



The social media influencers and its implication on college students' perceptions, attitudes, value and lifestyle. A case of Tanzania public service college (TPSC)-Tanga campus

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses how young people interact independently with others, the role of social media influencers, and the implications for college students, highlighting both positive and negative effects; it observes the dual impact of social media influencers on students' behavioural changes, perceptions, attitudes, values, and lifestyles. This study focuses on college-level students, highlighting both positive and negative aspects; it observes the dual impact of social media influencers on students' behavioural changes and lifestyles and examines how these influencers shape their perceptions, values, lifestyles, and future decisions. The current study, Social Learning Theory (SLT) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), guides the study. The study used a mixed approach to collect information regarding perceptions, opinions, characteristics, attitudes, and behaviours towards the use of social media and its implications. This study targeted the students from National Technical Award (NTA) level 4 to NTA level 6 at the TPSC-Tanga campus. Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were used to select students from various classes. Sampling techniques are used in the research in order to obtain correct information from the respondents. Data were collected in both secondary and primary forms, which were collected using interviews, focus group discussions, and questionnaires. Data were analysed thematically, and recurring patterns were identified through coding. The findings show that the majority of the respondents were exposed to different social media, and the types of content engaged with include entertainment, educational or academic content, beauty and fashion, playing games, motivational and self-improvement, and political & social issues. The study further established that social media influencers exert both positive and negative influence on students, as it contributes to academic motivation, healthy styles, career development, and creativity. The revealed negative impacts include the promotion of unrealistic lifestyles, time wastage, mental health challenges, and poor spending habits. The study recommends that policymakers and educational institutions strengthen existing laws and policies to effectively regulate influencer activities and online content. The institution as well as the family should be actively involved in shaping how students use and interact on social media. Media literacy programmes should be integrated into educational curricula to equip students with critical thinking skills for evaluating influencers' content.

Key words: Attitude Formation, Digital Identity, Lifestyle Values, Media Influencers, Social Media

I. INTRODUCTION

Recently, social media networks have profoundly transformed the people's ways of life, especially the social interactions among youth. Social media has emerged as the most significant medium for communication, entertainment, and lifestyle inspiration (Ibrahim et al., 2025). Empirical evidence indicates that many young adults, especially college students, have their own social media accounts, and on these accounts, they are following at least one influencer on any social media site (Khalid et al., 2018). Social media has evolved into a space with various types of users who depend on the platforms as a source of entertainment or earning income. Among these users are social media influencers, that is, individuals who have gained popularity on these platforms and have the ability to shape opinions and trends (Bu et al., 2022). These influencers initiate trends over the social networks, and they play a significant role in shaping the opinions of users on the intent (Qualman, 2012). Influencers always use the account to gain popularity, especially by obtaining more followers, which in turn adds credibility to the influences. Social media influencers are the group of people that have constructed a reputation for themselves through applying social media platforms to promote themselves (Ahmad & Bruno, 2021).

Celebrity endorsements help raise brand awareness (Lim et al., 2017). Social media influencers can directly associate with a brand through a contractual relationship, driving brand engagement. Engagement is measured by the interaction rate that an influencer generates among their followers, which includes posting about products on their social media profiles and fostering brand loyalty as well (Lim et al. 2017). Social media influencers can significantly affect consumers' trust and intent to buy clothing, hair, and cosmetic products (Cooley & Parks-Yancy 2019). Students are likely to utilise social media sites to obtain product information from their followers, social media influencers, people they know personally, and celebrities (Barnes, 2015). Individuals tend to adopt behaviours and lifestyles modelled. Engagement is measured by the interaction rate that an influencer generates among their followers, which includes celebrities and influencers on social media platforms.

Celebrities and influencers play a crucial role in driving attention toward events, communities and products. Their effectiveness is often assessed through engagement multi-dimensional construct that extends beyond raw follower counts. Recent scholarly work emphasizes that meaningful engagement encompasses not just easily quantifiable behavioral actions such as comments, and click thoughts but also cognitive and emotional involvement of followers. To accurately gauge this, researchers have developed multidimensional models. For instance, Levesque and Pons (2023) validate an engagement scale tailored for Instagram, capturing cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions of follower's interaction. Traditionally influences have been segmented by follower counts into categories like, nano, micro and mega. However, SITCS (2024) refines these categories introducing mid-tier influencers and adjusting followers' thresholds: influencers according to their following: nano influencers (1,000-10,000 followers), micro influencers (10,000-100,000), mid-tier (100,000-500,000), macro influencers (500,000-1,000,000), and mega influencers (over 1,000,000 followers). The number of followers reflects the level of influence an individual has on social media.

Influencers earn name because they impact learning, cognition and behaviour through modelling, reinforcement, and social interaction (Folkvord et al., 2019). Social media such as Facebook and Instagram encourage users to engage by linking and/or commenting on people's posts. Such interaction tends to build social bonds among the users and increase their attachment and emotional belongingness to the community (Zeng et al., 2017). These can help shape individuals' perceptions and values in the social context. People's decisions and behaviours the values that people hold significantly influence their decisions and behaviours (Burrows et al., 2013). by the values that they hold (Burrows et al., 2013). A value is something that an individual or group of people sees as an important aspect of their life. Values are used to select and justify actions and to evaluate people, including oneself, artefacts, and events.

Social media has a major impact on students' behaviour, attitudes, and personal development, exerting both positive and negative influences (Kyara, 2025). While it provides valuable knowledge, cultural exposure, and social empowerment, it can also harm young people, particularly when they are exposed to aggressive, misleading, or violent content. Research on political views indicates that the way people use social media can influence attitudes and behaviours related to science and politics. Using social media to connect with friends and family is associated with differing outcomes compared to using social media for news and political discussion.

The internet and social media serve as a well-known place where people search for information (Hamid et al., 2016). In health, for example, social media has become a place where anyone can share information regarding nutrition without being a certified dietitian or nutritionist (Granheim et al., 2020). The students are actually allowing the social media influencers to guide them in any area of their lives (Ahmad & Bruno 2021). The evidence shows that more people are becoming dependent on social media influencers; they are actually resorting to social media whenever they have any enquiries on any areas of their lives, as this is more convenient for them (Ahmad & Bruno 2021:545). Today, social media serves as a problem-solving tool for college students facing various challenges in their academic environment. It also acts as the source of enjoyment or relaxation, especially during times of difficulties or academic pressure.

Within college environments, social media now plays a central role in student life. Students frequently use these platforms to share academic materials, coordinate group assignments, and maintain communication with lectures (Mbegani, Mambe, & Mubofu, 2022; Katele, 2023). The use of social media has become a dominant aspect of student life, influencing not only social communication but also the way students engaged in academic life. Social media platforms can facilitate peer support networks, fostering a sense of belonging and community among students (Jha, 2024). It enhances communication and collaboration and provides access to vast educational resources and opportunities for self-expression and creativity.

However, alongside these benefits, there is growing concern regarding behavioural and attitudinal changes among students resulting from excessive social media exposure. Studies have linked overuse with reduced academic performance, procrastination, sleep disruption, and declining social interaction (Swai, 2023; Kessy & Pessa, 2022; Jha, 2024). Some empirical evidence highlights that social media addiction increases the risk of anxiety, depression, and emotional disorders while also disrupting sleep patterns (Putri et al., 2025). Beyond academic implications, the rise of social media influencers represents a powerful trend that shapes perceptions, tastes, and lifestyles among young audiences. Influencers on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube promote ideals related to fashion, beauty, relationships, success, and social behaviors that young people may adopt consciously or subconsciously. Exposure to influencer content affects youth attitudes toward lifestyle and values, influencing their perceptions of success, morality, personal

identity as well as issues relating to civic participation (Mkumbo & Kisongo, 2022). This unprecedented development of technology, especially in information and communication technology, has posed challenges to youths' behavioral patterns.

These developments raise important questions about how influencer culture shapes the moral, social, and behavioural orientations of today's youth. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the social media influencers and their implication on college students' perceptions, attitudes, values, and lifestyles. A Case Study of Tanzania Public Service College', exploring how influencer-driven content impacts students' lifestyle choices, value systems, and social conduct within higher learning contexts.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Recently, social media has emerged as a powerful tool that transforms how young people live and interact with one another. This increase has been driven by the development of science and technology, particularly Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Increased internet access and the widespread use of mobile phones have intensified social media engagement among youth, especially college students. The social media influencers have emerged as a powerful actor in shaping how youth act or make choices about their lives. The lifestyles portrayed by these influencers Followers often admire and imitate the lifestyles portrayed by these influencers, which makes them influential in shaping youth attitudes and values. by their followers, which makes the influencers influential in shaping youth attitudes and values. This admiration and imitation by their followers make the influencers influential in shaping youth attitudes and values. by followers, making them influential and shaping youth attitudes and values. The social media users originate from diverse socio-economic, political, and cultural backgrounds, and the contents they share may sometimes conflict with Tanzania's cultural orientations.

The Tanzanian government has established regulatory mechanisms and enforced laws and policies to regulate the online content and promote responsible use of social media. For example, the Electronic and Postal Communication (online content) regulation of 2020 regulates online content and requires Online Content Services Providers (OCSs) to comply with national standards (URT, 2020). In addition, the Cybercrimes Act of 2015 contains provisions that address restricted online content, penalise various cybercrime offences, and lay out a framework for the exercise of search and seizure powers related to criminal investigations (URT, 2015). The regulations are enforced by national bodies, particularly the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA), which licenses and maintains a register of online content service providers operating in Tanzania. The authority also has the mandate to address non-compliance with the 2020 regulation, including by ordering the removal of prohibited content.

Despite the growing influence of social media influencers, there is limited empirical evidence within the Tanzanian higher education context on how such content shapes students' perceptions of success, materialism, morality, self-image, and social behaviour. This lack of context-specific and systematic research creates a knowledge gap that this study seeks to address by examining how social media influencers shape youth attitudes toward lifestyle and values at Tanzania Public Service College (TPSC–Tanga).

1.2 Research Questions

- i. Which social media platform do you use frequently?
- ii. To what extent are students exposed to social media influencers, and what types of content do they engage with?
- iii. How do social media influencers impact students' lifestyle preferences and behavioural patterns?
- iv. What measures can policymakers adopt to promote positive influence and mitigate the negative impacts of influencer culture among youth?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 The Social Learning Theory (SLT)

The Social Learning Theory was developed by Albert Bandura (1977), which asserts that individuals learn behaviours, attitudes, and emotional responses through the observation and imitation of others. The theory explains how people imitate others' behaviours, for example, through a process called learning by imitation. Imitation and observation are vital aspects of how people develop behaviours and habits (O'Leary & Matusitz, 2024). According to Bandura and Walter (1977), people observe behaviour either directly through social interaction with others or indirectly by observing behaviour in the media. This assertion justifies that people can learn new behaviours indirectly by imitating what the media portrays in their day-to-day programmes. Learning by observation is the continuous process of human life, and it is natural because in any human interactions involving people from different socio-economic, political, and cultural backgrounds, new ideas, attitudes, or perceptions may be developed and eventually become a way of life for the majority. While other theories, such as behavioural theory in particular, suggest that all learning is the result of associations formed by conditioning, reinforcement, and punishment, Bandura's theory of social learning proposes that

learning can also occur simply by observing the actions of others (Frying et al., 2011). Additionally, based on social elements, it can be justified that people learn new information and behaviours by paying attention to others, a process known as observational learning.

In the context of social media, students at TPSC-Tanga are consistently exposed to behaviours displayed by peers, celebrities, and influencers on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Research suggests that adolescents are particularly susceptible to such digital role models; they imitate behaviours that appear attractive and socially rewarded or widely accepted (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Consequently, students may adopt new habits, language, fashion styles, or attitudes towards education and authority based on what they see online. Bandura (2001) emphasises this phenomenon further, stating, "Social media, in its symbolic environment, has become a major vehicle for observational learning." Thus, SLT provides a strong basis for understanding how continuous exposure to social media content can influence students' behavioural patterns, either positively or negatively.

2.1.2 The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The theory was developed by Ajzen (1985); it suggests that individual behaviour is determined by three components: attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. The theory posits that the most effective way to predict behaviour is by assessing an individual's intention to perform that behaviour (Conner & McMillan 2004). Furthermore, the theory further explains that behavioural intention is determined by three key factors, such as attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Conner & McMillan 2004). Attitude Toward Behaviour (ATB) refers to the degree to which a person has a favourable appraisal of behaviour (Autio et al., 2001; in Benachenhou et al., 2017). Subjective Norms (SN) reflect the pressure and approval from significant others regarding the awareness of the impacts of social media, both positive and negative, while also considering the individual's social context. Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) refers to the perceived ease of performing the behaviour and the perceived control over its outcome (Ajzen, 1988).

The main assumption of the TPB is that intention is a strong predictor of behaviour, and intention may be assessed by evaluating general attitudes, beliefs, and preferences (Caplescu, 2014). Therefore, the attitude toward the behaviour, the subjective norms, and the perception of behavioural control led to the formation of behavioural intention, which in turn leads to the performance of the behaviour (Ajzen, 1988). In relation to this study, social media influences each of these components. For example, a student's attitude toward education may shift after consuming content that either promotes or devalues academic achievement. Subjective norms are shaped by the online behaviours of peers, and they are also influenced by perceived behavioural control. Subjective norms are shaped by the online behaviours of peers, and they are also influenced by perceived behavioural control. This study specifically examines how students' behaviour may change due to the accessibility of online support and peer feedback. These interconnected influences can significantly affect students' intentions to behave in particular ways, ultimately manifesting as behavioural changes in the school environment.

2.2 Empirical Review

An empirical literature review is a type of literature review that focuses on empirical studies or research reports. According to Cooper (1998), an empirical literature review is "a summary and evaluation of the existing research that is pertinent to the research question" and involves critically analysing empirical studies to understand the research design, methodology, findings, and conclusions. Therefore, an empirical literature review of the study concerning behavioural change is as follows. A study by Ajasa et al. (2025) focuses on the impacts of global media content on cultural influence among students in higher institutions within Abeokuta Metropolis in Nigeria. The study revealed high exposure to foreign media content, accompanied by a decline in indigenous language use and a preference for Western fashion styles. In addition, the study revealed that the students learn and adopt foreign diets as their way of life and also align their cultural practices with the global influences. Adetimirin (2024) reported that several higher education students in Nigeria engage in ethical and unethical media use.

The increase in social media interactions has led to the emergence of various influencers who gain popularity among South African university students (Mlambo et al., 2025). The influencers: Young people see influencers as people who can change how they act. The youth view influencers as active agents who shape the behavioural patterns of university students. In Kenya, Ndung'u et al. (2023) identified that university students lean towards unethical behaviour by imitating what they see on social media, emphasising the need for intervention programmes to promote ethical social media use. As noted by Mlambo et al. (2025), social media influencers play a significant role for students not only as sources of entertainment or information but also as figures who provide aspirational content, cultural and political representation, and, in some cases, pathways for navigating personal and social identity. In this study, we specifically examine how students' behaviour may change due to their use of and engagement with social media platforms.

Empirical evidence has demonstrated that the influence of social media on young people's behaviour is multidimensional, affecting intellectual, social, ethical, health-related, and lifestyle outcomes. Alalwan et al. (2023) examined how social media influences affect intellectual, social, ethical, and health-related behaviours. The study

employed an online survey involving 1,612 adolescents aged 12-22 years. The study found that social media influencers have a significant positive influence on intellectual behaviour, but they negatively affect certain dimensions related to social media, ethics, and health. These findings are very crucial because they highlighted that media influence is multidimensional and not necessarily positive. However, the study relied on perceptions and used convenience sampling, which limits generalisability.

A study by Abdullahi (2024) focuses on media consumption habits among students at Federal Polytechnic Bauchi, Nigeria. The study assesses students' exposure to different media sources, time spent using media, and perceptions of media. The study emphasises the importance of understanding patterns of media consumption before examining behavioural effects. The study pays more attention to media use habits, with limited emphasis on the direct causal relationship between media exposure and students' behavioural changes.

More specifically, some studies have investigated how social media influencers can directly promote particular behavioural outcomes. Aschwanden and Messner (2024) are investigating whether social media influences could motivate inactive adolescents to become more physically active. The study employed a convergent mixed-methods design involving questioners. The quantitative findings indicate that adolescent followers enjoy physical activity more after the social media intervention and at follow-up than at the beginning of the study. The qualitative findings highlighted Instagram factors influencing physical activity, including resonance with influencers' lifestyles and preference for simple, related activities. The major finding reveals that influencers, such as a singer, a journalist, and an eFootballer, motivated adolescents best despite their nontraditional focus on physical activity.

Within a Tanzanian context, Sanga (2025) focuses on the impact of social media use on students' behavioural changes in tertiary institutions. The study identifies the increased use of social media platforms, including YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, TikTok, and Snapchat, and examines how these platforms affect students both positively and negatively; it highlights the dual impact of social media influencers on students' behavioural changes. The study was guided by the equation theory, which suggests how people treat computers, televisions, and new media like real people and places. The theory was significant in this study because the effects of treating social media as real people determine the effects of social media on students' behaviour through their daily interactions with these platforms. The study employs a descriptive research design with a total sample of 396 students from 10 tertiary institutions in Dar es Salaam. Data were collected through online questionnaires, follow-up interviews, and observation. The study revealed that social media had positive and significant effects on students' behavioural changes in tertiary institutions. Social media has improved their study habits, dressing styles, eating habits, communication skills, and purchasing behaviours. However, the abandonment of African traditional culture in dressing and food has created a need for policy interventions that purposefully regulate social media to sustain its benefits while also mitigating its detrimental effects through a legal framework.

A study by Mathembu et al. (2026) examined gender-based preferences in following TikTok influencers among 103 South African university students. The study employed an exploratory design and drew on gratification theory. The findings revealed that gender-related preferences and patterns of engagement with TikTok content shaped students' choices of influencers. These findings suggest that behavioural influence is not uniform across users; demographic and social characteristics may shape whom individuals follow and the types of content to which they are exposed. However, the study focused on influencer-following preferences rather than subsequent behavioural outcomes.

Overall, the reviews' empirical evidence demonstrates that social media and social media influencers can affect young people's behaviour in multiple ways, including intellectual development, social interactions, health practices, lifestyle choices, and physical activity. The studies also indicate that the nature and extent of such influence may vary according to media patterns, the characteristics of influencers, and the demographic characteristics of their followers. Most existing studies have focused broadly on social media or examined specific behavioural outcomes without comprehensively investigating the role of social media influencers in shaping multiple dimensions of students' behaviours. The literature review provides the necessary context for the present study.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey research design. According to Kothari (2004), the descriptive survey design is useful in obtaining information that reflects the current state of a population's characteristics and opinions of specific populations or groups. Furthermore, the study used a mixed approach to collect information regarding perceptions, opinions, characteristics, attitudes, and behaviours toward the use of social media and its implications. The approach gathered both qualitative and quantitative data on student behaviour changes attributed to social media use in a college setting. According to Creswell (2018), a mixed approach allows researchers to combine both qualitative and quantitative techniques to better comprehend research problems. This approach enables the researcher to collect quantitative data on the extent of social media usage among students and qualitative data on their experiences and behavioural patterns associated with social media use in a college environment.

3.2 Study Area

This study was conducted at Tanzania Public Service College (TPSC), Tanga Campus, located in the Tanga region in Tanzania. The college was established in 2000 under the ambit of the Executive Agencies Act, No. 30 of 1997, to support the ongoing Public Service Reform Programme by providing training, consultancy, and applied research interventions to the public service. The college provides training in public administration and other professional programmes and offers courses from certificate to diploma levels under the National Technical Award (NTA) framework. The college was selected because it has a diverse student population and active use of digital platforms among students, making it suitable for examining the implications of social media use on students' lifestyles, attitudes, and values.

3.3 Targeted Population

This study targeted the college students from National Technical Award (NTA) level 4 to NTA level 6 at the TPSC-Tanga campus, Tanzania. The population includes all students enrolled at the college, and therefore a target population is 1,500 students enrolled in different courses from certificates to diplomas. In addition, key informants, such as teaching staff, human resources officers, and non-teaching staff, were involved in the study.

3.4 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

3.4.1 Sampling Technique.

The study employed both probability and non-probability sampling techniques to select students from various classes. Sampling techniques are used in the research in order to obtain correct information from the respondents. As noted by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019), determining the correct sample size is essential to avoid sampling errors and ensure that the data collected allows meaningful and reliable analysis. To calculate the sample size for a targeted population of 1500 at Tanzania Public Service College, where the key respondents are staff and students from various levels, from NTA level 4 to NTA level 6.

3.4.2 Sample Size

The sample size was drawn from the college population of 1500, including students and staff. The sample size for the population of 1500 people (including staff and students at the Tanzania Public Service College) was calculated using the Yamane (1967) formula, resulting in 316 respondents at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error ($e = 0.05$). The distribution of the sample is presented in table 1 below.

Table 1

Composition of a Sample

Category	Sample Size			
	Male	Female	Total	Percentages (%)
NTA level 4 students	40	56	86	27.2%
NTA level 5 students	50	68	118	37.3%
NTA level 6 students	45	45	90	28.5%
Key informants	12	10	22	7%
Total	147	179	316	100%

Table 1 above presents the distribution of the selected sample. NTA level 4 accounted for 86 respondents (27.2%) each; in addition, 118 respondents (37.3%) were NTA level 5, 90 respondents (28.5%) were NTA level 6, and 22 respondents (7%) were key informants.

3.5 Data Collection Tools and Procedure

The study used several instruments to collect data, including questionnaires, which were administered to students to gather quantitative data regarding social media usage, perceptions, and behavioural changes. The interview was used to collect information from key informants, including teaching staff and non-teaching staff and members of the student's government. In addition, the focus group discussion was conducted among selected students in order to collect deeper qualitative insights and their experiences and attitudes toward social media use.

3.6 Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques. The quantitative data obtained from questionnaires were coded, organised, and analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS), Version 29. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarise responses' demographic characteristics, patterns of social media use, exposure to social media influencers, and students' perceptions, attitudes, values, and lifestyle behaviours. While qualitative data obtained through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions were analysed using thematic analysis, where



responses were grouped into themes based on the research questions and interpretation of findings in relation to research objectives and conceptual framework.

3.6.1 Coding Procedure for Thematic Analysis

The coding process involved both deductive and inductive coding. Deductive codes were developed from the research questions, conceptual framework, and theories. Inductive codes were generated from issues and meanings that emerged directly from respondents. The researcher himself with the study by reading the interview and focus group discussion data to gain an overall understanding of the study by reading the interview and focus group discussion data to gain an overall understanding of participants' experiences and views. Meaningful segments of the text were assigned initial codes representing specific ideas, experiences, and behaviours. In addition, related codes were compared and grouped into broader categories. For instance, influencer credibility, authenticity, and attractiveness could be grouped under perceived influencer characteristics, while observation, imitation, and social identification could be grouped under social learning and modelling.

3.7 Validity and Reliability

The validity of the study instruments was ensured through content validity and triangulation. The content validity was ensured by subjecting the instruments of data collection to the research experts for review and assessment for relevance and clarity, where the important adjustments were done to ensure that the instruments aligned with the study objectives. The triangulation of data collection methods further enhanced the internal validity. Selecting respondents from various educational levels ensured external validity from NTA level 4 to NTA level 6. Reliability was ensured through a pilot study conducted on a small group of students to test for consistency, clarity, and applicability of the instruments. Necessary amendments were made before the instruments were administered to the respondents.

3.8 Ethical consideration

The research permit was obtained from the institutional management; please refer to the letter with reference number Ref No QA.202/430/01/121, dated 03 November 2025, which granted permission to conduct research at the institution. The researchers obtained informed consent from participants before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could withdraw at any time without consequences. The information obtained from this study was handled with confidentiality and was only used for the research purposes.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondent

The demographic characteristics of respondents in the study include the participant's position in the institution and the general information such as age, gender, level of education, and marital status.

The demographic results indicate that 186 of the respondents were female, constituting 58.9% of the total, while 130 of the respondents were male, constituting 41% of the sample. More than half of respondents were aged between 15 and 20 years and 21 and 25 years, accounting for 41.8% and 35.4%, respectively, suggesting a youth-dominated sample, indicating that the sample includes the age group that is predominant in social media. The 26–30 age group accounts for 10.1%, while those aged 31–35 represent 9.5%, showing moderate participation from slightly older individuals who may have more diverse responsibilities such as work or family. Only 3.2% of respondents are aged 36 and above. The demographic profile suggests a predominant young, female, single population with a mid-level educational background. The reasons are based on the case study, which focused on the mid-level education, where the majority of them are young and female students.

Table 2*Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 316)*

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Female	186	58.9
	Male	120	41.1
Age (yrs.)	15–20	132	41.8
	21–25	112	35.4
	26–30	32	10.1
	31–35	30	9.5
	36 and above	10	3.2
Educational Level	NTA Level 4	164	51.9
	NTA Level 5 & 6	135	42.7
	NTA Level 7–9	9	2.8
	NTA Level 10	8	2.5
Marital Status	Married	42	13.3
	Single	274	86.7

4.1.1 Which Social Media Platform do you Use Frequently?

The study aims to determine the social media platform most frequently used by respondents; the study identifies four major social media platforms. The distributions are presented in table 3 below;

Table 3*Social Media Platforms Used Frequently by Respondents*

Platform	Users(n)	Percentage %
Whatsapp	103	32.5%
Instagram	30	9.4%
Facebook	128	40.5%
TikTok	55	17.4%
Total	316	100%

Table 3 above reveals that Facebook is the most frequently used platform among respondents, accounting for 40.51% of the sample. WhatsApp follows suit with 32.59%, indicating its continued relevance for communication. TikTok represents 17.41% of usage, suggesting moderate engagement among users, while Instagram is the least frequently used platform at 9.49%. Overall, the findings highlight a preference for platforms that support both social interaction and information sharing.

4.1.2 To What Extent Are Students Exposed to Social Media Influencers, and What Types of Content Do They Engage With?

The study aims to investigate the extent to which students are exposed to social media influencers and the types of content they engage with. The results are presented in tables 4(a) and 4(b) below.

Table 4(a)*Exposure to Social Media Influencers*

Exposure Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
High Exposure (daily interaction)	148	46.8%
Moderate Exposure (weekly interaction)	107	33.9%
Low Exposure	61	19.3%
Total	316	100%

Table 4(a) presents the respondents level of exposure to Social Media Influencers. The finding reveals that, 148 respondents representing 46.8% reported high exposure, as they interacted with social media on daily basis. Additionally, 107 respondents 33.9% indicated moderate through weekly interaction while 61 respondents accounting 19.3% reported low exposure. The finding aligns with existing literature suggesting that frequency of social media usage directly determines the level of exposure to social media influencers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). Also, Lou & Yuan (2019) argued that, users who engage with social media platforms on a daily basis tend to experience high exposure due to constant interaction with influencer generated content.

Table 4(b)*Types of Content Students Engage With*

Content Type	Number of Students Engaging	Percentage (%)
Entertainment	112	35.4%
Educational/Academic Content	78	24.7%
Beauty & Fashion	54	17.1%
Playing games	32	10.1%
Motivational & Self-Improvement	25	7.9%
Political & Social issues	15	4.9%
Total	316	100%

Table 4(a) presents the types of content students engage with in the social media. The finding reveals that, 112 respondents representing 35.4% engaging with entertainment contents. Additionally, 78 respondents (24.7%) they interacted with the educational or academic content, 54 respondents representing (17.1%) reported engagement with beauty and fashion contents, 32 respondents, representing (10.1%) reported that they use social media for gaming, 25 respondents accounting (7.9%) reported Motivational and Self-improvement while 15 respondents accounting (4.9%) reported they followed Political and Social issues. The findings indicate that students' engagement on social media is largely dominated by entertainment content, with educational content emerging as a notable secondary interest, while other content types attract comparatively lower levels of engagement.

4.1.3 How Do Social Media Influencer's Impacts Students' Lifestyle Preferences and Behavioral Patterns?

The study aims to explore how social media influencer's impacts (both positive and negatives) students' lifestyle preferences and behavioral patterns. The results are presented in the table 5(a) and 5(b) below; Positive impacts of Social Media Influencers; The respondents were asked to identify the positive impacts of social media influencers on their life styles and behavioral patterns within the college environment. Table 5(a): Positive impacts of Social Media Influencers;

Table 5 (a)*Positive impacts of Social Media Influencers (N = 316)*

Positive Influence	Number of Students Affected	Percentage (%)
Encourages academic motivation	86	27.2%
Promotes fitness and healthy routines	74	23.4%
Shares career development and skill-building content	68	21.5%
Inspires creativity and entrepreneurship	59	18.7%
Total	316	100%

Table 3(a) presents the positive impacts of social media influencers. The finding indicates that 86 respondents, representing 27.2%, indicate that social media encourage academic motivation. Additionally, 74 respondents (23.4%) reported the promotion of fitness and healthy well-being. Also, 68 respondents, representing 21.5%, reported the contribution to career development and skill building, while 59 respondents, accounting for 18.7%, reported social media inspires creativity and entrepreneurship skills. These findings are consistent with the views of Mcbjay et al. (2024), who argued that social media influencers contribute positively to the intellectual development of youth and adolescents by motivating learning, fostering healthy lifestyles, and enhancing skills relevant to personal and professional growth. The empirical evidence demonstrates that social media influencers have enormous potential to shape adolescent behaviour in a more positive direction if they adopt a responsible and authentic approach to the content they share (Audrezet et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2029, as cited in Mohammad & Manaf, 2025).

One of the respondents argued that

"Users of social networks for entertainment, reading, learning how to live with others, self-employment through online business, where many students are engaging in the business while they are at the schools, and also to reduce mental stress" (Respondent 2, 10 November 2025).

The Negative Impacts of Social Media Influencers; the respondents were asked to identify the positive impacts of social media influencers on their life styles and behavioral patterns within the college environment.

Table 5(b)*Negative Impacts of Social Media Influencers (N = 316)*

Negative Influence	Number of Students Affected	Percentage (%)
Promotes unrealistic lifestyles	71	22.5%
Causes time wastage	64	20.3%
Causes mental health problems and low self-esteem	58	18.4%
Poor spending habits	49	15.5%
Total	316	100%

Table 5(b) presents the perceived negative impacts of social media influencers. The finding indicates that 71 respondents (22.5%) reported that social media promote unrealistic lifestyles. Additionally, 64 respondents (20.3%) identified time wastage. Furthermore, 58 respondents (18.4%) reported mental health problems and low self-esteem, while 49 respondents (15.1%) reported risky behaviours or poor spending habits. Overall, the findings suggest that social media influencers significantly affect college students by shaping their lifestyles and, in some cases, encouraging the adoption of unrealistic standards. High levels of exposure to social media influencer content appear to exacerbate these effects, particularly in relation to students' mental well-being. This observation aligns with Mcbjay et al. (2024), who noted that social media influencers carry substantial mental health implications, thereby emphasising the value of critical thinking and media literacy skills among young people. There is some evidence of a broad link between adolescent social media use and unfavourable health factors such as sleep problems, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Al-Ansi et al., 2023). Continuous exposure to and follow-up of celebrities on social media has become almost like drinking water for many young people, but this trend is increasingly becoming one of the most serious problems confronting this group (Al-Ansi et al., 2023). It can lead to many health issues related to sleep, addiction, anxiety, headaches, and social isolation from others. Seo et al. (2016) argued that overuse of social media creates more problematic challenges for teenagers, like addiction, low self-esteem, and emotional well-being. Also, it was observed some detrimental effects of social media influences on teenagers include cyberbullying, backstabbing, addiction, cheating, and humiliation. This was reinforced by qualitative evidence, where one student explained that

“Social media has influenced me to imitate the lifestyle of celebrities, leading me to spend a lot of money on unnecessary things on social media and making my college life very difficult” (Respondent 1, 10 November 2025).

Also, another respondent argues that

“I observe that spending money on data bundles for online entertainment is a growing concern. There are many online entertainment platforms available, and frequent use of these platforms consumes a large amount of mobile data. As a result, the cost of purchasing data bundles becomes a financial burden for me and other students” (Respondent 2, 10 November 2025).

In addition, one participant expressed concern about the abuse of drugs that were readvertised on the internet, stating that

“Exposure to these advertisements can influence individuals to misuse drugs, which may lead to serious health consequences” (Respondent 3, 10 November 2025).

4.1.4 What measures can policymakers adopt to promote positive influence and mitigate the negative impacts of influencer culture among youth?

The study aims to explore the measures or strategies that a policy makers can adopt to promotes positive influence and mitigate the negative impacts of socials media influencers among youth and adults in the studying area. The results are presentenced in the table 6

Table 6*Measure to Promote Positive Impacts of Social Media*

Strategies/measures	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strengthening media literacy	52	16.5%
Enforcement of laws	120	38%
Promotes positive role model	46	14.6%
Awareness campaigns	32	10.1%
Facilitate counselling and support programme	66	20.9%
Total	316	100%

Table 6 presents the measures proposed by respondents to promote the positive impacts of social media. The results show that 120 respondents (38%) emphasised the enforcement of relevant laws as a key strategy for regulating

social media content and influencer activity. Additionally, 66 respondents (20.9%) recommended counselling and support programmes to help students navigate social media responsibly. Strengthening media literacy: Fifty-two respondents (16.5%) suggested strengthening media literacy, emphasising the value of equipping students with critical skills to evaluate online content. Furthermore, 46 respondents (14.6%) identified the promotion of positive role models as an effective measure, while 32 respondents (10.1%) suggested awareness campaigns to educate students on responsible social media engagement. These findings are consistent with Mcbjay et al. (2024), who stressed the importance of comprehensive efforts involving parents, educators, and policymakers, as well as the establishment of open dialogue platforms to promote healthy social media engagement and responsible decision-making among adolescents. Similarly, Al-Sharif and Aziz (2025) argued that addressing the negative impacts of social media influencers on youth requires multiple strategies, including strengthening family and school oversight, enhancing legal and media awareness among students, and regulating digital content to ensure alignment with educational and societal values. One respondent argued that:

"There should be effective control over the content to be presented on social media; in case of misuse of social media, strict punishment should be imposed for further misuse of social media" (Respondent 4, 12 November 2025).

Other respondents argued that

"I believe that social media education should be provided in school and through media to raise community awareness about the proper use of social media. Furthermore, young people should be given quality training to help them use social media effectively to achieve their economic and social goals." (Respondent 5, 14 November 2025).

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined students' social media usage, their exposure to influencers, the types of content they engage with, and the resulting impacts on their lifestyles and behaviour. The findings reveal that Facebook and WhatsApp are the most frequently used platforms, indicating students' preference for platforms that facilitate communication and information sharing. A significant proportion of students reported high to moderate exposure to social media influencers, largely driven by frequent daily and weekly usage. Entertainment content dominates student engagement, although educational and academic content also attracts considerable interest.

The study further established that social media influencers exert both positive and negative influences on students. Positively, influencers contribute to academic motivation, healthy lifestyles, career development, and creativity. However, negative impacts such as the promotion of unrealistic lifestyles, time wastage, mental health challenges, and poor spending habits were also evident. Overall, high exposure to influencer content intensifies both beneficial and harmful effects, underscoring the complex role of influencer culture in shaping students' lifestyles and behavioural patterns.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that policymakers and educational institutions strengthen the enforcement of relevant laws and regulations to guide influencer activities and online content. The institution as well as the family should be actively involved in shaping how the students use and interact on social media. Media literacy programmes should be integrated into educational curricula to equip students with critical thinking skills for evaluating influencer content. Counselling and support services should be expanded within institutions to address mental health concerns and promote responsible social media use. Additionally, the promotion of positive role models and targeted awareness campaigns can help reinforce healthy values and mitigate the negative impacts of influencer culture among students.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

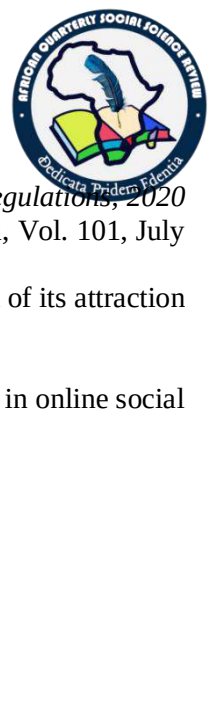
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THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA
PRESIDENT'S OFFICE
PUBLIC SERVICE MANAGEMENT AND GOOD GOVERNANCE



TANZANIA PUBLIC SERVICE COLLEGE

In reply, please refer:

Ref No QA.202/430/01/121

03/11/2025

Zawadi Rashidi and Yuda Kyara,
Tanzania Public Service College,
P. O. Box 750,
TANGA.

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Reference is made to the above subject.

2. Tanzania Public Service College (TPSC) was established in 2000 under the ambit of the Executive Agencies Act No. 30 of 1997 to support the ongoing Public Service Reform Programme through the provision of training, consultancy, and applied research interventions for the public service.

3. Recognizing the importance of applied research as one of the core functions of the College, permission is hereby granted to conduct a research study titled "**Social Media Influencers and Their Implications for College Students' Perceptions, Attitudes, Values, and Lifestyle at Tanzania Public Service College: A Case Study.**"

4. On behalf of the College Management, I hereby grant the above-mentioned researcher's permission to conduct the study at Tanzania Public Service College. The study is intended for **promotional purposes** and is expected to contribute to knowledge and a deeper understanding of social media and its influence on students' perceptions, attitudes, values, and lifestyle. Data will be collected from students and staff of the college. In conducting the study, the researchers are required to strictly observe all relevant research and ethical principles, including respect for respondents, informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, and responsible use of information. The researchers shall also comply with all relevant college policies, rules, regulations, and professional standards governing research activities within the institution. The research activities should not interfere with the normal operations of the college.

5. Thank you for your continued cooperation and support.



FOR RECTOR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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