Factors Influencing Use of Social Network Among University Students in Tanzania: A Case of Mzumbe University, Morogoro

ABSTRACT: Integration of the social networks in educational practices may bring increased student engagement and may promote collaboration and lead to improved learning outcomes; it does, however, bring an implication: the requirement for policy frameworks and training to guide appropriate usage for the students to balance their academic and recreational activities effectively. This article aims to evaluate factors influencing use of social networks among university students in Tanzania. This study employed a case study research design and mixed research approach was used. The target population includes 176 student who undertakes bachelor degree in human resource management, wherebya sample size of 100 respondents was selected using simple rando sampling technique. Data were collected by using the questionnaire and interview method, and the collected data were analysed by using descriptive statistics for quantitative data using tables, and thematic analysis for qualitative data. This study revealed university students in Tanzania particularly at Mzumbe University are motivated using social network by several factors including education, interaction, information, and refreshments. Also, it was noted that university students use social networks as a tool or instrument to remove stress, boredom on their daily bases where others call kill time on social networks. Based on the findings, it is recommended that Universities in Tanzania should encourage their students to properly social networks to increase leadership skills, build network to socialize with different groups of people, and interact with people of the same professional to share professionalism and profession opportunities. Universities also should incorporate social networking tools in academic practices using official sites where students can meet and share educational content apart from holding discussions; in this way, the students will still be connected with social networks for the appropriate academic purposes without the risk of the non-essential applications.

Keywords: Social,Network, Social Network, and University student.

1.   Introduction

Social networks have been a very vital part of modern communication, providing connecting platforms where people share ideas and information with ease over long distances (Coyle et al., 2008). Social networks have been extremely popular among university students as a means of keeping up relationships, obtaining academic materials, and information (Steven, 2013). Sharing, collaboration, and interactions among students in online communities are allowed on the social media sites Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube. The same networks afford possibilities of self-expression, entertainment, and professional networking (Wood, 2004). Despite the potential of such benefits, there is concern about how various factors influence the extent and nature of using social networks among university students.

Globally, rapid strides in the technology of the internet have dramatically rearranged communication and social interaction (Steven, 2013). In countries like the United States and China, social networks have proved to be powerful tools in the creation of novelty and stimulus to economic growth (Jack Ma, 1994). In addition, the diffusion of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok has brought about a world where free information flows across the borders. Social networks have been integrated into professional networking, e-commerce, and education; they, therefore, offer opportunities for both individuals and businesses (Chen, & Bryer, 2012). On the other hand, such platforms pose several challenges: information overloads, privacy issues, and potential misuses that all require critical examination in order to harvest the benefits and minimize the risks (Jack Ma 1994).

The increasing availability of the internet and the affordability of smartphones have fostered the growth of social networks in Africa (Donath and Boyd 2004). With millions of youths joining every day, social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook have become very important means of communication, education, and socialization among youths (Chen, & Bryer, 2012). Social networks open up ways for African university students to get access to educational content, take part in virtual discussions, and look for professional opportunities (Wood, 2004). But other challenges such as lack of appropriate infrastructure, high costs of using the Internet, and inadequate digital literacy are significant barriers to their effective use (Donath & Boyd, 2004). This brings into focus the real need for context-specific studies addressing the unique dynamics of the usage of social networks on this continent.

There is immense growth in the use of social networks in Tanzania, especially among university students. A few of the leading platforms, including WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, govern the digital landscape and indeed prove useful for academic collaborations, social engagements, and entertainment (James 2014). Social networks enable Tanzanian students to share study materials, communicate with both their peers and lecturers, or seek possible employment opportunities (Stephen, 2013). However, unequal access to the technology, high costs of the internet, and possible academic distractions are some of the major challenges (Donath & Boyd, 2004). Understanding the factors that influence social network usage in Tanzania will therefore help in developing strategies to maximize their use while addressing associated risks.

Identifying what drives university students to using social networks is the most fundamental challenge. While on one hand, social networks open many educational and self-developmental opportunities, the excessive or uncontrolled use tends to cause distractions with a lack of academic focus and eventual addiction (Stephen, 2013). And even though the universities have engaged multiple initiatives encouraging digital literacy in using the social media; challenges are still rife. For example, lack of access to technology in rural areas or economic limitations may prevent fair access to social networks, while for those students with access, overindulgence in the same networks can lead to a kind of academic neglect (James, 2014).

The problem persists, with many instituting awareness campaigns and digital literacy programs. Most students still lack the knowledge or guidance to effectively use social networks for their academic and professional benefit (Kazienko et al., 2010). Understanding the factors influencing the use of social networks among university students will go a long way in designing appropriate measures to harvest its benefits while minimizing the associated risks. This study aims at investigating these factors in the Tanzanian setting, hence providing insight on how best to maximize the use of social networks for academic and personal development.

Previous studies have examined the general impact of social networks on education and social interactions. For instance, Donath and Boyd (2004) highlighted the historical evolution of social networks, while Chen and Bryer (2012) focused on their educational applications. However, there is limited research that specifically investigates the drivers of social network usage among university students in Tanzania, particularly considering socioeconomic, demographic, and technological factors. This presents a knowledge gap that warrants further exploration.

This study aims to establish the factors that influence the usage of social networks by university students in Tanzania. The identification of important drivers will help understand

how these platforms can be integrated in ways useful to both academic and social environments. These findings will provide insights valuable to educators, policymakers, and students for the design of strategies that will enhance the productive use of social networks while addressing associated challenges.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Theoretical Review

This study was guided by social network theory. Social Network Theory (SNT) was first propounded by the sociologist J. A. Barnes in 1954 and further propounded by other scholars, among whom are Barry Wellman and Stanley Milgram. The theory assumes that individuals or entities are linked with each other through social relationships; these links have consequences for behaviours, information flow, and sharing of resources (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). It postulates that the structure and dynamics of a network, such as the strength, frequency, and quality of ties, play a critical role in shaping interactions and outcomes in a group or community.

There are several factors affecting the use of social networks among universities in Tanzania, which can be explored using the SNT. First and foremost is access to technology, as universities with more advanced technological infrastructure are more likely to engage students, faculty, and staff in social networks (Coyle et al., 2008). Second, institutional support apparently matters, as universities that provide training, resources, and incentives for the use of social networks will see more engagement (Boyd, 2007). The level of social capital existing in academic communities defined as trust and reciprocity modulates how students, faculty, and staff interact with one another through social networks. It also reveals that cultural factors acceptance of digital communication tools and willingness to share information and collaborate play a big role in network centrality and the way information flows through a university; institutions with more central or influential actors are likely to see greater social network use (Boyd, 2007). Lastly, it is the engagement by students and faculty with social networks driven by their interests, goals, and perceived value that directly influences the degree of use in educational settings (Enriquez, 2010).

Strengths of SNT, it explains how relationships influence behaviours and information flows through a network, thereby making it possible to take a much more nuanced view of precisely what happens at universities about informal channels of communication; hence, networks are valuable in knowledge sharing and collaboration (Barnes, 1954). However, one of the weaknesses of the theory is its over-reliance on the assumption that all relationships are equal. Such an assumption may overlook complexities pertaining to power dynamics and hierarchies, as well as the unequal access to network opportunities of various actors in the university environment (Barnes, 1954). Another criticism of SNT is that it totally neglects cultural and environmental factors that could impact network formation and interaction.

This theory is so relevant to the study of social network use among Tanzanian universities, as it provides a structured approach through which the various factorssuch as institutional policies, technology access, and social capitalshape the usage patterns of social networks in academic settings. Justified in this context, despite its limitations, SNT provides a broad framework for analysing the nature of relationships between various stakeholders in a university and the flow of information through networks, which is central to the study's focus on understanding social network dynamics in Tanzanian universities. Based on the above argument, the strengths of explaining relationship structuresincluding the ability to adapt for

consideration of unique challenges and opportunities within the Tanzanian academic environmentoutweigh the weaknesses.

2.2   Empirical Review

Oniboken (2012) conducted study on factor motivates university students to use Social Networks. The findings indicate students attracted by feeling proud on, staying in close contact with classmates and for entertainment purposes. Oniboken (2012) understand what factors motivate students using Social Networks where respondents had to express their own views. Reasons were; was to stay in contact with friends, family and the university, second group stated Social Networks acted as human needs for relatedness, pleasure, popularity, security, competence and entertainment (play games) when their too tired of reading, listen to music if their tired and to see funny videos and third groups some participants stated Social Networks sites was to gain attention from other people by sharing my feelings and thoughts. Therefore, Social Networks exist due to human beings needs to socialize with others in order to thrive (Coyle & Vaughn, 2008).A study by James (2014) on behavioral addiction volume 3(4) expressed on how university students misuse time on SN. The researcher (ibid) reveals the time spent on application on SN as follows; students use 94.6 minutes to read text per day, 48.5 minutes to peruse emails, 36.6 waste on facebook, 26.9 minutes used to listen music and 34.4 minutes spend on finding social media. It means that in every day students waste 4hrs.This result of research it portrays some element of the truth on total time wastage in a single day to social network users.Students use social networks on academic purposes such as downloading different written materials that facilitate collaborative behaviour and knowledge sharing, class assignment, research works. Reference materials from data from e-books, articles, and video presentations to enhance performance (Boyd, 2012). Also, students use SN such as whatssap as a means of providing announcement to students through their class representative which develop into more interaction with their lectures or supervisor (Ibid). To be in touch/close with classmates or families motivate University students to use SN and to keep up to date with things going on at University (Stephen, 2013). Also, human beings need to socialize with others to maintain relationship or get his basic needs (Coyle & Vaughn, 2008). Furthermore, students also use SN as an entertainment. The process of engaging in fun and entertainment activities were described in different ways by participants, for example, to play games when there are too tired of reading, listen to music if their tired and to see funny videos (Coyle & Vaughn, 2008).

3.   Methodology
3.1   Research Design

Kothari (2004) define research design as process constituents the blueprint for the collections, measurement and analysis of data. According to Msabila and Nalaila (2013) research design is a plan or roadmap on how study to be conducted. Both authors had the same content therefore research design is a detailed and outlined methods on how an investigation is taking place in the study to find out the reality. It typically includes how data are collected, what instruments was employed, how the instruments were used and the intended means for analysing data that had been collected. It is a logical and systematic plan prepared for directing a research study which specifies the objectives of the study, the methodology and techniques to be adopted for achieving the objectives (Krishnaswami, 2013).

This study was guided by a case study design.According to Bromley (1986), a case study design is a systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related eventswhich aims to describe

and explain the phenomenon of interest where multiple sources of evidence are usedfrom documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations and participants. It is an in-depth comprehensive study of person, a social group, an episode, a process, a situation, a programme, a community, an institution or any other social unit (Krishnaswami, 2013). In this study researcher used case study design because it is appropriate to the study to explore in-depth and comprehensive study of a person or student (Chrishnaswami, 2013).

3.2   Population of the Study

Population refers to all the items under the field of inquiry (Kothari, 2004). Target populations can be defined as a group of individuals, objects, or items from which sample are taken for measurement (Ibid 2004). Mzumbe University specific school of Public administration in department of HRM third year had a total population of 176 who are available to the University. The researcher focuses much on students of Mzumbe University and chosen SOPAM-BHRM3 so as to get the information on the factors influencing use of social network among universities students. The reasons to select this population are approachable, observable, and easy to manage users of social networks in daily academic sessions or socialization.

3.3   Sample size and Sampling Procedure

3.3.1   Sample Size

According to Jamal and Kamuzora (2008) sample size is the exactly items, list or number that is selected from the population to constituency a sample, is what we call sample size. It is the process of selecting a few cases out of some large grouping or population for study (Thomas, 2001). Where suggest use large sample size to enable to generalize findings. The study likely uses the sample size comprise of at least 121 respondents. The sample size was calculated using a Yamane formula of 1967.

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

Whereby,

n is sample size

N is study population (176)

e is marginal error (0.05)

$$n = \frac{176}{1 + 176(0.05^2)}$$

The sample is 122.222≈ 122 sample.

3.3.2   Sampling Technique

This study will employ both probabilistic and non-probabilistic sampling technique whereby, simple random sampling procedure and judgmental sampling will be used respectively. The study selected 122 respondents randomly from the Mzumbe University specific school of Public administration in department of HRM third year students. In this case, the researcher obtained a list of 176 HRM third year students from the school of Public administration at Mzumbe University, and then wrote the names of these students on pieces of paper, cut them into small pieces, and mix them. Afterward, someone was asked to randomly select 122

pieces of paper from the 176 papers for the collection of quantitative data through questionnaires.

In the judgmental sampling technique, the study selected students from HRM third year purposively/judgmentally for the interview method of data collection on the factors influencing use of social network among universities students. The study arranged face-to-face interviews with HRM third years students at Mzumbe university through class representatives.

3.4   Data Collection Methods

3.4.1   Questionnaire

The researcher designed and distributed questionnaires to HRM third year students who could fill them out on their own time but within the given period via email. The completed questionnaires were sent back to the researcher to allow individuals to maintain anonymity. Closed-ended types of questions were formulated and used to get rich insight into the factors influencing use of social network among universities students. However, the researcher applied a self-administered questionnaire as the only way to obtain self-reports on people's opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and values because only trustworthy samples received questionnaires, which helped to more effectively and efficiently address the study issues that are posed.

3.4.2   Interview

The study also employed an in-depth interview method via phone to evaluate factors influencing use of social network among universities students. The interviews were conducted one-on-one using a predefined list of questions or a set of interest areas with HRM third year students around the Mzumbe university. The study involved 22 respondents, as a qualitative design is not a major research design, and 20–30 respondents are required when a qualitative design is a major research design, as recommended by Babbie (2010).

3.5   Data Analysis Techniques

3.5.1   Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying themes within the data gathered from interviews. The researcher interpreted the meaning in the dataset and wrote a report presenting the findings of the thematic analysis. The report included a description of the research process, the identified themes, illustrative quotes or excerpts from the data, and an interpretation of what the themes mean about the research questions on the factors influencing use of social networks among universities students.

3.5.2   Quantitative Data Analysis

The data is a group of random symbols which represents quantitative, action or objectives (User manual 2011). Analysis refers to the computation of certainly measure along with searching for pattern of relationship that exist among data group (Thomas, 2001). The data collected were quantitative from the respondents and they were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software, Microsoft excel and Microsoft word. Before

analysis, the data were tallied, coded and classified. Then the data were analysed by computing using descriptive statistics through tables (Krishnaswami, 2013).

3.5.3   *Ethical Consideration*

The Mzumbe University Research Ethics and Publication Committee granted ethical clearance for the study, while the Mzumbe University authority granted permission. Employees were given consent before data collection, with the right to withdraw at any time. The collected data was used solely for the study, and they were informed of their rights during consenting. Confidentiality was observed on all information whereby they were used for the academic purpose, and anonymity was considered on all personal respondents' information.

4.   Results and Discussion

The study sought to identify factors which contributing to the wide spread use of social networks among students. The study used online questionnaire and phone interview as a method to get the relevant information concerning the objective. It should be noted that the researcher started by asking respondents as to whether they are familiar with the term social networks together with examples of social networks (Table 1).

Table 1: Factors Influencing Use of Social Networks Among Universities Students

Factors	No of respondents	% of respondents
Education	07	7%
Interaction	01	01%
Information	24	24%
Refreshment	01	01%
All the above	67	67%
Total	100	100%

Sources: SPSS Output (2024)

From the findings (Table 1), the study revealed thateducation is one of the factors for universities students to use social networks.Students use Social Networks for education were 07 (7%) of the total respondents where they said SN help them on searching school materials. University students argue that social networks help them on finding materials. For instance, one respondent said"*Just now iam doing my research everything i get into networks like http://scholar.mzumbe.ac.tz or youtubes*".

Interaction, who use as a means for interaction 01(1%) students are connected from one University to another where they can share materials, exchange ideas on academic issues.Information, respondents who uses were as a means of getting information were 24(24%) of the total respondents, and other students they went far that these networks simplify every moment they get breaking news anywhere happening they are informed one among of respondents shouted,

> *.… On my side SN is my life where I have business I get to advertise and I used to learn entrepreneurship programs I don't listening neither Radio nor TV so I get informed via SN and I search a lot of school materials because we are in e-libraries for stance this moment I am doing research every assistance for academic is from supervisor and social men…*(Key informants, 2024)

Another factor contributing on wide spread of these social networks users the study revealed 01(1%) of the sample like to refresh minds, jokes, making fun, pray games, and interesting movies. Education, interaction, information, refreshment this group was named as those who use all the above items listed 67(67%) of the total respondents who were 100 it means all items motivate them. This study and its findings support the report of Shah, et al. (2001) did a study on effect of SN over 1000 students' users at Whittemore School of Business and Economics, the study conducted again with University of New Hampshire agrees and believes that current college students grew up in the technology era and SN is now just a part of a student's daily routine (ibid) students use SN for social connections, entertainment, education and professional reasons.

Also, the study supported by Oniboken (2012) thesis on factor motivates university students to use SN. The findings indicate that students are attracted by being proud on; staying in close contact with classmates and for entertainment purposes. Conducted research to know what factors motivate for using SN each participant was asked to give one reason for using a SN. Three types of reason were given; the main reason given by most participants for using social-networking sites was to stay in contact with friends, family and the university.

The presented results also are supported by the social network theory which states thataccess to technology is one of the factors influencing use of social networks, as universities with more advanced technological infrastructure are more likely to engage students, faculty, and staff in social networks (Coyle et al., 2008). Second, institutional support apparently matters, as universities that provide training, resources, and incentives for the use of social networks will see more engagement (Boyd, 2007). The level of social capital existing in academic communities defined as trust and reciprocity modulates how students, faculty, and staff interact with one another through social networks. It also reveals that cultural factors acceptance of digital communication tools and willingness to share information and collaborate play a big role in network centrality and the way information flows through a university; institutions with more central or influential actors are likely to see greater social network use (Boyd, 2007). Lastly, it is the engagement by students and faculty with social networks driven by their interests, goals, and perceived value that directly influences the degree of use in educational settings (Enriquez, 2010).

Moreover, the study wanted to know if students do use Social Networks as a tool to remove boredom or stress by chatting with friends or classmates. The study aims to know factors contribute wide spread of university students using social networks. The study reveled that, those states Yes, they do were 66(66%) out of 100 respondents used as sample, and those students who replied No, were 30(30%) of the sample of the existing respondents out of 100 and the last group tested they said are Not sure were 04(4%) of the number of students responded.

The meaning of the findings is that university students use social networks as a tool or instrument to remove stress, boredom on their daily bases where others call kill time on social networks. This study reflects the study done by Stephen (2013) on his thesis perceived effects of Social Networks where students replied they pass time in Social Networks when were bored or tired. The aim of researcher was to know if students have specific time on browsing SN, and if they have time to rest after being tired but 66% of respondents said yes.

Figure 1: Do you prefer express your ideas and feelings on SN sites to remove stress/boredom?

Remove stress/boredom
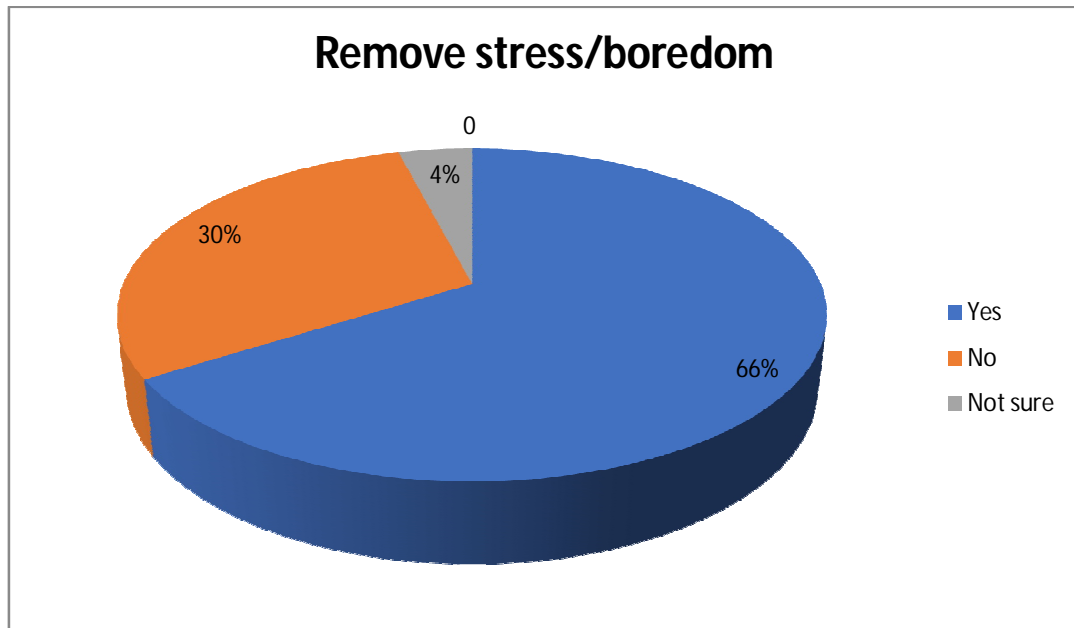
Source:SPSS output (2024)

5.   Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concludes that education, interaction, information, and refreshment are mojor factors influencing use of social networks among universities students. The findings indicate that students are attracted by being proud on; staying in close contact with classmates and for entertainment purposes. Cultural factors acceptance of digital communication tools and willingness to share information and collaborate play a big role in network centrality and the way information flows through a university; institutions with more central or influential actors are likely to see greater social network use. The engagement by students and faculty with social networks driven by their interests, goals, and perceived value that directly influences the degree of use in educational settings. The study also are encouraged to use social networks for the aim of reducing stress and boring.

Certainly, based on the findings, it is recommended that universities in Tanzania should encourage their students to properly social networks to increase leadership skills, build network to socialize with different groups of people, and interact with people of the same professional to share professionalism and profession opportunities. Universities also should incorporate social networking tools in academic practices using official sites where students can meet and share educational content apart from holding discussions; in this way, the students will still be connected with social networks for the appropriate academic purposes without the risk of the non-essential applications.

COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER:

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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