (Personal Interview, 27th July, 2025).

Regarding the use of text messages in social media (mean score = 3.23), the study establishes that it enables adolescents to improve in writing skills to a certain level. Its contribution towards literacy skills was supported by 54.2% of students who strongly agreed and none agreed, while 0.8% were undecided, 50% disagreed, and 40.0% strongly disagreed. Furthermore, frequent use of Snapchat (mean score = 3.11) enables adolescents to develop an interest in literacy skills. Its contribution was supported by 15.8% of students who strongly agreed and 0.4% agreed, while 72.1% were undecided, 2.1% disagreed, and 9.6% strongly disagreed.

Social media such as Snapchat boosts students' critical thinking, which is another aspect that was mentioned by students. The participants posted a mean score of 2.76. Students rely on Instagram as their social media platform, yet it negatively affects their acquisition of literacy skills, with a mean score of 2.36. On the same theme on the contribution of social media to the development of information literacy skills among students in HLIs in Arusha region, a lecturer noted that:

“HLIs should create and share educational videos on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp. This relevant academic information, if accessed by students, will enhance their literacy skills. Similarly, making use such vast resources will supplement traditional teaching methods. Students should be guided on how to find reliable and relevant educational content on the platform” (Personal Interview, 29th July, 2025).

In addition, the lecturer's parent pointed out that:



“Students should be encouraged to set personal limits on social media usage to balance their time effectively between academic and social activities. Tools and apps that monitor and control screen time can be introduced” (Personal Interview, 29th July, 2025).

While responding to the question on how social media influences students' information literacy skills, another lecturer remarked that:

“Course instructors in educational institutions should provide guidelines on the effective use of social media platforms like Twitter and WhatsApp for academic purposes. This could include following educational accounts, participating in academic discussions, and using these platforms for research and collaboration” (Personal Interview, 30th July, 2025).

Use of WhatsApp chats improves students' interest in reading and writing, with a recorded mean score of 3.02 that was slightly lower than the grand mean score of 3.09. The data shows that 41.5% of students strongly agreed and 1.7% agreed, while 1.3% were undecided, 10.0% disagreed, and 46.3% strongly disagreed.

4.2 Discussion

The findings from the study highlight several critical aspects regarding the use of online learning platforms, internet accessibility, and social media in shaping students' literacy skills in higher learning institutions in the Arusha Region. The research instruments achieved a 100% return rate, ensuring reliable and representative data collection from both students and lecturers. Demographic analysis revealed an equal gender distribution and indicated that most lecturers were assistant lecturers, suggesting differences in adoption of digital tools across academic seniority levels, consistent with Kimani and Mwenzwa (2021). In relation to learning platforms, Moodle was widely acknowledged as an essential tool for enhancing information literacy, although challenges such as usability and limited technical support were reported. Zoom, on the other hand, was strongly preferred by students for its flexibility and accessibility, though lecturers expressed mixed opinions about its effectiveness, echoing findings by Powell et al. (2022).

With regard to internet access, the results demonstrated that most universities in the Arusha Region provide consistent connectivity in classrooms, computer labs, libraries, and student residences, although disparities remain. High-speed internet was recognized as critical for digital learning (Zarei & Mohammadi, 2022), yet occasional challenges such as limited bandwidth, infrastructural deficiencies, and financial constraints were highlighted. Access to online platforms for academic purposes was reported as high, supporting resource sharing and collaborative learning, though training gaps for both students and instructors were identified. IT support services were generally available, ensuring quick resolution of technical problems, though occasional deficiencies persisted.

The use of social media platforms revealed both positive and negative effects on literacy skills. Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Snapchat were found to enhance reading, writing, and critical thinking skills when used responsibly, aligning with findings by Greenhow and Lewin (2016) and Sivakumar (2020). However, the use of contracted words, particularly in chats, was shown to negatively affect spelling and formal writing skills, consistent with Wood et al. (2014). YouTube and Instagram, while widely accessed, were perceived as more entertainment-focused, with limited contributions to literacy development unless carefully integrated into academic contexts (Snelson et al., 2022; Kelly et al., 2015). The results also highlighted social media's potential to foster collaboration, engagement, and motivation in reading and writing, though addiction and misuse could undermine academic performance.

Overall, the study underscores that while digital platforms and social media present significant opportunities for enhancing literacy skills, their effectiveness depends on responsible use, institutional support, and training. Higher learning institutions must therefore strengthen technical infrastructure, provide continuous sensitization, and encourage the academic integration of social media and online learning platforms to maximize their educational benefits.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

According to the study's findings, social media platforms are widely used in Arusha region higher education institutions and have a strong integration with teaching methods. The extensive use of YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Moodle for student involvement served as proof of this, demonstrating the platforms' popularity and universal acceptability in the academic community. Furthermore, professors' judgments on Zoom's efficacy as a teaching tool were more varied, reflecting a range of experiences and viewpoints, even if students preferred it as a learning tool. Additionally, both lecturers and students agreed that internet connection is widely available in computer labs, libraries, and classrooms, fostering a technologically enhanced learning environment that supports academic pursuits. To guarantee constant accessibility and usability of online platforms, however, concerns including sporadic connectivity problems and differences in technical support levels, were noted as problems that need to be addressed. Regarding the effects on educational quality, the widespread use of social media platforms, which typically promotes easier access to learning materials and flexible learning settings, emphasizes the significance of resolving infrastructure and technical issues to maximize their efficacy in literacy development.

According to the data, students mostly use social media platforms for social contact rather than education, even if they also use them extensively for some instructional purposes. Group interactions and resource sharing on social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp demonstrate the potential for educational involvement. However, there is little incorporation of social media sites like Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter into official educational activities; instead, they are primarily utilized for private communication and enjoyment. Social media platforms' educational potential could be increased by incorporating them into the curriculum in a planned and intentional manner and promoting their use in scholarly discourse. The results emphasize how crucial it is to use social media sites like YouTube and WhatsApp in a controlled and responsible manner to improve students' education in HLIs. Important techniques that students find useful include getting help, managing their schedule, and making use of educational resources. Reading comprehension can be further improved by participating in scholarly debates and interacting with instructional materials. To avoid distractions and guarantee a balanced approach, social media usage must be restricted and adjusted to emphasize educational benefits.

5.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

HLIs should create and share educational videos on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp. This relevant academic information, if accessed by students, will enhance their literacy skills. Students should actively participate in responsible usage of social media and utilize interactive tools provided by the platforms to enhance engagement and acquisition of literacy skills. There is a need to develop clear guidelines and policies for the use of social media platforms in educational settings, outlining expectations for both academic engagement and responsible social interaction. This can be made possible by establishing peer support groups to discuss and address social media issues.

Collaborative learning through social media platforms by integrating them into group projects, discussions, and peer-to-peer tutoring activities should be encouraged. Similarly, there is a need to regularly monitor and assess students' social media usage patterns to identify opportunities for educational enhancement and to address potential distractions or misuse. Parents should be educated about the dual roles of social media in adolescents' lives and encourage them to set reasonable usage limits to support academic responsibilities. Online academic discussions through social media platforms to foster collaborative learning, critical thinking, and literacy skills among students should be facilitated and promoted.

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