

## **Understanding user motivations influencing choice of social network sites among high school teenagers in Kenya**

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**Abstract :** *The popularity of Social Network Sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram demonstrates the addictive appeal of online communities, particularly among teenagers. Such addictive appeal is accompanied by both positive and negative aspects, which raises the question of what influences teenagers' choice of SNSs. This study addresses the gap in empirical research related to user gratification factors influencing choice of SNSs among high school teenagers. This was a quantitative study involving 481 respondents purposively drawn from Nairobi County. Findings revealed personal identity, surveillance and social capital significantly influencing choice of SNSs. The study recommended enhanced use of SNSs in behavior change communication among teenagers.*

**Keywords:** *New Media, Social Network Sites, Teenagers, Motivations, User gratifications*

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### **I. Introduction**

Interaction on social media, and by extension the use of social network sites (SNSs), is central to many teenagers' lives<sup>[1]</sup>. Further literature<sup>[2]</sup> points to this centrality by positing that popular media accounts tend to portray young people's media practices as "deficient or deleterious to academic learning" (p. 1130). This is manifested by the choice of Social Network Sites (SNSs) as a major communication medium among teenagers. Although research on young people's use of SNSs is emerging, questions remain regarding exactly what young people do on these sites, whom they interact with, and how their SNSs use relates to their other online and off-line activities<sup>[3] [4] [5] [6]</sup>. SNSs are the latest online communication tool that allows users to create a public or semi-public profile, create and view their own as well as other users' online social networks<sup>[4]</sup>. That teenagers are connected to these global online communities is both a frightening prospect for parents and educators and an intriguing area for social science research<sup>[6]</sup>.

#### **1.1 Social Network Sites (SNSs) and their effect on youth**

Since their introduction, SNSs such as MySpace, Facebook, and Bebo have attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily practices<sup>[4] [2]</sup>. SNSs are further defined as "web-based services that allow individuals to (a) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (b) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (c) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system"<sup>[4]</sup> (p. 211). This definition is consistent with SNSs use among teenagers in the U.S. where it is reported that some 93 percent of teenagers use Internet, and more than ever are treating it as a venue for social interaction, a place where they can share creations, tell stories, and interact with others<sup>[7]</sup>. Research further reported that a majority of online teenagers (55 percent) in the U.S. have created a personal profile on a SNS like MySpace or Facebook<sup>[7]</sup>. Amid the array of what websites can be termed SNSs, the technical definition of SNSs provided still provides a shared conceptual foundation.

#### **1.2 Growth of Social Network Sites (SNSs) use in Kenya**

Locally, the growth of SNSs can be attributed to the proliferation of Internet. The Internet is undoubtedly the most prominent mass medium today<sup>[8]</sup>. By March 2006, there were over a billion Internet users worldwide<sup>[9]</sup>. The number of Internet users grew by 114 percent when compared with the figure in 2000<sup>[9] [10]</sup>. Interestingly, Kenya has more Internet users than South Africa. Kenya was ranked fourth among Africa's top Internet countries as at December 2011<sup>[11]</sup>. Nigeria is ranked first with 45 million users, a fact that can be attributed to its large population of 155 million people. Kenya had a paltry 200,000 Internet users in the year 2000 but currently enjoys 10.4 million users as at 2011<sup>[11]</sup>. This figure however varies from the Communications Authority of Kenya (CAK) statistics that put the total number of Internet users at 17.3 million combining all mobile and data Internet subscribers, terrestrial wireless subscribers, satellite subscriptions, fixed

Internet connections, fiber optic subscriptions and fixed cable modem users<sup>[12]</sup>. According to the World Internet statistics, Kenya's Internet penetration is estimated at 25.5 percent of the population, which stands at 41 million people. CAK's figures put the penetration at 36.6 percent. Kenyan users account for Africa's 7.5 percent people with access to Internet. These statistics formed the foundation of this study considering that Internet access is an important ingredient of SNSs use among teenagers.

### **1.3 Objectives of the study**

The general objective of this study was to investigate user motivations influencing high school teenagers' choice of SNSs. Specifically, the study sought to fulfill the following objectives.

#### **1.3.1 Specific Objectives**

- 1) Investigate the influence of personal identity on high school teenagers' choice of social network sites.
- 2) Determine the influence of surveillance on high school teenagers' choice of social network sites.
- 3) Examine the role of social capital on high school teenagers' choice of social network sites.

### **1.4 Justification of the study**

Although the youth constitute 32 percent of the population, they have remained on the periphery of the country's affairs and their status has not been accorded due recognition<sup>[13]</sup>. Important policy documents such as Kenya vision 2030 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) may not be achieved without incorporating the teenage youth population. The selected teenage group (14 to 19 years) is considered to be at its peak and is progressively inching closer to the employment category. Therefore, this means that there should be more focus on research targeting this particular age group. Findings of this research added to the knowledge and understanding of the subject of uses and gratifications of SNSs among teenagers. The study was justified in the sense that it:

- a) Generated greater awareness among the public on the importance of having a positive approach to SNSs use among teenagers.
- b) Provided useful knowledge to policy makers on new communication approaches targeting teenagers.
- c) Allowed the identification of opportunities in SNSs research, which might aid in their use in education.
- d) Improved youth access and utilization of social media.
- e) Contributed significant theoretical insight into the media effect of SNSs on teenage populations.

## **II. Related literature**

### **2.0 The teenage youth segment**

The youth are defined as people within the age bracket of 15 to 24 years<sup>[14]</sup>. It is further reported that "although people 24 years old or younger make up almost half of the world's 7 billion population (with 1.2 billion between the ages of 10 and 19), their percentage of the population in some major developing countries is already at its peak"<sup>[14]</sup> (p. 10). The number of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 is 1.1 billion; youth constitute 18 percent of the global population<sup>[15]</sup>. Youth and children together, including those aged 24 and younger, account for nearly 40 percent of the world's population. Considering the definitions of youth, teenagers fall within the youth bracket. Geographically, the largest population of youth is concentrated in Asia; 15 percent, in Africa; 10 percent, in Latin America and the Caribbean; and the remaining 15 percent, in developed countries and regions. This study focused on currently enrolled public high school teenagers aged between 14 and 19 years.

### **2.1 Definition of Social Network Sites (SNSs)**

The online phenomenon of SNSs has been consistently growing in popularity over the past five years. SNSs constitute a form of virtual community, with sites such as bebo, Facebook and MySpace commanding a vast global following<sup>[16][4]</sup>. For example, Facebook and MySpace report in excess of 70 and 50 million visitors, respectively on a monthly basis to their sites<sup>[16]</sup>. Scholars concede that social media consumption in Kenya is among the highest in Africa<sup>[11]</sup>. Among the popular SNSs in Kenya include Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. This study focused on Facebook, Twitter LinkedIn, Google+, and Pinterest as the five most popular SNSs globally<sup>[17]</sup>. Consequently, a new aspect of new media referred to as 'user-generated media' has emerged. Consequently, SNS is defined as "a web-based service that allows individuals to (a) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (b) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (c) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system"<sup>[4]</sup> (p. 211). SNSs "are increasingly attracting the attention of academic and industry researchers intrigued by their affordances and reach"<sup>[4]</sup> (p. 210).

## 2.2 The uses and gratifications (U&G) theory

The U&G approach was propounded by Blumler and Katz in 1974. The underlying assumption is that audiences are active and they seek out that content which provides the most gratification<sup>[18]</sup>. They further added that “the level of gratification depends on the level of need or interest of the individual” (p. 120). The last few years have witnessed a revival of direct empirical investigation of audience uses and gratifications<sup>[19]</sup>. Each of these studies attempts to press towards a greater systemization of what is involved in conducting research in this field. The U&G approach is concerned with: “(a) the social and psychological origins of, (b) needs, which generate, (c) expectations of, (d) the mass media or other sources, which lead to, (e) different patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in, (f) need gratifications and, (g) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones” (p. 510). This model informed the present study in the sense that, (a) teenagers have social and psychological needs, which (b) determine the Gratifications Sought (GS) through specific SNSs, and (c) have expectations of the different SNSs available, which (d) enables them to access social media, (e) and engage in different online activities, resulting in (f) gratifications obtained (GO) and, (g) other consequences (both positive and negative), mostly unintended.

## 2.3 Conceptual framework

Motivations influencing high school teenagers’ choice of SNSs have been summarized into the following variables; (a) personal identity/ individual psychology, which relates to value reinforcement, (b) surveillance, which is information about things which might affect one or will help one do or accomplish something<sup>[21]</sup>, and (c) social capital, which captures the benefits accrued from personal relationships, for example, family, friends, classmates, and acquaintances<sup>[20]</sup><sup>[21]</sup>. The conceptual framework is illustrated in Fig. 1.

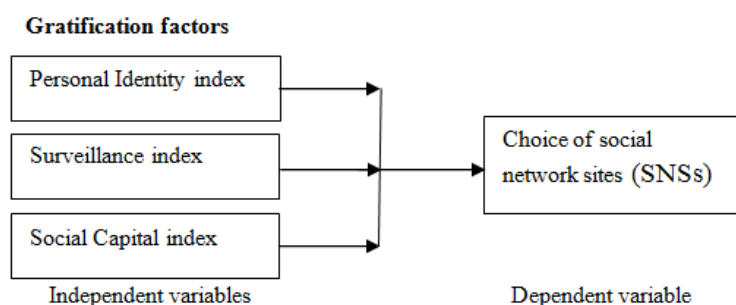


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

### 2.3.1 Personal identity

Personal identity is a critical variable considering that the importance of presenting a positive self-identity among teenagers cannot be overemphasized. Identity is defined as “the way in which users develop their online profiles and lists of friends to carry out important community processes”<sup>[22]</sup> (p. 114). Aspects of identity are further outlined as follows.

(a) Impression management, which is concerned with personal identity formation, (b) friendship management, which is linked to impression management in that users use publicly displayed profiles of others to choose who they would like to include as friends on their list, (c) network structure, relates to the roles that users play in the social community in which they participate, and (d) bridging of online and offline social networks, which is concerned with the degree to which the SNS becomes an integral part of the users’ actual life while offline<sup>[22]</sup> (p. 114).

This is evidenced by a study on young people’s use of online SNSs<sup>[16]</sup>. This study was carried out among girls aged 12 to 14 years and focused on one SNS ‘Bebo’. Findings revealed an active use of Bebo for personal motives and gratifications in terms of presenting and managing a certain identity and persona in a social context. One respondent in their findings stated, “sometimes you look at people’s profile pictures and go “oh my god”, what are they at”? Some of the stuff they say about themselves is exaggerated as well, they are trying to make themselves look cool”<sup>[16]</sup> (p. 52). Among the process gratifications sought by the youth include the need for image, fashion and status<sup>[23]</sup>. The study thus presented the following hypothesis.

H<sub>01</sub> There is no significant relationship between personal identity and choice of social network sites among high school teenagers.

### 2.3.2 Social capital

The concept of social capital draws a variety of definitions in multiple fields<sup>[24]</sup>. Broadly though, social capital is defined as the resources accumulated through the relationships among people<sup>[24]</sup>. This definition is reinforced by the assertion that:

It is loosely understood to operate like financial capital in that it creates more of it. However, instead of goods and services, the things being used and created are personal relationships and the benefits that come with them: Some social actors interact and form a network of individuals – a “social network”- resulting in positive affective bonds. These in turn yield positive outcomes such as emotional support or the ability to mobilize others <sup>[26]</sup> (p. 594).

Unsafe disclosure of information, cyberbullies, addiction, risky behavior, and contact with dangerous communities are among the popular concerns raised about the use of SNSs <sup>[25]</sup>. Further, “other research shows that young people are motivated to join these sites to keep strong ties with friends and to strengthen ties with new acquaintances” <sup>[26]</sup> (p. 876). This validates the argument that bridging and bonding social capital could be motivating factors influencing choice of SNSs <sup>[26]</sup>.

Social capital is split into ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ <sup>[26]</sup>. Bridging and bonding allow for different types of social capital to result when different norms and networks are in place. These two types of social capital are related but not equivalent <sup>[26]</sup>. Bridging social capital is inclusive and occurs when individuals from different backgrounds make connections between social networks. By contrast, bonding can be exclusive. It occurs when strongly tied individuals, such as family and close friends, provide emotional or substantive support for one another <sup>[26]</sup>. Media audiences also seek to maintain social capital <sup>[27]</sup>. Maintained social capital focuses on staying connected to groups from previous moments in one’s life. The question though at this point is whether high school teenagers’ choice of SNSs is motivated by the desire to ‘bridge’, ‘bond’ and ‘maintain’ social capital. This was hypothesized as:

H<sub>02</sub> There is no significant relationship between social capital and choice of social network sites among high school teenagers.

### **2.3.3 Surveillance**

Surveillance is equally categorized as a motivation factor <sup>[21]</sup>. Surveillance is defined as the desire to see what old contacts and friends are up to, how they look, and how they behave. McQuail as cited in <sup>[28]</sup> argued that there are four main motivations for media use; (a) information, (b) entertainment, (c) social interaction, and (d) personal identity. Entertainment, surveillance, passing time, and escape are listed as motivations for internet use <sup>[29]</sup>. Although these motivations are observed from a broad perspective, it is clear that surveillance acts as motivation for Internet use. This information could be related to bridging and bonding social capital among teenagers. This was therefore hypothesized as:

H<sub>03</sub> The need for surveillance will not be predictive of high school teenagers’ choice of social network sites.

### **2.3.4 Choice of Social Network Sites**

The unique social nature and mounting popularity of SNSs has necessitated academic research into the motivations underlying the use of social media <sup>[30]</sup>. The global expansion of SNSs mirrors the inherent desire people have in common <sup>[30]</sup>. This is the desire to relate to others. Although differences are noted across different Internet applications, the basic motivations underlying SNSs choice are considered similar and include information seeking, entertainment, convenience, and social interaction. This is in tandem with the argument by other scholars that the rapid adoption of SNSs by teenagers around the world raises some important questions <sup>[31]</sup>. “...why do teenagers flock these sites? What are they expressing on them? How do these sites fit into their lives? What are they learning from their participation?” <sup>[30]</sup> (p. 119). SNSs are based around profiles, a form of individual home page, which offers a description of each member <sup>[4]</sup>. These profiles “contain comments from other members and a list of people that one identifies as friends within the network” <sup>[4]</sup> (p. 123). While socializing drives certain kinds of engagement with SNSs, several motivating factors drive teenagers to SNSs <sup>[30]</sup> <sup>[31]</sup>. These are generally summarized as, meeting friends, seeking information, entertainment, self expression, passing time, communication, and personal identity. For the purpose of this study, these motivations are classified into three independent variables of personal identity, surveillance, and social capital. These have been discussed in the preceding sections.

## **III. Methodology**

A quantitative methodology was employed in this study involving 481 high school teenagers purposively selected from two sub-counties (Langata and Dagoretti) within Nairobi County. A total of 481 questionnaires were distributed to high school teenagers in forms two, three and four. A response of 365 was received, which represents a 76 percent response rate. Considering that the sample size of 385 was over sampled to 481 in order to achieve a response rate of 80 percent, this was considered adequate for analytical purposes for the study. Findings revealed a majority of the respondents (51%) being male while 49 percent were female. A majority (96.1%) accessed SNSs at home.

**3.1 Data analysis**

Data obtained using the quantitative research method was coded and entered in the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) version 21.0. Entered data was then cleaned after entry to identify errors made while ‘keying in’ the data. The best way to do this is “for the data to be entered twice, independently, by two people” [32] (p. 398). Group comparisons were conducted using univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA). For experimental designs with categorical information (groups) on the independent variable, researchers use t tests or ANOVA [32]. Group comparisons were done using ANOVA, while t tests were conducted to test the research hypotheses.

**IV. Results And Discussion**

This section outlines the research findings through both descriptive and inferential statistics. Specifically, the section explains the findings of each objective. The independent variables of personal identity and surveillance were measured using five point Likert scale items each, which ranged from Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Social capital was tested using 15 Likert scale items with five each for bonding, bridging, and maintaining social capital. The percentages, means, and standard deviation for each item are discussed in the following sections.

In determining the influence of the three independent variables of personal identity, surveillance, and social capital on high school teenagers’ choice of social network sites, the study conducted a one sample t-test. The one-sample t-test is used when we want to know whether our sample comes from a particular population but we do not have full population information available to us. The one-sample t-test is used only for tests of the sample mean. The t-test was used in this study to test hypotheses and determine whether the four independent variables influenced high school teenagers’ choice of SNSs.

$H_0: \mu = 3.4$

Versus  $H_1: \mu > 3.4$

The t-test findings are represented in Table 1 and explained under each objective.

**Table 1 Influence of independent variables on choice of social network sites**

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
					Test Value = 3.4	
SURVILLANCE	8.916	360	0	0.32992	0.2571	0.4027
IDENTITY	5.942	359	0	0.25463	0.1704	0.3389
SCAPITAL	13.735	363	0	0.35924	0.3078	0.4107
BONDING	1.126	362	0.261	0.04793	-0.0358	0.1316
BRIDGING	20.485	363	0	0.63938	0.578	0.7008
MAINTAINING	11.907	360	0	0.39654	0.331	0.462

In order to test positivity of the influence of the independent variables on the choice of social network sites, the test value of 3.4 was arrived at based on the five Likert scale items, which were assigned codes of 1 to 5, where 5 = Strongly Agree (SA), 4 = Agree (A), 3 = Neutral (N), 2 = Disagree (D), and 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD). The main disadvantage of the Likert scale is that it is uni-dimensional and only gives 5 to 7 options of choice, and the space between each choice is not equidistant. In order to address this disadvantage, the values between 1 and 5 were further enumerated in order to establish an accurate range between each code. These ranges include, (1) 1 to 1.8, which represents “strongly disagree”, (2) 1.8 to 2.6, representing “disagree”, (3) 2.6 to 3.4 representing “neutral”, (4) 3.4 to 4.2 representing “agree”, and (5) 4.2 to 5 representing “strongly agree”. The study therefore concluded that any value below 3.4 was below the neutral and thus did not show positivity in the influence on choice of social network sites.

**4.1 Influence of personal identity on choice of social network sites**

The first objective of the study sought to determine the influence of personal identity on high school teenagers’ choice of social network sites. This was measured using five Likert scale items. Findings reveal that high school teenagers sought to present their ideal image through SNSs (Mean = 3.9944, SD = 1.08205). Each statement in this item posted a high mean (>3) implying that personal identity rated highly in influencing the choice of SNSs.

#### **4.1.1 One sample t-test for personal identity**

Considering that the hypothesis being tested was,

H<sub>01</sub> There is no significant relationship between personal identity and choice of social network sites among high school teenagers.

Personal identity equally yielded the following findings. Since  $t(359) = 5.942$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that  $\mu > 3.4$ , which implies that the mean score of personal identity index is above the neutral position meaning that respondents choice of social network sites is determined by personal identity.

This is in agreement with several scholars who found that personal identity determined the choice of social network sites<sup>[16] [23]</sup>. Although none of their studies focused on high school teenagers, this could be considered a first step in determining high school teenagers' SNSs preferences. Apparently, the popularity of SNSs such as Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn demonstrate the addictive appeal of online and virtual communities across generations and cultures, particularly to teenagers<sup>[22]</sup>. These findings are in tandem with the argument that "teens are modeling identity through social network profiles so that they can write themselves and their community into being"<sup>[31]</sup> (p. 120). Active uses of SNSs among the youth are alluded to personal motives and gratifications in terms of presenting and managing certain identity and persona in a social context<sup>[16]</sup>. These findings also concur with other scholars who argued that among the process gratifications sought by the youth included the need for image, fashion and status<sup>[23]</sup>.

#### **4.2 Influence of surveillance on choice of social network sites**

The second objective of the study examined the influence of surveillance on high school teenagers' choice of social network sites. The study, through a five point Likert scale sought to determine the influence of surveillance on high school teenagers' choice of SNSs. Findings reveal that a significant number of high school teenagers visited SNSs to see what is happening out there ( $M = 4.1357$ ,  $SD = 0.94037$ ). The weakest statement "I visit social network sites because I am not curious about what others are upto" posted a low mean (2.3556).

##### **4.2.1 One sample t-test for surveillance**

To test the hypothesis,

H<sub>04</sub> The need for surveillance will not be predictive of high school teenagers' choice of social network sites.

The independent variable of surveillance revealed the following. Since  $t(360) = 8.916$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that  $\mu > 3.4$ , which implies that the mean score of surveillance index is above the neutral position meaning that respondents choice of social network sites is determined by surveillance.

Four Likert scale items in the survey instrument recorded a Mean of above 3.4 ( $> 3.4$ ) with one item scoring a Mean of 2.3556 and SD of 1.17125. This can be attributed to the negation of this item to read "I don't visit SNSs because I am curious about what others are up to", which may have confused the respondents. These findings agree with scholars who argued that "social networking sites like Facebook may also serve a surveillance function, allowing users to "track the actions, beliefs and interests of the larger groups to which they belong""<sup>[34]</sup> (p. 1028). Further to this,

The surveillance and 'social search' functions of Facebook users leave their privacy settings relatively open. If 'social searching' is a public good, then reciprocity rules would dictate that by enabling a degree of surveillance of oneself, one would also be able to engage in reciprocal surveillance of others.<sup>[34]</sup> (p. 1028)

Specific attributes that enable users to search other people's profiles and equally have their profiles searched demonstrates why Facebook was the most popular SNS among high school teenagers. It also explains why SNSs sharing similar attributes were equally popular. Although these findings are based on one SNS (Facebook), this could be applied to other SNSs that share similar attributes with Facebook<sup>[34]</sup>.

#### **4.3 Influence of social capital on choice of social network sites**

In order to assess the third objective of the study, which sought to determine the influence of social capital on high school teenagers' SNS preferences, the study adopted William's social capital scale. This was modified to suit the present context. Aspects of bonding, bridging, and maintaining social capital were measured using 15 Likert scale statements to which respondents were supposed to agree, strongly agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree.

The five Likert scale items presented to test whether high school teenagers sought to bond social capital through their choice of SNSs returned interesting findings. High school teenagers tended to turn to SNSs most when lonely ( $M = 3.9945$ ) and least trusted people on SNSs to help solve their problems ( $M = 3.1560$ ). High school teenagers' interaction with people on SNSs made them curious about other places in the world ( $M = 4.2541$ ). Equally, interacting with people on SNSs made them feel like a part of a larger community ( $M = 4.2452$ ). Respondents strongly agreed with the statements in this section.

Respondents were given a set of statements to test whether their choice of SNSs was influenced by the need to maintain social capital. Findings indicate that respondents would be able to find out about events in other schools from their peers studying there ( $M = 4.0947$ ,  $SD = 0.92872$ ). Comparatively, each Likert item scored a high Mean indicating that high school teenagers' choice of SNSs was influenced by maintaining social capital. The fifth Likert scale item "I'd be able to stay with a high school friend if I travelled to a different town" was eliminated after posting a low mean ( $< 2$ ). This indicated that it did not significantly affect choice of SNSs.

#### **4.3.1 One sample t-test for social capital**

To test the hypothesis,

$H_{02}$  There is no significant relationship between social capital and choice of social network sites among high school teenagers.

Findings revealed that social capital is a determining factor for social network sites choice since  $t(363) = 13.735$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , we reject the null hypothesis and conclude the  $\mu > 3.4$ , which implies that the mean score of surveillance index is above the neutral position meaning that respondents choice of social network sites is determined by social capital.

This echoes other scholars who argued that investment in social networks enabled individuals to develop norms of trust and reciprocity, which are necessary in collective activities<sup>[25]</sup>. These activities may vary among high school teenagers. Considering that the core idea of social capital is the resources available to people through their social interactions, when researchers operationalize Internet use as time spent with the technology, they ignore the multiple audiences' motives and experiences that the medium allows<sup>[25]</sup>. As evidenced in the study findings, high school teenagers tend to bridge and maintain social capital more than bonding. Weak tie networks produce bridging social capital because they connect people from different life situations<sup>[25]</sup>. "Individuals in weak tie relationships do not gain the benefits of bonding social capital, such as emotional support that occurs based on the interdependence and commonalities of strong tie networks"<sup>[25]</sup> (p. 879). This is exhibited in the fact that two Likert scale items for bonding social capital scored low Means ( $< 3.4$ ). These statements include; 'there are several people on social network sites I trust to help solve my problems' ( $M = 3.1560$ ,  $SD = 1.30455$ ), and 'if I need an emergency loan of 100 bob, I know someone on social network sites I can talk to' ( $M = 3.2299$ ,  $SD = 1.43944$ ). Overall, high school teenagers bond existing relationships through their online interactions and equally seek to maintain existing relationships through their choice of social network sites. This in essence supports the argument that individuals with a large and diverse network of contacts are thought to have more social capital than individuals with small, less diverse networks<sup>[25]</sup>. Considering the diversity of the school system, this could not be further from the truth.

## **V. Conclusion**

This study provides some of the first clear evidence of the influence of user motivations of social capital, surveillance, and personal identity on high school teenagers' choice of social network sites. It is, moreover, one of the first large scale demonstrations that a quantitative design can be deployed to estimate the causal impact of user motivations on SNSs choice. It is therefore worth concluding that indeed the choice of social network sites is a complex phenomenon. Whereas all the objectives of the study were fulfilled, there still exist gaps in understanding user motivations for SNSs usage.

Critical to policy makers and behavior change campaigners is the role of SNSs in message dissemination. The high percentages of high school teenagers belonging to SNSs is a clear indication of the importance that this category of youths attach to this medium. The appeal of SNSs to adolescent teenagers should be encouraged and probably harnessed for positive outcomes both socially and in academics. Most respondents accessed SNSs through Internet enabled mobile phones. This calls on the government to enhance accessibility to these devices in order to enable more access to SNSs. This could be through tax reliefs for teenage youths desiring to acquire handsets. The fact that access to SNSs mostly occurred at home is indicative of the fact that Kenya's education system should be made more flexible to allow learners access SNSs during rest periods. The positive aspect of SNSs use should equally be enhanced in order to educate parents and educators on the positive influence of SNSs.

The quest to enhance their Personal Identity motivated high school teenagers to choose SNSs. This can be attributed to the stage in their lives where they are between childhood and adulthood, implying that they are trying to find personal space for themselves in life. The fact that most teenagers would present an 'ideal' identity online shows that there is an identity crisis in this age group. Equally, these teenagers seek acceptance among their peers and thus switch their identities depending on which peer group they would feel 'cool' belonging to. Among the features presented on online SNSs, Facebook presented the best alternative for teenagers to find acceptance in their personal profiles. The fact that one can 'Like' another person's status update including photos and status messages supports the popularity of Facebook among this group. Other SNSs such as Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, and Pinterest could borrow a leaf from this and improve their interactivity. Comparatively,

a SNS such as Twitter sets a character limit of 140 thus limiting user capabilities to interact. Twitter equally does not allow one to 'Like' other peoples comments but only has 'Retweet' and 'Favorite' functions. Functions such as photo album found on Facebook are lacking in the other SNSs.

Surveillance motivated high school teenagers' choice of SNSs. This is attributable to the nature of the education system in Kenya, where most students are boarders. Being kept away from society increases the urge for students to survey what is happening around them as connection with their peers is cut through school. Radical steps should be taken by government to increase the number of Public day high schools. This in essence will enable proper parenting and mentorship among teenagers and thus forestall negative behaviors acquired through the formation of new alliances in the confinement of boarding schools. Policies could be drawn to elevate day schooling as a way of cutting the cost of education and ensuring proper mentorship for productive citizenry. Parents would equally play a role as enablers of these new technologies through the support they give their children to acquire Internet enabled devices.

High school teenagers seek to bridge, bond and maintain social capital through their choice of SNSs. The different levels of education, such as, primary, secondary, and tertiary are a pointer to the need to bridge, bond, and maintain social capital. Friendships established at one level are majorly bridged when these students move to a different level and are separated by their performance at the previous level. These teenagers equally build new friendships at a new level through bonding social capital, and ensure that these friendships are maintained even when they move to a different level.

### **5.1 Implications for future research**

Behavior change campaigns targeting teenagers and the youth in general require re-engineered thinking. The positive and negative outcomes of SNSs usage point to an emerging need to positively harness the power of SNSs in behavior change campaigns. The fact that a significant percentage of teenagers belong to SNSs is testimony to the emerging importance of this medium. Behavior change campaigners should enhance the utilization of social network sites as a medium for communicating with teenagers.

The fact that this study focused on gratifications sought (GS) necessitates further research into gratifications obtained (GO) by high school teenagers in their choice of social network sites. Considering that this study only focused on one urban county. Further studies could be carried out in rural counties. Comparative studies could equally be done on both urban and rural counties to establish whether user motivations will vary. The youth constitute a wider bracket than the teenage segment, which was the focus of this study; further studies could be carried out with a widened age bracket.

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